

**THE WORLD'S EAR:
THE AURALITY OF
LATE MEDIEVAL ENGLISH LITERATURE**

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Declaration:

This thesis has been composed by me, and all the work contained herein is my own.

Signed:

Joyce Coleman



Venfient le prologhe du trans-
 lateur pour le second volume
 des annales hystores des nobles
 princes de haynn.
 Pour sieulwant la
 matere promise del
 iste pinte oeuvre ce
 ra est promise du comenchemet
 et premier prologhe de la pre-
 miere partie volume. de chief
 au comanchemet de mon dit es-
 crevante seigneur monseigneur philippe

par la grace de dieu duc de bour-
 gogne de lotaringhe de brabant
 et de lembourc comte de flandre
 d'artois & de bourgounis palatin
 de haynn de hollande de zelade
 et de namur cœ dit est se sous
 la possibilite de mon pectot et
 fable enyien me sui determinee
 et enhardis de celle pinte oeuvre
 translatee et mettre en nre lan-
 guage maternel quant a la sece
 partie si avant que se l'ay sceut

A kneeling man reads the *Chroniques de Hainault* aloud to Philip the Good, duke of Burgundy, and his court.

(1468; Flanders; Jean Wauquelin, *Chroniques de Hainault*, v. 2; Bibl. Roy. 9243, f. 1.)

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the reception formats of late medieval upper-class literature in English--i.e., how its readers read it. My particular interest is aurality, the reading aloud of literature to one or a group of listeners. I try to show that aurality was not merely the byproduct of technological deficiencies (such as illiteracy and the scarcity of manuscripts) but also represented a contemporary preference for the shared experience of literature.

Chapter 1 reviews the evolutionary and polarizing assumptions that underlie, and undermine, many discussions of late medieval, particularly Chaucerian, reception. The popular argument I call "fictive orality" claims, for example, that Chaucer's references to hearers derive from nostalgia or else are an involuntary holdover of "minstrel formulas." But if Chaucer's texts *were* read aloud, as he keeps assuming they will be, there is nothing "nostalgic" or anachronistic about references to hearers.

Chapter 2 outlines the methodology used to construct the following chapters' "ethnography of reading," then presents a variety of generalizations to frame the intensive data presented in those chapters. Topics considered include the chronological and functional origins of medieval aurality, the varieties of late medieval English literacy, the role of aurality in generating a public sphere, the "constellation" of reception-phrases characteristic of late medieval texts, and the crossover of scholarly reading practices into recreational ones.

Chapter 3 quotes and analyzes historical reports of reading habits or events. The "field reports" from France, the duchy of Burgundy, England, and Scotland show monarchs and nobles--even those renowned for their libraries--choosing to listen to books until the late fifteenth century. These accounts further identify what could be called distinct "auralities"--i.e., significantly different patterns of reading--for the two cultural areas.

Chapter 4 looks at the Chaucer canon, in which Chaucer almost always speaks of his audience "hearing" his work. In his texts, strictly private reading has mostly deleterious effects on society, while public recreational reading is beneficial or neutral, and the professional private reading of scholars and clerics is beneficial because ultimately shared through the public activities of teaching and preaching. The ardent private reading of the fictional Chaucer would stand out to a medieval audience because it was *unlike* their experience, not delude them because it was so similar.

Chapter 5 reviews upper-class literature of the late fourteenth through the early sixteenth century. I assess the references to reception formats over time, the formulas authors use in framing their narratives, depictions of reading events and audience behavior, and any other interesting details provided by the material. It is not until the very end of the century that the medieval forms of aurality decline; nonetheless, it is easy to show that aurality itself survived, in new forms, well past the English Renaissance.

To Grandma Kate

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**THE WORLD'S EAR:
THE AURALITY OF
LATE MEDIEVAL ENGLISH LITERATURE**

Of hem that writen ous tofore
The bokes duelle, and we therefore
Ben tawht of that was write tho:
Forthi good is that we also
In oure tyme among ous hier
Do wryte of newe som matiere,
Essampled of these olde wyse
So that it myhte in such a wyse,
Whan we ben dede and elleswhere,
Beleve to the worldes eere
In tyme comende after this.

(Gower, *Confessio Amantis* prol.: 1-11)

INTRODUCTION

This thesis is not about illiteracy. It *is* about public reading in late medieval England, but it is not about book shortages or any other technological factor that might be supposed to explain the popularity of public reading. This thesis is dedicated to showing that public reading was and remained popular because people enjoyed listening to books in company; that these aural audiences included the sort of literate upper-middle- and upper-class readers for whom Chaucer wrote; and that even the arrival of the Renaissance signaled not the extinction of aurality but its transmutation.

To explore the nature of late medieval aurality (defined as the reading of books aloud to one or more people), I have drawn on both historical and literary sources. Since this investigation extends across some 175 years, I have kept it focused on one form of reading material: i.e., "court-oriented," secular, vernacular writing in English. Inevitably, I have strayed into other languages—Scots, Anglo-Norman, French, and Latin—but I have been firmer about genres, excluding the drama; most romances, histories, and scholarly works of science or philosophy; and most non-recreative translations. I have also excluded religious reading (by religious or of religious material, whether orthodox or Lollard) and reading by or to children.

The thesis is not about Chaucer, but he is certainly the most important author involved, and much of the debate over forms of reading derives from a general desire among modern scholars to distance him from the perceived concomitants of "primitive orality." In fact, however, there is not much debate; while Chaucerians of all theoretical stripes are eagerly asserting that in writing for private readers Chaucer marked the birth of English literature, various other critics are content to mildly acknowledge his aurality before going on to other business. No scholar has yet engaged

directly with the arguments of the anti-auralists, examining either their theoretical underpinnings or the historical substance of their claims.

Since these claims tend to a notable circularity—even Chaucer's references to hearers are held to prove his "literacy," by a complicated argument I label "fictive orality"—they are difficult to refute. In attempting this task, I have moved both deeper into Chaucer's canon and outside it, to records of historical reading events and to the writings of other authors, from Chaucer's time until the early Renaissance. The results, presented in Chapters 3-5, offer overwhelming evidence that far from being identified with ignorance, poverty, lack of sophistication, with bards or with minstrels, public reading was a common practice among the upper-middle- and upper-class elite audiences of both France and England until and (in modulated form) beyond the very end of the Middle Ages.

Another thing this thesis is not about is style. Several distinguished scholars have concerned themselves to create definitive lists of "oral" and "literate" stylistic traits, and many other scholars have confidently applied these prescriptive definitions to medieval texts. I would not say these ascriptions are always invalid, but I am certain that as presently applied, "oral" and "literate" are very nearly invalid as categories. Too much confidence has been placed in theoretical models based on outmoded evolutionary and Eurocentric principles, and too many capabilities denied to "orality" by those unfamiliar with the relevant ethnographic and folkloristic research.

Rather than imposing universal, self-validating categories of "oral" and "literate" style on texts, we should work outwards from given texts and literary environments to develop culture-specific descriptive systems. These systems would have to recognize the influence of factors besides modes of composition or reception, e.g., the "stylistic decorum" Mary Carruthers notes as producing many of the traits often identified as "oral" or "literate." "A sermon preached to the 'people,'" she explains, "would require a popular

style in order to be understood, while one preached to a learned audience would require a more elevated, *gravis* style" (1990: 210-11). Until more of the sort of inductive research offered in this thesis has been done, generalizations about stylistic traits would be premature, and I do not attempt here to offer any.

It may relieve tension for me to state at the beginning that the conclusion of all this pro-aurality argumentation is not that we must now read Chaucer (or his contemporaries) in some radically different way. Chaucer was and remains a sophisticated, writing poet, the father of English literature. His work remains as "literary"—in the sense of subtle, self-conscious, and ironic—as ever. The evidence assembled in this thesis would simply suggest that this subtle, self-conscious, ironic literature was directed primarily at listeners rather than private readers. Since these listeners were literate, educated members of the upper classes of society, the literature need not have been too imperiled by the contact. Chaucer may well have expected his closest friends and fellow-authors to read his work privately, and he also could expect that his wider audience, being literate, might choose at times to read him on their own. Yet the differences in reception style do not seem to make as great a difference as often supposed; except in the special case of other "professional" authors, the surviving evidence suggests that both private and public readers of Chaucer responded most readily to the more conventional aspects of his work.

PLEASE NOTE:

Having taken on a considerable task, this thesis ended up two chapters too long, based on the maximum word-count allowed by the University. Accordingly, I have had to excise the original Chapters 1 and 2, renumbering and slightly adjusting the remaining chapters. The removed

material dealt with theoretical issues, and I will briefly mention the most important points.

The original Chapter 1 examined the bases of modern orality/literacy theory, demonstrating the weaknesses that have been emerging in the work of Jack Goody and of Walter Ong, in particular. Of most relevance for this thesis, by conceptualizing "orality" and "literacy" as monolithic, polarized entities in a strict evolutionary relationship, these theorists have persistently de-emphasized and trivialized aurality by conflating it with one pole or the other. Drawing on the critiques of several social scientists--Sylvia Scribner and Michael Cole, Brian Street, and Ruth Finnegan--I argue for a more inductive, "ethnographic" approach.

The original Chapter 2 applied this critique to discussions of medieval "orality" and "literacy," showing how the fallacies of the master theory are replicated faithfully in the work of Paul Zumthor, Franz H. Bäuml, Brian Stock, and Paul Saenger. The result is a persistent undervaluation, or indeed suppression, of the role of aurality. Having demonstrated the many ambiguities of the terms "orality" and "literacy," Chapter 2 then went on to develop a more precise and elaborated terminology with which to describe the varieties and intersections of medieval literary reception. I will follow this Introduction with a Glossary that briefly reviews the most important of these words. Since these terms, and the ideas encapsulated within them, are important for the entire thesis, I hope my readers will brave the tedium of reading and referring to the Glossary.

It may further help for me to give here the contents listing for the two deleted chapters:

Former Chapter 1: "On Beyond Ong: The Bases of a Revised Theory of Orality and Literacy"

The Foundational Texts of Orality/Literacy Theory

Social-Science Critiques of "Literacy Theory"

Recent Modifications of Literacy Theory

"Restricted Literacy"

The "Literate" in the Oral and the "Oral" in the Literate
The Viability of Ancient Greece as a Model
The Aurality of the Ancient Greeks
Across the Great Divide
Scribner and Cole's "Practice Account of Literacy"
Street's "Ideological Model"
Finnegan's "Weak" Theory
The Inadequacies of Literacy Theory
Does Orality/Literacy Theory Work for Western Culture?
Evolution and the March of Literature
Polar Divides
Differentiating "Literate" Domains
Conclusion

Former Chapter 2: "A 'Modality Theory' of Late Medieval English Literature"

Envisioning Aurality
Modeling Aurality
The Practice of Aurality
Theorists of Medieval Orality and Literacy
Rewriting Chaucerian Aurality
The Standard Source-List on Chaucerian "Oral Delivery"
Input from Related Fields
Scholarly Resistance
Taxonomies and Terminology: The Pursuit of Disambiguity
Formats
The Ambiguity of "Read"
Modalities
"Orality" and "Literacy"
"Orality"
"Literacy"
Other Modality Terms
Charting Modalities
Mixing Mentalities and Modalities
Exophoric Literacy
Endophoric Orality
Sophisticated Listeners
Chaucerian Bimodality
Conclusion

The thesis, as it now stands, picks up with the former Chapter 3 (now Chapter 1), which reviews the secondary literature on the reception of medieval authors, especially Chaucer. This discussion reveals that the same

misperceptions of "orality" and "literacy" have informed most of this criticism. In particular, an elaborate set of arguments have been developed to discount Chaucer's references to and depictions of aural reading. In adapting this chapter to its new leading position, I have inserted "q.v." references to the Glossary and otherwise sought to make up for the absence of the two deleted chapters. I hope the result stands on its own, if necessarily somewhat weakened in its theoretical sophistication.

Chapter 2 (formerly 4) serves to introduce the intensive data of the last three chapters. It outlines the principles of the "ethnography of reading" that the data chapters will present and reviews some aspects of pre-Chaucerian literary history in an attempt to counter several prevalent myths about the origins and role of aural reading. The discussion that follows presents generalizations concerning the varieties of late medieval literacy, the role of aural reading in the medieval "public sphere," the system of verbs and phrases characteristically used by authors from Chaucer on to describe the transmission and reception of literature, and the effect on this system of the interaction of different literacies. Instead of agglomerating every variety of reading into one monolithic, private enterprise, these analyses progressively differentiate and trace a network of literacies, including the literacy of aural reading. The result is to clarify how public reading could co-exist stably with private reading as well as to suggest some reasons why even the most ambitious vernacular authors and their upper-middle- and upper-class audiences should accept this situation happily.

After this extensive theoretical introduction, Chapters 3-5 (formerly 5-7) will offer the data. Chapter 3 will quote and analyze historical reports of reading habits or events. The "field reports" from France and the dukes of Burgundy show monarchs and nobles—even those renowned for their libraries—choosing to listen to books until well into the later fifteenth century. England and Scotland provide similar evidence, although the prevailing tone shifts from starchy and intellectual to informal and *gemütlich*. These

accounts give many interesting details about who read what to whom why, when, and how. They also pile up overwhelming evidence that upper-class, indubitably literate people enjoyed public reading both during and long after Chaucer's lifetime.

Chapter 4 offers a detailed look at Chaucer's references to audience reception and his depictions of reading. His reception-verbs and phrases fall into a complex system that tends to ascribe private reading to authors (and narrators) and hearing to audiences. A survey of Chaucer's depictions of reading by characters other than himself seems to show that in his texts, strictly private reading has mostly deleterious effects on society, while public recreational reading is beneficial or neutral, and the professional private reading of scholars and clerics is beneficial because ultimately shared through the public activities of teaching and preaching. A concluding discussion points up the specialized functions underlying the seeming casualness of the fictional Chaucer's ardent private reading. To a medieval audience, as I try to show, this devotion to reading would stand out because it was *unlike* their experience, not delude them (as it does us) because it was so similar.

Chapter 5 reviews upper-class literature of the late fourteenth through the early sixteenth century, in four chronological blocks. Each section examines any depictions of reading events and assesses the references to reception formats and any other interesting details provided by the material. References to "hearing" decrease slowly over this period, as the verb "read" goes through a complex connotational shift. As late as Caxton's comments to his prospective clients, however, some 40 percent of the references to reception channel still invoke a hearing audience. Only at the very end of the fifteenth century do certain texts appear that seem to signal the obsolescence of aurality. But even that boundary marks the extinction only of a particular, characteristically medieval configuration of aurality;

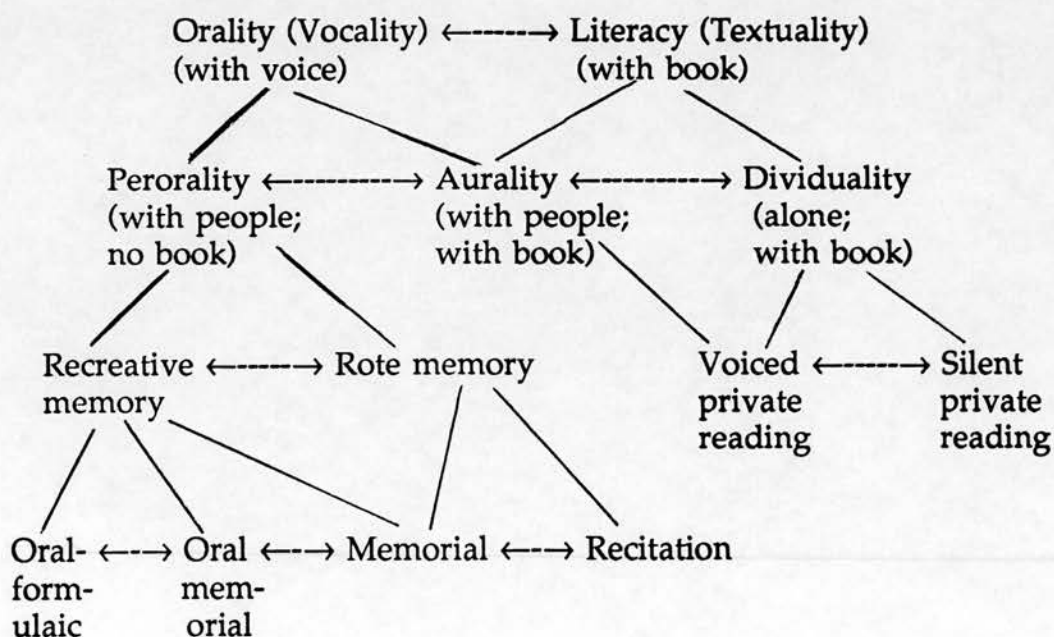
aurality itself survived, metamorphosed by the Renaissance to serve a variety of new roles.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

DISCUSSED IN THE OMITTED CHAPTERS

Many of the terms given below relate to the following chart, which attempts to present visually the taxonomic ordering of and the overlap between categories of literary transmission and reception. Overlap in the sense of two higher-order categories both operating on a lower-order category is indicated by converging lines running down from the upper-order modalities. Overlap between categories at the same taxonomic level is represented by horizontal lines with an arrow at either end. The new terms at the second level ("perorality" and "dividuality") have been developed to counteract the endemic tendency to conflate the first and the second levels under the terms "orality" and "literacy" (i.e., to equate the hearing of texts with bardic or minstrel performance, and the presence of books with private reading). The effect of such conflation, of course, is to squeeze the hearing of books--i.e., aurality--out of the picture.

Transmission and Reception Modalities of Medieval English Literature



Terms

Audiate, audiacy: Applied to experienced and able hearers who are accustomed both to the matter and manner of traditional oral and aural literature; the word was invented by W.H. Bolton (1970: xvii).

Aural, aurality: Applied to the reading aloud of a written text to one or group of listeners. Cf. *dividuality*.

Bimodal, bimodality: Applied to texts written for an audience that might read them either publicly or privately. Cf. *modality*.

Dividual, dividuality: Applied to the private reading of written texts, whether the reader read in complete silence or voiced the text as he or she went along. (The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines "dividual" as "That is or may be divided or separated from something else; separate, distinct, particular.")

Endoliterate, endoliteracy, endophoric literacy: Applied to forms of reading or thinking that exhibit the traits identified with endophoricity (q.v.).

Endophoric, endophoricity: Applied to the cognitive and literary traits sometimes labeled "literate," i.e., that exhibit a separation between the self and the environment (e.g., autonomy, abstraction, a sense of the past, etc.). Cf. *exophoric*.

Essentialism: The ascription of inherent, invariable traits to some cultural category; e.g., Walter Ong's description of orality as "empathetic and participatory rather than objectively distanced" (1982: 45).

Evolutionism: The assumption that literary modalities (q.v.) follow a Darwinian model of progressive refinement and improvement, with older "adaptations" becoming extinct as more successful ones appear on the scene.

Exoliterate, exoliteracy, exophoric literacy: Applied to forms of reading or thinking that exhibit the traits identified with exophoricity (q.v.).

Exophoric, exophoricity: Applied to the cognitive or literary traits sometimes labeled "oral," i.e., that exhibit an assimilation of the self to the environment (e.g., concreteness, traditionality, homeostatization of the past, etc.). Cf. *endophoric*.

Format: The means by which a medieval text was composed, communicated, or received.

Format-neutral: Applied to a medieval use of the word "read" where the author does not specify, and may not care, whether public or private reading is meant.

Great Divide: The rigid polarization of "orality" and "literacy" as envisioned by standard literacy theory (q.v.); the name derives from Ruth Finnegan (1973).

Literacy theory: The theory, pioneered by Jack Goody and Ian Watt (1963) and Eric Havelock (1963), that the introduction of writing entails a wide variety of major cognitive and literary changes.

Literate, literacy: Used in the text without quote marks, these terms have two meanings: As a technological description, able to read and, possibly, write; as a cultural entity, applied to the experience of books as stored in writing. In the latter sense, "literacy" overlaps with "orality" in two areas: public reading and voiced private reading. Cf. *oral*.

Used in the text with quote marks, these terms mean: Demonstrating some or all of the cognitive and/or literary traits associated by literacy or orality/literacy theory (q.v.) with the introduction or expansion of writing technologies.

Memorial, memoriality: Applied to the performance of texts from memory; in the present thesis, this term will apply chiefly to minstrel performance.

Modality: The cultural matrix within which a mode or modes of reception operate; e.g., orality, aurality, dividuality (q.v.).

Modality theory: A non-prescriptive term for the investigation of literary modalities that accommodates any order or interrelationship among them. Cf. *literacy theory, orality/literacy theory*.

Modality shift: The decline of a dominant form or forms of literary experience in favor of another or other form(s); e.g., the gradual decline of public in favor of private reading.

Oral, orality: Used in the text without quote marks, these terms have two meanings: As a technological description, unable to read or write; as a cultural entity, applied to the experience of books as presented orally. In the latter sense, "orality" overlaps with "literacy" in two areas: public reading and voiced private reading. Cf. *literate*.

Used in the text with quote marks, these terms mean: Demonstrating some or all of the cognitive and/or literary traits associated by literacy or orality/literacy theory (q.v.) with the lack of or deficiencies in writing technologies.

Oral-formulaic: The extempore composition and performance of poetry, made possible by combining formulas and themes as the metrical needs and sense dictate (Lord 1960).

Orality/literacy theory: Walter Ong's elaboration of literacy theory (q.v.) to apply to events after the introduction of writing and across Western history.

Peroral, perorality: Applied to texts composed, stored, and performed with no recourse to writing. ("Per-" adds the force of "thoroughly," i.e., in this context, "booklessly.")

Polarization: The conceptualization of "orality" and "literacy" as radically disparate entities that can co-exist, if at all, only in a fugitive state of transition from one to the other.

Plect, prelection: To read a written text aloud to one or more listeners; a term borrowed from John of Salisbury, who noted: "The word 'reading' is equivocal. It may refer either to the activity of teaching and being taught, or to the occupation of studying written things by oneself. Consequently, the former, the intercommunication between teacher and learner, may be termed (to use Quintilian's word) the 'lecture' [praelectio]; the latter, or the scrutiny by the student, the 'reading' [lectio], simply so called" (trans. McGarry 1955: 65-66). "Plect," "prelection," and "prelector" appear in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, with citations from 1586 through 1907.

Survival, survivalism: A corollary of the theory of unilinear evolution (q.v.) that explains the persistence of rituals, beliefs, and procedures from one evolutionary stage into the next as inert vestiges that have no power to define their context.

Technological determinism: The assumption that technological changes such as the introduction of writing, rising literacy, or improvements in book-production result directly in augmented "literate" (q.v.) cognitive skills.

Text: Any assemblage of words shaped into a communicative genre, whether written or not.

Textuality: Recognition that a text exists as a book that can be handled and inspected.

Unilinear evolution: The idea, first expressed by Sir Edward Burnett Tylor (1871) and Sir James George Frazer (1890; 1911-15), that humankind has evolved from primitive (Frazer's age of magic) through barbarian (the age of religion) to civilization (the age of science).

CHAPTER 1

A REVIEW OF THE SECONDARY LITERATURE

This chapter will discuss how the evolutionary and polarizing paradigms adopted by the orality/literacy theorists¹ operate in modern discussions of late medieval English literature. It is hard to know which to begin with, since the two assumptions are closely linked and mutually reinforcing: seen one way, the polarizing forces that define "orality" and "literacy" as radically disparate prepare the way for a model by which one evolves into the other; seen the other way, the impetus of an evolutionary model retrospectively imposes obsolescence on whatever seems old to modern eyes. Since medieval literature has always been assessed for its role in the development of literary discourse, however, I will start with the critical responses that I feel reflect a questionably apt reliance on an Ongian evolutionary model of orality and literacy.

EVOLUTION AND THE MARCH OF LITERATURE

Long discredited by anthropologists and eschewed as well by many literary theorists, the Victorian model of unilinear evolutionism (q.v.) has found a new niche in literary studies under the aegis of orality/literacy theory. The apparent rigorousness of this discipline, based on hard technological facts (literacy rates, book production, and so on), has attracted many medieval

¹Terms such as this which are defined in the Glossary following the Introduction will be marked, on their first appearance in the thesis, with a "(q.v.)." I apologize for the small blizzard of "q.v.'s" that is about to hit.

scholars—as has the prominence the approach gives their period and its implicit endorsement of a deeply embedded bias towards dividuality (q.v.). One rather startlingly explicit invocation of the Victorian antecedents of this evolutionary, pseudo-scientific bent is the recent remark:

Literary inventions and discoveries carry the very same importance as those of science. Informing us about the world, they dazzle with equal brilliance. If I imagine, say, Chaucer transplanted in that other world, he would most resemble Darwin, encountering for the first time those giant turtles--nature's exotics--in the Galapagos islands. (Sanders 1991: 111)

Much as I enjoy the image this passage gives me of the Harley 4866 Chaucer standing on an island pointing at a giant turtle, I will continue to maintain my anti-evolutionary assumptions: (1) that aurality (q.v.) and dividuality were partner modalities, co-existing as an "intermediate mode" (see D.H. Green 1984, 1990) throughout the later Middle Ages and, in new forms, on into the Renaissance; and (2) that the key transformation was not from "orality" to "literacy"--or even (in my terms) from bimodality to the relative prominence of dividuality—but from a relatively exophoric to an increasingly endophoric mentality.² This latter event was related to the transformation in modalities (q.v.) but by no means simply identical with it.

More typical than this scenario, however, is the assumption that over the course of the Middle Ages, English literature evolved from primitive/oral to sophisticated/dividual, via a series of intermediate stages and with occasional holdovers of older forms within the new. Driving this change are various interconnected, broadly conceived "technological" events such as the adoption of English as a high-status language, rising literacy, improved

²"Orality," "literacy," "bimodality," "exophoric," and "endophoric" are all defined in the Glossary following the Introduction.

technologies of book production, and a rising middle class.³ Out of some intersection of these influences emerged the Galapagean Chaucer, signaling the advent of true literature, i.e., of literate authors writing for private readers; while with Caxton we emerge into the state of grace represented by the fixed text (and thence, it is implied, by easy stages to a full valorization of the author, his originality, and his text's uniqueness and inviolability).

Within the model of the march of progress, evolution discarding less efficient solutions as it refines and perfects for the future, aurality is generally dismissed as a "transitional stage," and aural traits in late medieval literature as "survivals" (q.v.), "residue," "vestiges," or "archaisms" left over from the time of "orality." Even the followers of Albert Lord, who have devoted considerable attention to oral-formulaic (q.v.) and memorial (q.v.) texts, conceive of aural texts as "transitional" or "oral-derived" (see, e.g., Foley 1986; Renoir 1986).

The oral-formulaic form of orality has fared better in critical estimation than the aural form, perhaps, precisely because it is the original, "primitive" state of literature. Beginnings are always interesting; one is naturally intrigued to see how creativity functioned in its infancy, and one can afford to be generous to a phenomenon so distinct from our own habitual forms of composition and reception. But aurality tends as ever to fall between the two stools of oral and individual. Deprived of the glamour of the first-born, close enough to individuality to annoy by its failure to reach all the way, aurality is trivialized by the premise and the lexicon of evolutionism (q.v.). No great Parry of the read-aloud manuscript has yet appeared to defend aurality as a phenomenon in its own right. The evolutionary frame of mind

³As John Fleming remarked in a symposium on Chaucer's audience, "The middle classes have been rising for so long in Chaucerian scholarship that they are by now observable only with the most powerful optical instruments" ("Chaucer's Audience," 1983: 179).

justifies the dangerous attitude that since aurality was the last "stage" before "literacy," it is effectively a proxy for such "literacy," significant not for itself but for what it presages.

There is no question but that peroral (q.v.), memorial, aural, and individual modalities achieved relative ascendancy, as formats (q.v.) for vernacular literature, in that order; problems arise only when this sequence is first, telescoped, and second, treated not as simple historical fact but as a moral victory. The endliterate (q.v.) mentality, when first developing out of the exophoric matrix (and reinventing the aural one), not surprisingly rejected and devalued the older techniques; but that fight was over long ago. As C.S. Lewis remarked, the English humanists

claimed vociferously to be restoring all good learning, liberating the world from barbarism, and breaking with the past. Our legend of the Renaissance is a Renaissance legend. We have not arrived at this conception as a result of our studies but simply inherited it from the very people we were studying. (1954: 56)

It is only the final, or most recent, stage in an evolutionary sequence that can look back and see how everything has led up to itself--as the founder of anthropology, Sir Edward Burnett Tylor, assumed that the end goal of human evolution was Victorian man. We should be capable of greater objectivity by now, and welcome in each mentality and modality its own peculiar excellencies.

In the following subsections I will examine several ways in which the evolutionary premise affects studies of late medieval literature.

Technological Determinism and "Deficiency Theory"

Some scholars are quite prepared to admit that late medieval English authors expected their work would be read aloud. People had to read aloud to each other, these writers point out, because many people were illiterate and because manuscripts were scarce; but the situation improved as literacy

rose, paper became available, scribal production increased, and houses incorporated private rooms that encouraged private reading. This is technological determinism (q.v.) in reverse, applying the assumption that modes of thinking and of experiencing literature are transparently related to literacy rates and other technological constraints. This "deficiency theory" depicts prelection as the make-do phase of early literacy--a stand-in for the fuller literacy that would take over from it as soon as social conditions and technology allowed.

Deficiency theory allows scholars uncomfortable with public reading to declare it defunct as soon as they can point to traces of technological or educational improvement. If prelection (q.v.) is the result of certain practical obstacles, it will disappear as soon as those obstacles are overcome; little attention is paid to the evidence that literate people with good access to manuscripts often chose to have them read aloud. Scholars of medieval literature are prone to the "eureka" topos, by which they eagerly identify some single technological factor--most commonly "rising literacy"--as allegedly inaugurating the new age of authors who write self-consciously and in critical dialectic with their tradition, expecting to be read in an interiorized, thoughtful fashion by solitary readers. This of course is recognizably the way most or all serious literature is produced today; and, consciously or unconsciously, some modern-day critics seem committed to proving that it was the way that at least the great medieval authors also produced their works. Not all scholars have absorbed A.C. Spearing's warning that

the initial problem [in the study of medieval poetry]--one that persists to some extent throughout the medieval period--is to gain attention for characteristics that begin by seeming like deficiencies or absences when regarded in the light of the expectations appropriate to more recent writing. (1987: 2)

Eugène Vinaver is in the mainstream of the eureka tradition when he trumpets the rise of romance in the twelfth century as

the birth of a world in which vernacular writings were to share with Latin texts the privilege of addressing the reader through the medium of visible, not audible symbols; through words intended to be read, not sung or even recited; and with this went a radical alteration of the very nature of literary experience. The change heralded our modern world in much the same way as St. Ambrose's silent approach to his text heralded our reading habits. (1971: 4)

For Janet Coleman, rising literacy was the sole cause of major cultural and literary innovations in the *fourteenth* century. "The strikingly brief period of transition," she says,

from a society that consisted for most people in essentially traditional and oral values to a society where literacy was no longer unique brought about the achievements of a Chaucer on the one hand, and the alliterative revival in prose and verse on the other. (1981: 161)

Paul Saenger (1991) finds his eureka in a more esoteric source: "the reintroduction of word separation in the early Middle Ages by Irish and Anglo-Saxon scribes" (p. 210). The importance of this event "was great," he claims, for it

freed the intellectual faculties of the reader, permitting him to read all texts silently and, therefore, more swiftly and in particular to understand greater numbers of intellectually more difficult texts with greater ease. ... [S]eparated written text became the standard medium of written communication of a civilization characterized by superior intellectual rigor. (pp. 210-11).⁴

⁴Saenger associates lack of word separation with aural reading, here as in his influential 1982 article. He notes:

Precisely because those who read aloud relished the mellifluous sounds of pronounced text and were not interested in the swift intrusive consultation of books, the absence of interword space in Greek and Latin was not perceived to be an impediment to effective reading as it would be to the modern reader who strives to read swiftly. (1991: 208-9)

The passage is confusing until you realize that "those who read aloud" means those who heard someone else read aloud. The someone else, in the classical period, was usually a slave maintained for the purposes of copying and pre-lecting books. (*cont. next page*)

Donald Howard credits the advent of private reading to a rather later event, the introduction of paper:

If they had not been so rare, if the materials had not been so expensive, books wouldn't have had this "public" quality. Of course the rich always had some books they could read by themselves (if they could read), and the monasteries and schools had libraries; but all would have been different if only books could have been cheaper. That is why the introduction of paper into Europe in the twelfth century is one of the most important events in European intellectual history--compared to it, the printing press was only gadgetry. (1976: 64)

H.J. Chaytor would disagree with the "gadgetry" remark; in an often-quoted statement, he advocates a different monocause: "The question is sometimes asked," he notes,

when did the middle ages come to an end? They ended, so far as their idea of literary style is concerned, with the invention of printing. (1945, rpt. 1967: 82).

Derek Brewer, however, gives a good deal of weight to the withdrawing room, whose advent on the fourteenth-century social scene is famously invoked by Dame Studie in *Piers Plowman* (B 10: 96-102). "Langland complains in the late fourteenth century," Brewer notes,

As soon as we try to visualize this situation as Saenger describes it, his technological determinism begins to look less reliable. Why wouldn't "the absence of interword space" be an impediment to the *prelectors'* effective reading? How did they manage, while reading aloud, to produce "the mellifluous sounds of pronounced text" when they, like the readers of the post-classical age, were in the grips of "the difficulties of lexical access arising from *scriptura continua*" (p. 209)? And most forcefully, if these slaves were the same people who wrote out the texts, why didn't they forestall any difficulties by simply separating the words as they wrote them?

The answer may be, in part, that these Greek and Latin slaves were used to *scriptura continua* and had little trouble prelecting it, just as readers of Hebrew become used to the absence of vowels. (Saenger concludes a discussion of the physiological evidence for such habituation by reasserting the relative difficulty of reading unseparated words. His comment that "the ancient reader in daily life reacted by reading orally" again begs the question of the prelector's difficulties [pp. 204-5].)

that lord and lady were withdrawing from the noisy communal hall to greater privacy--a social movement which reflects the increasing privacy of reading literature. ... Private reading to oneself is very different from hearing songs and stories in hall. Silent reading demands an individual, not a group, response, more solitary but more thoughtful. (1982: 20-21)

The effect of Brewer's rather confusing discussion is that the endophoric revolution--the advent of solitary, thoughtful reading--is pinned to a satisfyingly "hard" architectural evolution.

By explaining "orality" as the byproduct of technological deficiencies, and crediting the advent of dividuality and endoliteracy to the removal of those difficulties, these scholars both endorse a reductionist view of modality shift (q.v.) and distort the primary evidence. They simplistically assume that any visible "advance" in literary technology (literacy rates, book production) must bring an "advance" in literary practice (dividual reading, endophoric reading), while behind any visible (or alleged) advance in literary practice must lie an advance in literary technology. Scholarly discussions of modalities are likely to become an exercise in imposing this template, reading evidence into the blanks in the record and ignoring the contradictory evidence that is there.

As we will see in later chapters, medieval historical and literary texts provide abundant proof that public reading maintained its popularity long after the rise in late medieval literacy rates and the advent of word-separation, paper, private chambers, and even print. While illiterates might have listened because they had no choice, and the book-deprived to share out the goods, the evidence shows that many literate members of the upper classes--even those renowned for their libraries--*chose* to listen to books. According to everything they say, they did so because they enjoyed and felt they benefited from the experience; the only technological problems the primary literature tends to recognize are scribal distortion, the need to translate out of Latin or French, and the variability of English dialects.

While technological (and other) changes may have helped, gradually, to change the relative popularity of different modalities, it is far too simplistic to consider any such shift a transparent reflection of technological change. The innate futility of such an approach reveals itself in the citations above, where a chorus of eureka's arises over a notably disparate collection of single causes. More important than the exact cause any scholar pinpoints seems to be the urgent sense that something important changed, and that something technological must have been responsible. Any of the usual suspects will do to provide the sought-after relief of reaching the "new."

The feeling that technology and cognitive or literary "advances" exist in a transparent, reciprocal relationship has underwritten an entire minor genre of scholarly articles. Seizing upon the idea of literacy as the sovereign force of cognitive and literary emancipation, these authors dart about the medieval landscape in eager pursuit of cultural changes they can claim to have been produced by some alleged advance in technology. What characterizes these articles is the shallowness of both their theoretical and empirical discussions; hardly ever do their conclusions stand up to even moderately rigorous examination.⁵

The deficiency theory, as applied to medieval literature, moreover ignores the fact that any form of creative expression exists within a social-technological matrix and is subject to change if that matrix changes. The fact that silent movies were rendered passé by sound recording has not prevented scholars from hailing many silent films as classics. Neither the people who created those movies nor the audience who enjoyed them are denigrated for participating in a soon-to-be-outmoded artistic experience. Why is such a defeatist attitude adopted towards public reading--which,

⁵Obviously, I should now cite some examples, but I hesitate to do so, feeling it would be a cruel procedure given the negative context. Moreover, analyses of the methodological and factual problems in them would take a considerable amount of time and space.

unlike silent film, continued as a creative medium long after its evolutionary successor, private reading, had appeared on the scene? As the film example suggests, after all, we have never *not* been in a transitional era.

Survivalism

The evolutionary framework, and the emphasis it places on technological constraints, implies that any evidence of orality persisting into the age of "literacy" is anomalous. To deal with that anomaly scholars have resort to the concept that Tylor used to explain curiosities such as the persistence of "savage" witchcraft in civilized Victorian England: namely, survivals. Like rock strata or like the fossils found within them (to recall the concept's antecedents in Lyell's geology and Darwin's biology), cultural survivals preserve into a later age the inert vestiges of a bygone, superseded era.

Many scholars tend to explain the presence in a late medieval text of such traits as formulas, redundancy, or references to the hearing of literature, all associated with a hazily conceived orality, as the carryover into a new modality of habits formed within the old--in other words, as survivals. References to hearing audiences are considered no bar to identifying a text as intended for private reading--because by evolutionary logic, its textuality (q.v.) defines the text as post-oral. The most influential recent exponent of this survivalism is Walter Ong (e.g., 1965, 1982), who persistently invokes the idea of "oral residue" to explain, among other things, "oral" elements in medieval texts.

In fact, of course, while oral-formulaic orality may have disappeared and memorial orality considerably declined by the late Middle Ages, prelectate orality--i.e., aurality--was alive and well. Aurality was predicated on textuality--you couldn't read aloud from a book unless there was a book--yet since you *were* reading aloud, there was nothing anachronistic in the book referring to a listening audience. In such cases, such references (as

well as a certain amount of redundant, even loosely formulaic language) were functional, not survivals.

The vocabulary used in discussing alleged carryovers from orality often reflects the Victorian idea of survivals and that idea's pseudo-scientific antecedents. Dieter Mehl, for example, argues that *Havelok* represents "a distinctly literary product and this means that the social occasion has become, as it were, fossilized" (1974: 174). Ronald Waldron also relies on geological tropes. He finds in fourteenth-century poetry "the remains of an oral technique embedded in written literature" (1957: 794) and notes: "We might naturally expect this intrusion of oral-formulaic features into written poetry to take place in periods when general literacy was increasing" (p. 793). Here, formulas are embedded in written literature like fossils in strata, or intruded like volcanic magma. H.J. Chaytor has Tylor's ages of human evolution well in hand when he writes: "Medieval literature, written to be recited and primitive in character, naturally preserved certain syntactical mannerisms which were eliminated in the course of progress towards literary style" (1945, rpt. 1967: 142).

Survivalism can be invoked with mellowness or acerbity. Clifford Aspland, for example, comments unsympathetically:

If formulaic language was originally developed to facilitate oral composition and, to a certain extent, improvisation, it later served the slipshod writer piecing together the familiar patchwork of his traditional motifs. (1970: 19)

Alain Renoir declares more amiably that the authors of the *Nibelungenlied* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* invoked "oral-formulaic elements [to] lend the poem an air of archaic legitimacy" (1986: 131). Whether friendly or hostile, these dismissive explanations obscure the fact that formulas facilitate not only composition but comprehension: even if writing authors could compose at leisure, aural audiences still had only the spoken moment in which to grasp their meaning. As long as the material was subject to

public reading, formulas had practical (as well, possibly, as esthetic) advantages.⁶

Fictive Orality

The logic of survivalism underwrites a common strategy for bypassing late medieval auralty, particularly but not only in the works of Chaucer.

"Fictive orality" explains away aural elements in a text as holdovers from the days of minstrel performance, preserved either inadvertently or in a deliberate attempt to foster in a privately reading audience a sense of the bygone *gemütlich* days of live performance (what might be called a *nostalgie de la bouche*). Either explanation dissolves the functional auralty of the late medieval author into a fictionalized orality. This line of reasoning depends on the usual evolutionary premises and the usual confusion of levels of orality. The actual auralty invoked in these texts may be flickeringly acknowledged but soon disappears into a preemptively polarized sense of the "oral"; all that remains is the aggressively dividual.

The fictive orality argument may have been launched by J.B. Burrow, in his classic *Ricardian Poetry* (1971). "Chaucer was an intensely bookish poet," Burrow wrote,

and in his metropolitan circles the new age of widespread literacy and the mass-production of books had already dawned. In his *Canterbury Tales*, accordingly, the older face-to-face relationship between narrator and audience, the relationship characteristic of an age when books were scarce, is internalized and fictionalized; and the corresponding features of style are thus accommodated and given a new justification within the poem's fiction, to which in turn they lend strength and authenticity. ... Chaucer did not have to invent this face-to-face story-telling manner. It is convincing, as no merely invented manner can be, because minstrel poetry was still in his day a living reality. (p. 36)

⁶This point has been made by Ruth Crosby (1936: 102-8) and A.C. Baugh (1959: 434; 1967: 9), as well as by others, e.g., Lewis 1961: 20-22 and Spearing 1972: 21-23.

The first premise of this argument should by now be familiar: technological progress--higher literacy and more books--was enough to ensure the obsolescence of orality among metropolitan sophisticates. Chaucer's bookish response, the logic goes on, was to fictionalize the performance situation identified with the outgoing (though still present) format of minstrel poetry. In this way he, apparently, retains for his book-isolated readership the "strength and authenticity" of the oral experience.

Chaucer was obviously artist enough to counterfeit any framework he liked, and there is no reason to doubt that he learned some of his craft from listening to or reading minstrel romances. Yet a few points in Burrow's argument merit exception. Like many scholars, he has jumbled together several kinds of orality and left out the most relevant one: public reading. Except in "Sir Thopas," Chaucer does not seem ever to imitate true minstrel style. Although Lee Patterson (picking up Burrow's argument) declares that "each of the tales is itself a kind of minstrel performance" (1989: 125), the performances fictionalized in the *Canterbury Tales* resemble a song or recital contest conducted by professional minstrels much less than they do a pseudo-folkloric storytelling session among a diverse group of amateur performers (see Lindahl 1987). (The event is "pseudo-folkloric" because, of course, few storytellers--and, likewise, few minstrels--would be likely to improvise, or to have memorized, such highly bookish tales in such elegant verse.) By invoking the deficiency theory and conflating aurality (the oral modality he does *not* mention) with minstrel performance and oral tradition, Burrow deprives Chaucer's aural phraseology of pragmatic effect. With no listening audience needing clear transitions, enjoying the author's direct address, or giving rationale to the many "as ye shall hear's" and so on, Burrow must interpret such traits as a mock-orality, a sophisticated, self-conscious adaptation of a forgone stylistic.

This confusion seems to arise from Burrow's difficulty in conceptualizing prelection as a distinct performance format. In a later article, having noted

that *Gawain and the Green Knight* was certainly written but also "certainly intended ... for recitation to a listening audience," he can only conclude that the "*Gawain*-poet, in short, belongs to the phase that can be called neither oral nor bookish, the minstrel period," which he then characterizes as "transitional" (1973: 357). The evolutionary framework of "phases" and "transition" promotes this confusion, which obliterates the evidence that, like Criseyde's maiden and Alison's fifth husband (and like many less well-known prelectors, fictional and historical), most prelectors of whom we have any evidence were not professional minstrels but household members, performing with book, not harp, in hand.⁷

Protected by its elisions, the premises of fictive orality keep it completely self-enclosed: anything that points to aurality can be dismissed as fictional, because it is based on a discarded reception format. "On the whole," says Derek Pearsall, for example,

it can be taken as a general rule that references within a romance to a listening audience do not provide a certain indication of the actual mode of delivery, since some dramatization of the author-audience relationship is characteristic of nearly all literature. On the other

⁷Adding to the confusion is the fact that in other contexts, Burrow (1971: 13-14) does acknowledge the existence of aurality, citing other scholars' citation of the public reading by Criseyde's maiden as evidence of the decline of minstrel performance. He seems to accept prelection here as a form of "literacy," as later when he notes that "the clever member of a family or household would have read [*Guy of Warwick*], sometimes aloud to others, sometimes in private and even silently." But in insisting that "the important fact" for the discussion of literary style is the un-"literary" "tags and formulas, appeals to the audience and heavily marked narrative transitions" bequeathed by the minstrels to writers such as Chaucer, he does not confront the seemingly obvious questions raised by his acknowledgment of non-minstrel domestic prelection. If he admits that Chaucer, the *Gawain*-poet, and others would have been read aloud, why does Burrow think that the only explanation for redundant wording, appeals to the audience, and clear transitions would be the fossil persistence of minstrelisms? Would these (and, perhaps, other traits) not have facilitated the comprehension of and otherwise appealed to an esthetic shared with the contemporary audiences hearing these books read aloud? Why attach only to the past what you acknowledge as entirely relevant to the present?

hand, references to the written text and the private reader are not likely in a romance designed for performance, since they are not appropriate to the dominant relationship. (1976: 61; see also 1985: 295)

Deeply committed to his home-brewed version of the Great Divide (q.v.), Pearsall leaves no room for a read-aloud romance, in which references to writing would be quite appropriate. References to the author's or translator's professional reading would be equally unsurprising, and references to the recreational reading of the audience or other people would most likely be format-neutral (q.v.)--there are almost no unambiguous references to *private* recreational reading in medieval English literature (see Chapters 3-5).

A good corrective to Pearsall's polarities comes from the anonymous Scottish translator of the *Buik of Alexander* (1438). The author notes in the preface to the second part of this romance that to cure himself of a hopeless love, he decided

For to translait in inglis leid
Ane romans quhilk that I hard reid (STS v. 2; pt. 2, ll. 21-22)

In his epilogue he notes apologetically his version's inferiority to the French original; he could do no better, he says:

Bot said furth as me come to mouth,
And as I said, richt sa I wrait;
Thairfoir richt wonder weill I wait
At it hes faltis mony-fald,
Quhairfoir I pray baith young and ald
That yarnis this romanis for to reid,
For to amend quhair I mysyeid!
Ye that haue hard this romanis heir
May sumdeill by exampill leir ... (STS v. 4; ep.: 14-22)

The translator, who was obviously literate, thus depicts himself first as hearing his source read aloud, and then as dictating his translation to himself. After begging those who would "reid" him to amend his faults, he retroactively implies that that reading would be voiced by addressing those

who "haue hard" his romance. At over 400 pages in the printed version, this text was clearly not meant for minstrel performance; but it still clearly mixes "orality" and "literacy" unconcernedly, both in the compositional and reception process.

One of the few unambiguous dividual readings that Ruth Crosby (1936: 97 n. 4) could cite from her extensive research offers an even more unambiguous testimony to the appropriateness of references to listening in written romances. In his allegedly autobiographical *Espinette amoureuse* (c. 1370), Jean Froissart records seeing a damsel reading a romance to herself. He soon joins her, however, listens to her read a few pages, and then reads a few more pages to her. Here private and public reading flow gracefully together, both modalities considered equally courtly and diverting (but only the second a good medium for flirtation).

With the advent of postmodernism and the widespread valorization of artificiality, the fictive orality argument has become almost an accepted "fact" about Chaucer. Some authors seem to admit frankly that they are pursuing it not because it is the more accurate but because it is the more interesting or "relevant" viewpoint. "There is no doubt," says Dieter Mehl,

that Chaucer belongs to a tradition of oral poetry, that he is essentially pre-Gutenberg, and that serious critical distortions result if we read him with the kind of expectation that the European novel from Richardson to James Joyce has helped to create. But it has also been observed that this particular audience at the court of Richard II is, for us, only a piece of historical fiction. Whatever reality it may have had for Chaucer, for us it can never be more than an abstract reconstruction which does not really affect our experience when we read Chaucer. (1974: 173)

Mehl then goes on to offer a frequently cited reading of *Troilus and Criseyde* based on the assumption that Chaucer inscribes a hearing audience in the text, in order to provide an enjoyable illusion for privately reading audiences. Does Mehl thus mean to imply that Chaucer rejected his own contemporary reality in order to produce a simulation of that reality for us,

in the twentieth century? Ruth Crosby seems to have anticipated Mehl's arguments 36 years before he made them. "Although Chaucer used his verse-tags and stock expressions with artistic skill," she wrote, "we cannot say that his aim in doing so was to create in *us* the illusion that we are listening rather than reading. His aim was to hold the interest of a fourteenth-century English audience that actually would be listening" (1938: 432).

Fictive orality has also been spreading beyond the Chaucerian canon. Evocations of prelection in the poems of the Alliterative Revival, says Thorlac Turville-Petre, for example, represent

a convention which has a *literary* function, ... part of the fiction created by the poet. ... The "narrator" in *Gawain* is therefore part of the fiction created by the poet. This device tells us something about the conventions of romance, but it cannot give us reliable information about the status of the author himself. Furthermore, if the "narrator" is fictitious, then the nature of the "audience" he is addressing may be equally so. (1977: 37-38)

Employing the same license to disbelieve the sources, Larry Scanlon (1990) assumes, against the grain of his text, that Prince Henry in Hoccleve's *Regement of Princes* is only an inscribed audience (or patron).

How can we escape, supposing we want to, from the circularity of the fictive orality argument? If all evidence of orality (or, more precisely, aurality) is fictive, and any evidence of reading is not only factual but coopted to dividuality, how can we recoup any space for the read-aloud book? The attempt to do so is one major thrust of this thesis: Chapters 3-5 will argue the factuality of aurality from historical sources, from an extended analysis of Chaucer's references to reception formats, and from within so many other literary texts that, bar some century-long, multi-author conspiracy, the idea of fictive orality collapses under the weight of the aural testimony. In advance of that extended refutation, however, I would offer a few general points.

Chaucer might indeed have chosen to indulge his private readers with the fiction of being listeners, but it is harder to believe that not only the greatest poet of the age but most of his contemporaries and successors until the late fifteenth century went along with the deception--as did the historians who recorded the reading habits of the late medieval upper classes. We might suppose, then, that Chaucer alone, genius as he was, made the breakthrough decision to opt out of the system--to write for private readers under cover of his aural formulas. Even if he did, though, how could he ensure that his fourteenth-century audience would read him privately? He doesn't *tell* them anywhere to take the book off and read it by themselves--although he does tell his scribe to copy accurately ("Chaucers Wordes unto Adam") and he does hope that dialectal variation won't distort his meter (T&C 5: 1793-96). The ardent private reading espoused by his fictionalized persona--in the *Book of the Duchess*, the *House of Fame*, the *Parliament of Fowls*, and the prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*--might (I argue in Chapter 4) have seemed to contemporary audiences as much an advertisement of his unique qualifications as author as an inducement to them to follow suit. Of course some people in his time--perhaps many people among his literary acquaintances--would read vernacular literature privately and seriously. But as Mehl himself argues (1974: 174, quoted below), Chaucer was writing not only for his fellow authors but for recreational audiences within and beyond his immediate circle, and he must have known that most of those people still read publicly most of the time. So his aural usages are functional, they must speak to the experience of a significant proportion, perhaps a majority, of his intended audience. What complexities and ironies lurk behind the functionality is, of course, another issue.

The fact that Chaucer projects such a vivid sense of a listening audience and of his own personality as arch-presenter reflects his genius--not, necessarily, his commitment to post-orality/aurality. We can imagine that

even his hearing audiences--actually listening together as he assumes they would be--would find that his artistry intensified the experience of togetherness, the exercise of audiacy (q.v.), that they sought and enjoyed in prelection. After all, if the exponents of fictive orality argue so cleverly that Chaucer was trying to simulate this experience for a reading audience, are they not inadvertently conceding that it was an enjoyable experience, one that a private reader would be happy to recover imaginatively? If that is so, why be a private reader at all? The chance to turn some pages over all by oneself might not outweigh, for a fourteenth-century literate, the pleasures of joining with friends and family to participate in a stimulating oral performance of Chaucer. In the famous passage from *House of Fame* in which the Eagle describes Geoffrey sitting "domb as any stoon" over his books, the verdict is that this makes him a "daswed" man who lives "as an heremyte" (ll. 656-59). When Pandarus suggests they go dancing, Criseyde responds that as a widow she should rather go live in a cave and read saints' lives (T&C 2: 111-19). These and other passages suggest, humorously, that private reading was not considered a particularly attractive option for those less eccentric than Geoffrey, or less exceptional than the real Chaucer.

The only extrinsic evidence the proponents of fictive orality can offer for their position is rising literacy rates and other indications of allegedly increasing bookishness. This is to invoke the deficiency theory, whereby people were prevented from reading privately only by illiteracy or scarcity of manuscripts--and to ignore the considerable evidence that the removal of these obstacles had little effect on reading habits. The only *intrinsic* evidence the advocates of fictive orality can rely on is Chaucer's complexity or irony, or whatever other characteristic they decide is too sophisticated for listeners to grasp. But such attributions betray only their preconceptions about listeners: there is no reason that a sophisticated group hearing a competent performer would be any less able to grasp Chaucer's subtleties than we (see

also Lindahl 1987: 159-61). After all, they would probably hear the same text read many times, they might well discuss the reading among themselves, and since most of them were literate, they could consult the text privately if they cared to. Since they were contemporary with Chaucer, they would obviously have faced far fewer interpretive difficulties than we.⁸

Chaucerian Evolution and the "First Audience" Argument

The survivalist mentality appears in two further forms of individualist damage control, both also in regard to the key figure of Chaucer. Some scholars who concede the factuality of Chaucer's references to aural performance go on to impose either or both of two amendments. The first says that while Chaucer did envision such performance for his earlier poems, he gradually, as he reached artistic maturity (and moved away from the court), evolved towards writing for private readers. The second amendment claims that while Chaucer expected to and perhaps did perform all or some of his poetry himself for his first audience, he expected equally that his later audiences would be reading his work privately. In the first instance auralness is a transitional phase in Chaucer's artistic development; in the second, Chaucer's command performances are a special case, no more reflective of general reading behavior than modern public readings by famous authors such as Julian Barnes.

Attempts to sustain the argument that Chaucer telescoped within his own writing career the crucial oral-to-literate transition can lead to a kind of pretzel-logic. After all, in what are actually or very nearly his last written words, Chaucer addresses his retraction to "hem alle that herkne this litel tretys or rede" (CT 10: 1081). If such references are accepted as proof of

⁸D.H. Green (1990: 277-78) makes several of the same points made here, in his assessment of Manfred Günter Scholz's *Hören und Lesen* (1980).

aurality in earlier works, how would one justify rejecting them in later works? Paul Strohm does his best to show that Chaucer migrated away from aurality over the course of writing *Troilus and Criseyde*. "The immediate, aural audience presupposed in the opening books," he says, "is replaced by a more remote 'redere' (v.270), with the aural audience not to reappear until late in the poem (v.629, 637)" (1989: 56). This is hardly an all-out victory for "literacy," with a possibly format-neutral reader popping up once near the end of the poem, ostensibly "replacing" the aural audience--which reappears a mere 359 lines later! In fact, Chaucer refers to a hearing audience throughout *Troilus and Criseyde*; every book has a few references along the lines of:

Pandare, which that sent from Troilus
Was to Criseyde—as ye han herd devyse ... (T&C 4: 806-7)

Few advocates of the "first audience" argument are as categorical as Bertrand Bronson, who declared that "Chaucer wrote for the ends of social entertainment and he wrote always from the point of view of one who himself in person would be giving that entertainment" (1960: 66). Yet they are ready to admit, and imagine (often based on the famous frontispiece to the Corpus Christi manuscript of *Troilus*; see Fig. 20), the idea of Chaucer performing to an audience of friends or patrons (e.g., Brewer 1978: 162-63); the exact composition of that audience, for various poems or periods, is a subject of considerable discussion. In itself, this idea of Chaucer's first audience is an interesting topic with, probably, a good basis in fact (for further discussion, see, e.g., Lawlor 1966; Reiss 1980).

For those uncomfortable with Chaucer's aurality in general, however, the first audience idea provides an attractive escape clause. Chaucer read or recited to his first audience, they agree; but he also wrote for people beyond that audience. Why else would he worry about scribes mismetering his poetry (T&C 5: 1793-96), or contemplate his status relative to Virgil, Ovid, Homer, Lucan, and Statius (T&C 5: 1789-92)? And this further

audience, of course, consists of private readers—since that is the only alternative to Chaucer's own oral performance. Strohm supposes that Bukton, Scogan, and other of Chaucer's friends who would hear him read "must share his attention along with a larger audience of imagined page turners, encountering Chaucer's work beyond his control" (1989: 51). Dieter Mehl admits initially that "Chaucer's poetry was written for a live performance, not for the study" (1974: 173). But he goes on to say:

When, in the Prologue to the *Canterbury Tales*, he warns the reader of what is to come and asks him to skip a story if he does not approve of it, he is obviously not talking to the courtiers listening at his feet, but rather to the anonymous reader of one of the many manuscripts that were soon to circulate. (p. 174)

I would agree with Mehl that Chaucer wrote for an audience beyond his immediate circle; but why must that audience have consisted of private readers? Chapter 4 will demonstrate that Chaucer invites his audience, throughout his works and throughout his career, to *hear* what he has written; "read's" are either identified with professional literary or scholarly reading, or are format-neutral (that is, they do not select between private and public reading). After all, Chaucer consigns *Troilus and Criseyde* to posterity with the words:

And red wherso thow be, or elles songe
That thow be understonde, God I biseche! (5: 1797-98)

"Read or sing" is a variant (based on church services, which were literally read or sung) on the familiar bimodal phrase "read or hear."

That Chaucer was unconcernedly projecting into the future the aurality he was used to in his present is further substantiated by a similar but more explicit passage by Christine de Pizan. In her *Livre de la paix* (1413), she addresses not only Louis de Guienne (son of Charles VI) but also other, unknown readers-to-be:

Pour ce que le temps avenir ouquel ce present livre, se Dieux plaist,
pourra en maint lieux estre transportéz et leuz comme livres soient

au monde si comme perpetuelz pour cause de plusiers coppies qui communement en sont faictes ... (ed. Willard, p. 71)

(Because in the future when this present book, if God wills, may have been distributed and read in many places, for books carry on in the world as if perpetually because of the multiple copies that are usually made of them ...)

Having clearly, and optimistically, envisioned her book's textual perpetuity, Christine goes on to admonish Louis and these "autres oyans" ("other hearers") that its content is true, "et vous qui l'oyez le croiez" (p. 72) ("and you who hear it can believe it"). Thus, writing later than Chaucer, in a more serious genre, and for a more sophisticated court, Christine shows no doubt that the ear will prove as "perpetuel" as the book.

Under scrutiny, many medievalists might admit that the evolution they like to trace from bards to minstrels to Chaucer (whose writings are often equated with "real" literature) is an approximation disguising a shift in relative concentrations, not an all-out succession of literary species. They might even accept the presence and force of the continuing references (by Chaucer and writers up to a century after his death) to a listening audience. Stretch them this far, however, and their elastic is bound to snap back with the invocation of survivalism: these references to listeners may have been there, but if so they were either a literary game played by authors who really expected to be privately read, or addresses to the exponents of a moribund modality. In either case, the argument is justified on purely evolutionary grounds: aurality was on the decline, it was superfluous after the advent of private reading, and thus could be invoked only in terms of its incipient senescence. The chronocentric perspective of such scholars tends to confer validity only on what they recognize and value in their own period.

If aurality, however, was still popular and acknowledged (and documented in the historical record) a hundred years after it had supposedly been supplanted by private reading--if in fact aurality was a living, significant phenomenon throughout the entire medieval period--then how can one justify excluding it from consideration? Only by clinging to the technological determinism that posits no other forces at work on literary (and cultural) evolution than literacy levels and constraints on book-production.

But other forces were at work. Until the early sixteenth century, every reference to the circumstances of public reading of which I am aware says or implies that people read together because they enjoyed and valued the experience (see Chapter 2). It should be no surprise, then, that public reading did not disappear the moment that an alternate modality became technically more feasible. This preference for a public, communalized relationship with tradition affected recreational readers just as it did scholarly ones, as Mary Carruthers has demonstrated in her discussion of "public memory" (1990: chap. 5). If as a private reader you gained the power to flip around in your copy of Chaucer (and why would you want to, if you were an ordinary, nonscholarly reader?), you sacrificed the warmth, companionability, interactivity, and social-cultural reinforcement of a shared reading. The fact that such reading was increasingly (though never totally) supplanted, beginning at the very end of the Middle Ages and carrying on to the present, is irrelevant to discussion of literature produced before that decline began.

POLAR DIVIDES

Intrinsic to the doctrine of literary evolution is the rigid Great Divide polarization of "orality" and "literacy." Only if these are maintained as radically discrete phenomena can any evidence of the latter be considered

proof of the former's obsolescence. The depth of the feeling that the two modalities cannot possibly co-exist, other than in a fleeting relationship of evolutionary transition from one to the other, emerges in both older and more recent scholarly writings on medieval literature. Faced with the teeming auralty of the primary texts, such authors defend their polarized turf either by coopting auralty to one pole or the other, or simply by refusing to notice its presence at all.

"Yheere" and Gone; or, Turning Over a New Leaf

The best possible illustration of the preemptive deletion of auralty (as opposed to its conflation with orality or literacy) concerns a line that has become the *locus classicus* for birth announcements of the new, post-oral age: the famous "leef" passage with which Chaucer introduces the Miller's Tale.⁹ Those who would be offended by the rough language, Chaucer suggests, might wish to

Turne over the leef and chese another tale (CT 1: 3177)

This line has raised the eureka topos to the status of a hallelujah chorus. "The illusion of fictional oral narration" in the *Canterbury Tales*, writes Paul Christianson, for example,

is to be only ironically allowed to mask for the private reader, free to "turne over the leef and chese another tale," a recognition of the essential artifice and the accompanying sense of achievement, pleasure, and artful time spent that is inherent in literacy. (1976/77: 115)

Robert Kellogg agrees that the passage offers "one of the great freedoms of being readers rather than auditors." It suggests a new-found power of

⁹So far I have collected sixteen citations of this passage that interpret it in the manner described below; those not quoted here are Bronson 1940: 3; Muscatine 1966: 89; Brewer 1974: 75; Brewer 1988: 86, 108; "Chaucer's Audience," 1983: 177; McKenna 1988: 41-42; Pearsall 1992: 187; and Schibanoff 1988: 101-2. Mehl 1974: 174 has been cited above in another context, and de Looze 1991: 168, 177 will be quoted below.

"choosing the tales in our own order, skipping, comparing, cross-referencing, omitting and re-reading" (1977: 655). John Fisher declares: "Whatever the imagined audience for the tales when they were originally composed, the links between the tales are directed to the solitary reader. In the Miller's headlink, the reader is directed to 'Turne over the leef and chese another tale'" (1985: 243). Tracing Chaucer's personal evolution from "oral" to "literate," Derek Pearsall notes that with the *Canterbury Tales*, "There was now, for the first time, a general expectation of private reading built into the work as a whole, in several allusions, both in tales and links." As support Pearsall cites, among others, line 3177 of the Miller's Prologue (1985: 296).

One might think that faith in the dividuality of the leaf-turner would waver among those who paid any attention at all to line 3176 of the Miller's Prologue. Not wanting to falsify his matter, Chaucer begins his warning:

And therefore whoso list it nat *yheere*, (CT 1: 3176; emphasis added)

Yet even so astute a scholar as Paul Strohm does not hesitate to state, while citing both lines, that Chaucer was writing for

a reading audience, which will draw its conclusions in private, away from any possibility of Chaucer's intervention. To such readers, encountering his poetry through the medium of a bound manuscript, he refers in the Prologue to the *Miller's Tale*:

... whoso list it nat *yheere*,
Turne over the leef and chese another tale. (1989: 65)

The control Chaucer ascribes to his audience implies, to every scholar in my "leef" collection--even to those who quote both lines of the text, even to those (not cited here) who visualize Chaucer reading those lines before the court as his first audience--only one possible reception format: private, endoliterate reading. The association between page-turning and (private) reading is so strong that it doesn't need statement, and is not available for refutation. Imbued as they are with this belief, the writers quoted here deal

with the prominent, stressed "yheere" of line 3176 by not citing it, by ignoring it, or by dismissing it as an illusion of a fiction (that is, as what I have called "fictive orality"). The word that Chaucer does *not* use, "read," dominates the readings of the passage; amidst the excitement and the assumptions, the single, stubborn word "yheere" is deprived of all resonance.

Yet the "yheere" line is inextricably bound into the if-then logic of Chaucer's statement: *if* you don't want to hear the tale, he says, *then* turn over the leaf. A truer reading of the passage would have to accept that somehow, in Chaucer's mind, hearing and page-turning co-existed. Even scholars who have come so far as to acknowledge both halves of the statement, however, honestly fail to see how they can be reconciled. Jörg O. Fichte's comment is that "obviously two modes of reception are blurred here ... the author momentarily confuses the communicative situation" (1988: 124). And Carl Lindahl can only conclude: "The fact that these two phrases are juxtaposed in the *Canterbury Tales* gives some idea of the problems such [internal] evidence presents" (1987: 159). The idea of leaf-turning listeners seems to be inextricably oxymoronic.

Perhaps, however, that is only because we have accepted too passively the idea of the oral audience's passivity--of their supposed inability to affect the experience they were having. Evoking the manners "we know ... best from the theatre or concert hall," V.A. Kolve assumes that medieval listeners would

submit to a process strictly controlled by a reader/reciter who, on behalf of the poet, exercises a maximum power over their experience of the whole. ... Chances are, for instance, no one will interrupt, or leave before the end. ... (1984: 15-16)

To this restrained environment Kolve contrasts the private reader's freedom to "read slowly or quickly, one time or many times, from beginning to end or in any other sequence that seems attractive: 'turne over the leef and chese another tale'" (p. 17). While I applaud Kolve's nonpartisan conclusion

that "listeners and readers, then, each have proper to themselves certain kinds of pleasure and privilege" (ibid.), I think he has shown himself more adept as literary critic than as literary ethnographer.

What happens if we suspend our assumption that medieval audiences sat through prelections as meekly as modern audiences sit through plays and concerts? Or if we shift the comparison to a more informal setting, say an audience at a folk club hearing a favorite local singer? In the latter environment, a fair amount of interplay and negotiation between audience and performer would be quite normal. Indeed, even the folk club comparison fails to reflect fully the power of the medieval listener. In almost every description of recreational prelection I came across in which the prelector was somehow identified, by name or by role, the prelector was of lower status than at least one member of the audience. Maidens read to their parents or their mistress, priests or authors read to their patrons, lovers read to their lady, household retainers read to the monarch. Where the prelector is not identified, the sense is usually that he or she would be at most a peer of the audience's, rarely in the superior position of a performing artist today.

Along those lines, it is not hard to construct a scenario that gives equal weight to both features of the "leef" passage. Instead of a private reader flipping pages she doesn't want to hear, could Chaucer not be thinking of an audience who might instruct a prelector—or of a prelector who might himself decide—to skip a portion of the text? Thus if Criseyde, for example, had not wanted to hear some particular part of the *Siege of Thebes*—because she considered it indecent, or boring, or for whatever other reason—she need only have said, "Don't read that bit. Go on to the part about x"; and her maiden would have complied. Precisely the same action would have brought the same result in any medieval English households where the audience decided against hearing the Miller's Tale. Or the prelector could have decided, on his or her own authority, to turn the page. Or the entire

group might have laughed and called for the reading of the Miller's Tale to begin forthwith. Or there might have been a spirited argument, with some later surreptitious private reading by the pro-Miller's Tale faction.

The manipulability of the written book is juxtaposed in just this way with its audibility by another fourteenth-century writer, Robert Mannyng of Brunne. Having instructed the audience of his *Handlyng Synne* (1303) to "lestene & lerne wan any hem [the book] redys" (l. 118), he goes on to explain:

Whedyr outys thou wylt opone the boke,
Thou shalt fynde begynnyng on to loke.
Oueral ys begynnyng--oueral ys ende,
Hou that thou wylt turne hyt or wende.
Many thynges ther yn mayst thou here;
Wyth ofte redyng mayst thou lere. (HS: 121-26)

Mannyng envisions his audience not only turning a leaf but turning and "wending" their way through the entire book. Yet he combines this hot-fingered textuality with explicit invocations of the audience hearing and listening to the contents. The only explanation must be that he expected the prelector, in consultation with the audience, to skip around in the book, reading out rubrics, presumably, until he and they found a section they wished to read together.

This "emergent" or negotiated quality of public reading is particularly vivid in the case of Chaucer's other famous aural reader. Alison of Bath had no trouble in determining what was to happen with the leaves of the book she was "passively" hearing, and no shyness about interrupting the prelector: when she saw that Jankyn "wolde nevere fyne / To reden on this cursed book al nyght," she "plyght" three leaves "Out of his book, right as he radde" (CT 3: 788-90). Jankyn was trying, one might say, to transfer to his hearthside the sort of academic prelections he would have experienced as a student at Oxford, where the higher-status lecturer read and expounded great books to his silent, subordinate audience. As a husband, he was

(technically) of higher status than Alison, he was reading from a florilegium of auctorial texts, and his audience was even less enfranchised than a university one, being female and (probably) illiterate. Jankyn had the book, the "read" verbs (nine of them in the Wife's description, CT 3: 669-793), and the voice; but, as he discovers, in a setting that his listener ultimately interprets as more proper to recreational reading, none of these sources of control avails a prelector who will not read cooperatively with his audience.

Jankyn's failed experiment illustrates neatly the idea of there being different medieval "auralities." Where academic prelection was rigidly hierarchical, recreational prelection was more consensual, closer to the emergent quality of oral narration than to the ponderous scholastic *translatio auctoritatis*. Unlike the university students who might hear such misogynistic texts read in lectures or hall, Alison, as a woman, was not hearing a reading that affirmed her sense of self. Therefore she initiated a negotiation (if a rather violent one) that had the ultimate result of suppressing the offending text. Chaucer's awareness of the recreational audience's power to affect the narrative processes they participate in is illustrated in many of the storytelling interactions in the *Canterbury Tales*. One thinks particularly of the Host's advice to the Monk, in seconding the Knight's interruption of his tale:

"For certainly, as that thise clerkes seyn,
Whereas a man may have noon audience,
Noght helpeth it to tellen his sentence." (CT 7: 2800-2)

The clash of auralities set in motion by Jankyn's disregard of this clerkly doctrine suggests that another modality tangle may be contributing to modern scholars' inability to reconcile hearing and page-turning. The sort of literacy many scholars find in the "leef" passage is the sort of literacy they exercise as professional academics: "choosing the tales in our own order, skipping, comparing, cross-referencing, omitting and re-reading" (Kellogg 1977: 655). This is how we read if we are writing a lecture, article, or book

on the text(s) in question; it is not how recreational readers would approach a book, six hundred years ago or now.¹⁰ We know that two classes of medieval "professional" readers did engage with Chaucer in a relatively critical, comparative way: glossators (see Fichte 1988: 126-31 for an overview of glosses to the *Canterbury Tales*) and fellow authors. Unless we are prepared to argue that this is the audience for whom Chaucer primarily wrote, however, we must ask ourselves why the ordinary reader or hearer of Chaucer's time would *want* to engage in the study-group maneuvers envisioned by Kellogg? Many of the less ambitious text-manipulations practiced by modern recreational readers were equally available to medieval audiences: the latter could skip tales by telling the prelector to turn the leaf, or could recover forgotten details by asking the group to remind them, or the prelector to page back and find out. Moreover, it is far from clear that even medieval academics read in the nose-to-book mode their modern successors celebrate in Chaucer (and themselves). "For surely, you don't think," exclaims Hugh of St. Victor c. 1130,

that those who wish to cite some one of the psalms have turned over the manuscript pages, so that starting their count from the beginning they could figure out what number in the series of psalms each might have? Too great would be the labor in such a task. Therefore they have in their heart a powerful mental device, and they have retained it in memory, for they have learned the number and the order of each single item in the series. (quoted in Carruthers 1990: 263; see also quote on p. 83)

Some scholars might argue that the syntax of Chaucer's direct injunction--"whoso list it nat yheere, / Turne over the leef"--implies that the reluctant listener and the page-turner must be the same person. The lines could certainly be read that way, and such a reading would have the interesting virtue of forcing its proponents to acknowledge and account for

¹⁰Chapter 2 will elaborate on the distinctions between academic, recreational, and other kinds of reading.

the role of the listener in Chaucer's statement. But one could argue as well that the social melding promoted by public reading blurred the bounds of such agency. Criseyde herself signals the potential strength of this role-elision when she tells Pandarus, "This romaunce is of Thebes that *we* rede" (T&C 2: 100; emphasis added). Here she ascribes to her entire group what might be considered the activity of only one, the maiden who was actually holding and prelecting the book. Criseyde goes on to explain that "*we* han herd how that kyng Layus deyde" and that "*we* stynten at these lettres rede" (T&C 2: 101, 103; emphasis added), including the prelector among the hearers and extending the decision to halt the reading--which must have proceeded from her--to her co-readers. If Criseyde had ordered any pages skipped, would she not have explained her action similarly: "we turned over the leaf and chose another tale"?¹¹

Finally, it is conceivable that the proponents of the "fictive orality" argument might contend that the disputed passage is another instance of Chaucer carrying over minstrel phrases or deliberately invoking bygone performance modes. Any such argument should be easy enough to refute. "And therefore whoso list it nat yheere" is not a standard minstrel tag, as minstrels were not in the habit of telling their audiences to go away. And with plenty of other lines available for the purpose, why would Chaucer choose to promote oral nostalgia in the same sentence with what is claimed to be his archetypal evocation of the glories of private reading?

My interpretation of lines 3176-77 of the Miller's Tale may not be the correct one, but it certainly takes the unusual step of accepting the lines as they stand, rather than preemptively suppressing the first and imposing a possibly factitious dividuality and endoliteracy onto the second. Alternate

¹¹An alternative, or complementary, suggestion is that an audience member could be said to have turned a leaf whose turning he or she had requested or ordered--in the same way that a king, for instance, could be said to have built a palace whose construction he had ordered.

interpretations should at least account for the "yheere" of line 3176, and without the biased circularity of the fictive orality argument--i.e., without assuming that "oral" traits appearing after the advent of "literacy" cannot be evidence of "orality" because "orality" disappears upon the advent of "literacy."

Conflating Towards Orality

Outright denial of orality's persistence is one common means of reassuring oneself that it has disappeared, or fallen into desuetude. Another frequently seen behavior is conflation, which deals with the persistence of orality by preemptively assigning its late-medieval form, aurality, to one pole or the other of the Great oral-literate Divide. Much abetting any such tendency is the terminological and conceptual poverty that traditionally subsumes a wide variety of phenomena and meanings under the overburdened terms "orality" and "literacy" (cf. D.H. Green 1990: 271-72).

In their attempts to discuss aurality, scholars thus often end up switching back and forth between what are in fact many forms of "orality": formal recitation by authors; non-authorial, domestic prelection or recitation; memorial performances by minstrels and jongleurs; extempore oral performance by bards; oral tradition or folklore; and even speech. There would be nothing wrong in discussing a wide variety of formats, of course--if they were clearly distinguished, and the move from one to the other recognized as a change of focus. But very often these disparate entities are lumped into one indiscriminated mass, and points made about one incontinently applied to another. Such confusion will be promulgated even by scholars who, at another point in their text, unambiguously state that much medieval literature was read aloud. Once their attention is on a broader context, however, or once the stakes have risen, they revert to their "default settings."

The end result is often that prelection--which, as Chapters 3-5 will demonstrate, was an active, popular reading format throughout the late medieval period--is marginalized by being conflated with less relevant categories. If reading aloud is somehow assimilated to minstrel performance or oral-formulaic composition, it can be relegated with these less relevant formats to mere background in readings of canonized writers such as Chaucer, the *Gawain*-poet, or Malory. With the aural phraseology thus deprived of pragmatic effect, scholars can interpret aural traits as literary conservatism, or as oral survivals, or as a nostalgic evocation of a defunct stylistic. The most important and influential example of such reasoning is Burrow's "minstrelism" theory, which (as already explicated in the "Fictive Orality" section, above) equates Chaucer's aural phrases with minstrel tags. By nullifying the living tradition that generated these phrases, Burrow can redefine them as fossil remnants or Chaucerian game.

A more recent trend involves a conflation of aurality, oral-formulaic orality, and actual speech patterns. This sort of confusion hinders Jörg O. Fichte in his intelligent discussion of hearing and reading in the *Canterbury Tales* (1988). The confessional prologues of the Wife of Bath and the Canon's Yeoman, he argues,

try to imitate the form of free-flowing, live speech. Characteristic of this mode of speech are the following features: asseverations; addresses directed to the audience, such as warnings, pleas for silence or attention, apostrophes and rhetorical questions; repetitions; loss of one's train of thought and the recovery of one's argument; *occupatio* and the inexpressibility or inability topos. All of these rhetorical devices serve to create the impression of an oral communicative situation in which a speaker confronts his audience directly. (p. 122)

Most of the traits Fichte ascribes to "free-flowing, live speech" are formal markers rarely found at the more informal end of the oral spectrum. His list, in fact, seems based on Crosby's (1936) and/or Bronson's (1940) compilations of traits characteristic of orally delivered literature, mixed with some rhetorical devices and a couple of Ernst Robert Curtius' (1953) literary

topoi. All of these are properly identified not with speech but with forms of oral or aural literature. Fichte--who does not exclude aurality as a reception mode for Chaucer--nonetheless undervalues its influence on the *Canterbury Tales* by failing to distinguish the aural traits present because Chaucer actually anticipated a hearing audience from the "oralizing" traits inserted to bolster the illusion of a fictional performance and audience.

The impetus of work on earlier medieval "orality" (inaugurated by Albert Lord's ground-breaking *Singer of Tales* [1960]) has generated a recent surge of scholarly work on late medieval "orality." The usefulness of such work is almost invariably undermined, however, by its reliance on the premises of standard orality/literacy theory. The confusions that result are at times acute. Britton J. Harwood, for example, in a recent article on "Dame Study and the Place of Orality in *Piers Plowman*" (1990), has no other framework in which to view academic prelection than as a form of "orality," which he has no other explanation for than as the transitional vestiges of the movement towards "literacy." Dame Study represents, Harwood says, "the teaching voice" of the medieval schools, and he has to admit that academic orality was a vigorous and, of course, book-based phenomenon throughout Langland's era--although he does what he can to blame its survival on the scarcity of study-texts pre-printing (p. 9). But since he knows (citing Brian Stock [1983], primarily) that "orality" is characterized by the absence of cognitive traits such as abstraction, interiority, individualism, a sense of history, and a separation of self and subject (pp. 3-5), obviously Dame Study's orality must be equally impoverished. But if an ability to abstract and analyze was not to be found among academics in the fourteenth century, where was it to be found?

Harwood twists out of this one by moving on to identify Study with the *lectio divina*, "whether heard in the lecture room or meditated as *sacra pagina*," and linking this orality with a prelapsarian (i.e., pre-"literate," or pre-quite-so-literate) mystical oneness that sounds more "oral" (pp. 10-12).

The fact that one achieves this mystical orality by close reading of a written text is glossed over in Harwood's conclusion that

the Study episode ... recovers for illiteracy a place within the very heart of reading. ... The immediacy of preliterate communication is recovered as the integrity of reader and text within the idea that the tropological level of Scripture becomes fully realized only when the reader internalizes it as a change of life. The orality to which the 'lewed' are condemned becomes, in the Study episode, not a cause for anxiety, but the oral reading of a text, the first stage of *lectio divina*, and a necessary condition for textual understanding. (p. 13)

Harwood thus elegantly collapses into a great pile of oralities, in which the long-standing reading habits of the most educated men of Langland's period are reassuringly identified as a "recovery" of a "preliterate" stage (of unannounced but necessarily considerable antiquity), and identified blandly with the complete illiteracy of the completely uneducated. Harwood cannot but go around in circles, bumping over absurdities, because his premises forbid him to recognize, first, that orality (like literacy) can have a plurality of forms, whose traits cannot be predicted from an essentialist checklist; and second, that orality did not become problematic with the advent of literacy, but in fact had co-existed and continued to co-exist with it throughout the Middle Ages. (See Chapters 2 and 3 for discussion of the forms of late medieval literacy and aurality.)

Conflating Towards Literacy

While some scholars have met the evidence for aurality by conflating it with less prevalent or less relevant forms of orality, others have felt equally at home conflating it entirely into literacy. Filed under "orality," aurality slips back and away down the evolutionary timeline, leaving the field clear for the triumph of "literacy." Filed under "literacy," on the other hand, aurality is swept up into the march of literary progress—leaving the field clear for the triumph of "literacy." As with the claims that oral traits prove

nothing and literate traits prove that people are reading privately, the logic of this argument is decidedly of the "heads I win, tails you lose" variety.

As a complement to Burrow's conflation of aurality with minstrels, we can note Janet Coleman's statement that in the fourteenth century "the former role of the minstrel, the singer of tales, was gradually being replaced by the private reader or the raconteur, who read what someone else had written" (1981: 56). Coleman here enforces the sense of orality's pending obsolescence by conflating two very different classes of oral performer: the mid- to late-medieval, (primarily) memorial minstrel and the early medieval, extempore epic composer. To this category she opposes the private reader, with whom she identifies the "raconteur"--who, since he is said to "read what someone else had written," must be equivalent to what I have called the prelector. Aurality thus appears, home and dry, on the anti-oral, anti-minstrel shore of the Great Divide.

Coleman phrases her comparison in these terms, using the unusual word "raconteur," in order to frame her upcoming interpretation of a well-known passage in the mid-fourteenth-century *Winner and Waster*. In a grumpy comparison of a better *then* to a decadent *now*, the poet laments the decline of "makers of myrthes that matirs couthe fynde" in favor of beardless boys who "can jangle als a jaye and japes telle" (ed. Trigg, ll. 20, 26). While at first glance the contrast seems to be between two sorts of oral performers and genres, the temptation to read the *then* as "oral" and the *now* as "literate" is too strong. Coleman declares, accordingly, that the passage records "the replacement of the minstrel by the poet" (1981: 56). At a later point, she phrases the contention even more starkly: *Wynnere and Wastoure*," she says, "is quite clear about the distinction between minstrel performers and creative poets who write their own works c. 1350" (p. 124).

As with Chaucer's "leef" passage, where the present "yheere" was overwhelmingly ignored in favor of an absent "read," here a "maker" whom the text insistently associates with creativity is identified with minstrels, a

class that the critic specifically excludes from creativity, while creative, writing poets are conjured out of a text in which writing is never mentioned by supposing that the jangling child is reciting or prelecting "the poetry of others" (p. 56). The logical acrobatics are necessary, because the only way literacy can be read into the text's "now" is by interpreting the boy's performance as a prelection, and by conflating prelection into "literacy." While reversing Burrow's polarities, Coleman thus arrives at the same endpoint: the imposition on late medieval multimodality of what Ruth Finnegan describes as the "apparently unidirectional and 'natural' progress based on 'ascending' technologies of communication" mandated by the evolutionary model of literature (1988: 160).¹²

A more direct way to disenable auralty as an independent literary modality pivots off of the hall-to-chamber evolution evoked in Dame Studie's famous complaint in *Piers Plowman*. Derek Brewer, as partly quoted above, draws on this passage to justify his account of the shift from public to private reading. "Langland complains in the late fourteenth century," he notes,

that lord and lady were withdrawing from the noisy communal hall to greater privacy--a social movement which reflects the increasing privacy of reading literature. ... It is in some such room [as at Haddon Hall], with lord and lady, their children, accompanied by a knight or squire, that a chaplain might read the poems of the *Gawain*-poet, or other romances. ... The significance of such better homes, still a tiny minority, was that they allowed for private reading not only by day but at night, in the warm if dim light of a candle (which

¹²The disputed passage from *Winner and Waster*, and the history of its treatment at the hands of editors and scholars, requires more discussion than I have space for here. I might just note, in relation to the statement that the text does not mention writing, that such a reference was inserted by the poem's first editor, Sir Israel Gollancz (rev. ed., 1930). His "makers of myrthes" carry "Wyse wordes with-inn, that wr[iten] were neuer" (l. 22); the actual manuscript reading, which has been restored by later editors, is "that wroghte were neuer" (e.g., ed. Trigg). Coleman, however, reproduces Gollancz's reading, with the brackets removed (1981: 56).

Chaucer says left his eyes bleary). Private reading to oneself is very different from hearing songs and stories in hall. Silent reading demands an individual, not a group, response, more solitary but more thoughtful. (1982: 20-21)

Opposing the hearing of songs and stories in a noisy hall to the decorous prelection of romances in a private chamber, Brewer then goes on confusingly to equate the latter with bleary-eyed private reading, which then somehow becomes not only private but silent and endophoric reading. The result of this shell game of modalities is a pair of neatly contrasted literary environments: public hall, rowdy assemblies, and publicly experienced literature vs. private chamber, sophisticated, select audience, and literature experienced if not privately, in the first instance--well, as good as.

Alain Renoir makes the same point more explicitly, and without the modality sleight-of-hand. "We may suppose," he says,

that a poem designed to be read aloud to a small elite audience in the quiet privacy of elegant quarters--say, the way the "romaunce ... of Thebes" is read aloud to Criseyde and her friends in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* (2.100)--will use rhetorical devices different from those found in a poem designed to be delivered before a large and heterogeneous crowd at a marketplace. In many respects, the former situation is tantamount to a silent reading by a single person, even though the reading takes place aloud. (1986: 118)

Whether the comparison is to performances in hall or in marketplace, however, the reasoning is equally poorly based on a conflation of private and public reading, including a misrepresentation of the latter. Minstrels and jongleurs, the performers associated with medieval storytelling in hall or marketplace, recited works they had memorized after hearing or reading. Apart from some late thirteenth-century references to rowdy evenings of minstrel performances including "romanz-reding on the bok" (*Havelok*, l. 2328), there is no evidence that minstrels habitually read aloud from a manuscript in their hands. Rather, reading aloud appears to have always been a domestic, small-scale occasion (see Chapter 2). Thus to equate such

public reading with private reading collapses it entirely into private reading, begging the question of its status as an independent phenomenon. Moreover, given the communalizing and other effects of listening in a group, the transition from shared to solitary reading seems at least as crucial an event as the putative decrease in the mere size of the hearing audience. Thus the equation of small audiences with literacy and sophisticated literature seems a piece of special pleading designed to regain for literacy and private reading the ground claimed by the proponents of aurality.

Polarization splits reception into two mutually exclusive categories, setting the conflated and/or poorly defined category of "orality" in strict opposition to the equally conflated and poorly defined category of "literacy." Each term carries an extensive set of behavioral and stylistic implications: hearing goes with illiteracy, lack of manuscripts, lack of sophistication, passivity; private reading goes with literacy, availability of manuscripts, sophistication, control. The entities in this "strong" theory do not miscegenate, as Robert Kellogg suggests when he declares that Chaucer's "leef" passage addresses "readers rather than auditors" (1977: 655). The very common, and automatic, assumption is that if an author refers to writing, to reading, to turning over the leaf and choosing another tale, that author is literate and not oral. This means, as the assumptions pile up, that the author was self-consciously writing for private, critical readers. Such all-or-nothing polarization leaves no room for forms of aural literacy or audiacy. Prelection is marginalized, even scape-goated: off it goes bleating into the wilderness, bearing away the drunken, rowdy hall-listeners and the naive, illiterate oafs who haven't the nous to grasp Chaucer's subtleties. It sometimes seems that for medievalists, aural is the other; it is made to bear whatever values scholars wish to distance from themselves or from the work they are analyzing.

I hope that by illustrating and explicating these forms of misconstrual I have established their basis in fallacy. The blindsiding of prelection is a case not of conflicting opinions or interpretations, but of logically insupportable first principles--as if one were to carry into the analysis of an artistic corpus the assumption that there are only two primary colors.

CONCLUSION: THE "LITERACY COMPLEX"

Why should scholarly discussion stumble repeatedly over a fact already well known--and often acknowledged elsewhere within the same critical work? Why should the pioneering work of Ruth Crosby remain, after over fifty years and after an avalanche of orality studies, the only full-scale consideration of aural reception? Through the sort of misreadings and misinterpretations that we have been examining, scholars tend to massage medieval literary history into a particular shape, telling themselves, over and over, the same exciting bedtime story--the one about how minstrels gave way to poets, the ear to the eye, orality to literacy, roistering listeners to quiet, serious readers, blind following of tradition to self-consciousness and creativity. The marginalization of prelection seems to derive most often from an impulse to set as early a date as possible for the advent of "serious literature" within medieval England, and from a persistent misconception, in service of that impulse, of the aural. The feeling, apparently, is that to be real, worthwhile, analyzable literature, to be a *text*, Middle English literature must be completely identifiable as "written" or "literate."

I call this the "literacy complex" because, as in a psychological complex, the presence of any one element tends to activate an entire set of associations. Thus we have seen scholars hailing the rise of literacy or the introduction of paper or the turning of pages or the jangling of children as proof of the arrival of "literacy" in all its modern splendor. Show them a leaf and

they report a forest. The literacy complex completely colonializes prelection, to the point of eliminating it from discussion.

I have reserved to this point a very recent citation of the "leef" passage that seems an apt sort of "final exam" with which to conclude this review of the literature. Writing vigorously and with conviction, Laurence de Looze manages to invoke almost every piece of anti-aural pretzel-logic that I have surveyed above. "Chaucer's well-known admonition to the reader to turn the pages and choose another tale," de Looze remarks, "presupposes that the individual is privately reading the text, not listening to it read aloud" (1991: 168). To this familiar interpretation he appends a note, stating:

This is true, despite the fact that the same passage also refers to the possibility of the reader's "hearing" things he does not like. The rhetoric of orality remains as a pseudo-oral feature long after texts are entirely conceived and conveyed in writing. ... The presence of "oral" features intermingled with "written" features can thus be a proof only of writing, unless it be proved that the written features are later accretions. No oral work will refer to itself as being written, though the opposite obtains. The example from Chaucer is therefore a remarkable instance of textuality not *despite* but *because of* the hear/read admixture. (p. 177)

Here we see the evolutionary and survivalist premise that "pseudo-oral" features persist "long after" texts are written; the conflation of writtenness and textuality with dividuality (that is, the assumption that a written text must have been read privately); the polarizing assumption that "oral" and "written" are radically divergent modalities that cannot properly co-exist within a text or a time period; and the reliance on the theory of "fictive orality" to deprive references to orality/aurality of any force. By the end of his note, de Looze has satisfied himself that Chaucer's invocation of a hearing audience constitutes a remarkable piece of evidence that he meant to be read privately. Perhaps the most alarming thing about de Looze's discussion is that he evidently considers his various points to be critical commonplaces, since not one is provided with any supporting references.

Has Chaucer's "fictive orality"--his allegedly bookish play with allegedly extinct oralities--become as accepted a part of the critical armamentarium as the distinction between poet and pilgrim, or the tracing of Italian influence? If so, then it is past time to start assembling some strong counterarguments.

In place of the "strong" orality/literacy theory of Goody and Watt, Havelock, Ong, and others--and in place of generations of critical underestimation of aurality--we must begin exploring the prolific space opened up for us by "weak" modality theories such as Ruth Finnegan's and Brian Street's. The "mixedness" they have found in the cultures they discuss is equally and easily discoverable in the late medieval period in England. We will find it the moment we allow ourselves to trust what our texts tell us--reading them not uncritically, but informedly and in collaboration with many other contemporary records. It is present not only within the relatively narrow confines I have set for this thesis--within secular, court-oriented literature in English--but in many other texts read in many other contexts and in at least two other languages.

In the material surveyed in Chapters 3-5, we will find ample and mutually reinforcing evidence of aural reception persisting among high-status audiences both during and after Chaucer's life. There is no question but that rising literacy and advances in the techniques of book production--along with various other social, political, historical, and technological influences--did result in England, and Western society in general, developing the modern-style endophoric complex of literary traits and assumptions familiar to us today. But these events began converging only towards the end of the fifteenth century, and did not achieve dominance until sometime after the English Renaissance. It makes little sense to refuse to acknowledge late fourteenth-century aurality on the grounds that aurality would be somewhat eroded 75 or 100 years later.

If we wish to respect the primary literature, we will have to unlearn our evolutionary and polarizing assumptions. In particular, we will have to

accept the compatibility, within both texts and times, of writing and hearing. We will have to accustom ourselves to the concepts of bimodality and of format-neutrality. Works written in the expectation that most audiences would consist of hearers were both *written and heard*. References to the physical or mental strain of *writing* or to the physical book and the audience's freedom to handle it say nothing about the kind of *reading* anticipated. These references are as appropriate to a book meant for reading aloud as to a book meant for reading privately--and most likely meant to accommodate either. References to language, the power of language, the difficulties of expressing oneself; references to authorship and its discontents, are all equally appropriate to language meant to be heard as to language meant to be read privately.

References to reading should not be assumed to refer to private reading unless the context clearly establishes that they do; a simple mention of reading, or an injunction to read something, is format-neutral--it could imply either public or private reading, or be open to both. If anything, in Chaucer's time, it would lean towards prelection, because that was the prevalent form of reading. Clear references to private reading of recreational literature--which are extremely rare for any but authors--do not signal the demise of public reading, because the two formats co-existed for centuries. People who could read went on wanting to hear for a long time; they were intelligent people, sophisticated people; they could recognize irony and they could distinguish good writing from bad. They just preferred to exercise these competencies in a friendly group enjoying a performance, rather than alone in a room, hunched over a book like a dazed hermit.

The scholarly impulse to marginalize prelection seems to derive from entirely benign motives: an unconscious adherence to habitual frames of reference and values, or even a positive attempt to build the reputation of favorite authors by associating their texts with the traits and the cultural

complex that dominate our contemporary definitions of greatness in literature. By arguing the case of reading aloud I intend no insult to those reputations, which are in any case established beyond my powers of harm. Nor do I think that every discussion of Chaucer's work, in particular, must pay constant and respectful tribute to his auralty. I think, rather, that Chaucer is every bit as great as everyone says he is, that he may well be doing many of the complex things ascribed to him--and that none of this is incompatible with auralty.

In fact, admitting auralty into literary history makes relatively little difference in how one goes about literary criticism. We can still do close readings of Chaucer's or other poets' work--because the work *was* written; the only problem is with manuscript divergences, not with the factitious inability of listeners to have appreciated sophisticated references and patterning. Aural poets' use of formulas can be seen to have had a practical basis--giving their listeners some familiar wording to ease their comprehension. But as many analyses of oral literature have established, the fact that formulas have a practical function doesn't mean that an author cannot deploy them to artistic effect--which Chaucer and the *Gawain*-poet, for example, do. In fact, auralty is not the big bad wolf that critics seem to think it is; it doesn't diminish the great writers or their audiences in any way to place them in a context of bimodal rather than of private reading--as scholars such as V.A. Kolve have begun to demonstrate. To recognize the true cultural matrix in which these writers work removes a sort of scholarly neurosis in regard to what are considered the polluting effects of auralty. It doesn't close any critical doors; it may open a few; it merely reasserts a basic and too often neglected reality about late medieval literature.

CHAPTER 2

PUBLIC READING AND THE READING PUBLIC: INTRODUCTORY GENERALIZATIONS FROM THE DATA

The present chapter makes a bridge between the theoretically informed critique of the preceding chapter and the intensive data of the following three. With the perspectives enabled by the reformulation of standard orality/literacy theory, this chapter will present some general introductory observations about aspects of late medieval literary culture. These emerged gradually over the course of setting out and analyzing the evidence about reception in chronicles and other historical writing and in literary authors from Chaucer to Caxton, and thus reflect the "ethnographic" methodology I have adopted in approaching my texts. Also included are some particularly relevant ideas from other scholars.

I will begin this chapter by setting out some of the principles applied in the "ethnographic" methodology, and then by reviewing some pertinent background data in order to address certain persistent misconceptions about the chronological trajectory of aural culture.

THE METHODOLOGY FOR AN "ETHNOGRAPHY OF READING"

The basic principle of ethnography is to describe what is there; it is a descriptive discipline, not a prescriptive one, and as far as possible its generalizations proceed from the data rather than being imposed upon

them. The anthropologist Brian Street clearly articulates the methodology of specificity:

[The] challenge to "universalism" need not pose in its place a simple relativism or a mere piling up of empirical descriptions. Rather, as in social anthropology, it is possible to develop a dynamic model in which the student begins from the acute self-consciousness that his or her own concepts may be culture-specific at depths so far unexamined, and so starts out tentatively from them, being ready to revise them in the light of new ethnography. He or she then constructs new, cross-cultural models for further work, recognising that these too may have to be revised. Moreover, members of other cultures are understood to be themselves active participants in such model building and so their social and linguistic "grammars" have to be taken into account also. (1984: 69)

Such an enterprise no doubt has its limits, but it also has its strengths, chief of which may be the groundedness of its observations.

The kind of research presented in the following chapters may perhaps best be described as an "ethnography of reading"—on the model of Dell Hymes' (1962) "ethnography of speaking" and Keith H. Basso's (1974) "ethnography of writing." The mandate of an ethnography of reading would be to describe the interactions of authors, traditions, texts, and audiences as closely as possible within certain clearly spelled-out boundaries of time, place, language, genre, social class, and any other relevant category. Although it makes for cumbersome sentences, for instance, I consider it important to state periodically that I am working on late medieval court-oriented secular literature in English, and to emphasize that I am excluding religious and scholarly reading as well as drama and the more popular romances. I concentrate on England and "English" reading but refer often to Scottish texts; generalizations about Britain and "British" reading include both England and Scotland.

Precision such as this becomes desirable once we discard unitary, essentialist conceptions of orality and literacy. I tried not to apply to my data any wholesale, extrinsic assumptions about modalities, and I would not expect

the observations I derive from those data necessarily to apply to literatures in other times, places, or languages. Some may, some may not; it becomes an interesting exercise to examine such correspondences or the lack of them. More importantly, scholars can begin to compile similarly precise descriptions of other modality environments. The cumulation of such studies over time will enable what sociolinguists call "comparative generalization" (Hymes 1962), identifying trends and influences across the domain boundaries (including time) used to structure the research. Any "evolutions" discerned in such analyses will probably be more complex than the unilinear, teleological model often imposed on the data by standard orality/literacy theorists.

Some medievalists have begun to call for such descriptive studies. Evelyn Birge Vitz, for example, notes: "What I think we will have to do is take up works case by case, examining carefully the ways in which they belong to--embody--one or both of these [oral and literary] traditions" (1987: 300). Similarly, Carl Lindahl has echoed the social historians' claim that

the systematic use and linkage of records can yield a more representative and ultimately more vivid view of medieval life than that provided by a collection of dramatic but haphazardly assembled vignettes. This precept, now considered a truism by historians, has yet to influence Chaucerians, who continue to use the *potpourri* approach to provide historical background. (1987: 4)

Ethnographic Guidelines

There are several things that ethnographies of reading would not do. They would not, for one thing, mix times and places together too freely. Ambrose's silent reading, for example (Augustine, *Confessions* 6: 3), is often and freely compared to Chaucer's, regardless of the miles and the millennium that separate the two. Rather, the fourth-century Ambrose is seen as participating, with Chaucer and all of medieval Christianity, in a universal, atemporal Latin culture that transcended (and renders irrelevant any

preoccupation with) particular times and places. Such an intellectualist approach tends to ignore the "specificity of literacy" (Scribner and Cole 1981: 107) and the uniqueness of the cultures within which even the most intellectual of writers and readers necessarily lived. Glending Olson has underlined the potential problems of such reasoning, noting

that the belief in a single "medieval" way of responding to literature is unwarranted, and ... accordingly the judicious use of medieval literary thought in the interpretation of any individual work entails first establishing rather than assuming what critical ideas are most relevant to it. (1982: 24)

This is not to say that Ambrose's reading has nothing to do with Chaucer's, necessarily. But it would be interesting to see a discussion that takes their very different historical situations into account and that attempts to bridge the chasm separating them with, for example, later commentaries on Ambrose's reading habits.

In drawing on "field reports" outside my specified period and place, accordingly, I have tried to restrict myself to traditions that are in some way directly related to the core data I am discussing. I will, however, occasionally draw on theoretical discussions of reading from earlier or non-British Latin texts that were still read in late medieval Britain. Whereas Ambrose's silent reading was one finite, personal event, Geoffrey of Vinsauf, for example, offered a general discussion of poetic aurality that his later compatriots must have considered at least somewhat relevant to their own experience, since they, including Chaucer, continued to read him and to echo his advice.

Another questionable practice, from the current viewpoint, is to juxtapose isolated cases, attributing observable differences to the texts' relative "orality" and "literacy." Comparing the *Livre de Caradoc* with *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, for example, one scholar recently concluded that the latter poem's greater complexity and depth illustrated the superiority of "literate" (or "recursive") rhetoric (Troyan 1990). One might as

well declare that men are better writers than women because *Crime and Punishment* is a better novel than *Jamaica Inn*. As Lindahl suggests, the advantage of a more ethnographic approach is that its generalizations derive from a larger, and therefore potentially more reliable, database.

Finally, one should beware of assuming that various concepts carried the same value in the past as in the present, that they have the status of, as Auerbach puts it, "extrahistorical and absolute categories" (1965: 13). The editor of volume 2 of *The History of Private Life* dismisses with a few sentences the problems of applying "the idea of *privacy*, which first emerged in the nineteenth century in England," to medieval society (Duby 1988: ix). Given this insouciance, it is not surprising to find one of the contributors to the joint project remarking, "Petrarch became so involved in Saint Augustine's tribulations that he cried, struck his forehead, and wrung his hands as he read the *Confession* in his private chamber; naturally he was not keen to have witnesses to his emotion" (Braunstein 1988: 616). If Petrarch was so shy about his extravagant reactions, however, why did he write them up for everyone to read? Certainly he was more pleased than embarrassed that a friend "was suddenly arrested by a burst of tears" when prelecting his (Petrarch's) version of the Griselda story (Robinson and Rolfe 1898: 195). It seems both chronocentric and ethnocentric to assume that a fourteenth-century Italian would have the same feelings about public and private emotionality as a twentieth-century Frenchman. Medieval English authors such as Chaucer and Malory, moreover, further invert our modern preconceptions by generally attaching negative connotations to private (or "privy") behavior and positive ones to public ("common" or "open") behavior. "In the historical forms themselves," Auerbach concludes, "we gradually learn to find the flexible, always provisional, categories we need" (1965: 13). We will be slow to notice such patterns, however, if we are too committed to our own value systems.

Ways and Means of the Present Research

The aim of this thesis is to explore the forms of reading employed by late medieval English audiences. My chief sources are the literary texts themselves, including some historical writings such as chronicles but excluding documentary records. By focusing on "court-oriented" literature (i.e., works written by authors associated with the court or addressing issues of national interest), I am able to assume that the potential audience consisted of upper-middle- and upper-class individuals, most of whom would be literate. Speaking of the merchant class in late medieval London, Sylvia Thrupp concluded: "it is clear that all the men read English and that most of them had some training in Latin, and ... that most of the intelligent women had found ways of learning at least to read and write English" (1948: 161). Nicholas Orme finds it "likely that the ability at least to read the vernacular was generally mastered by the upper class from Richard II's reign onwards, if not in youth then in later life" (1973: 34).

My procedure with Chaucer and other writers through into the late fifteenth century has been to read everything they wrote (except in Lydgate's case, where I read a sample), looking for any dramatizations of, invocations of, or references to modes of experiencing literature. The most productive hunting-ground, naturally enough, was the "metatexts"--the prologues, epilogues, and rubrics with which authors framed their texts. Analysis of the chronological distribution of reception statements, phrases, and verbs has engendered a variety of conclusions about how authors conceived of their relationship to their sources and their audiences, and about changes in reading patterns over the last century or so of the Middle Ages in England. The first stage in these various investigations was to collect the "raw data" and analyze them. The second stage, which forms the basis of the discussions presented in this thesis, was to organize the data according to the patterns that emerged as most meaningful.



The nature of my database and analyses raises the important question: can the texts be believed? As noted in Chapter 1's discussion of "fictive orality," some scholars have articulated a sophisticated rationale for disbelieving any of Chaucer's references to aurality (or "orality"). Chaucer, these critics claim, employed "minstrel tags" and so on to evoke the atmosphere of oral narration for his privately reading audience. I have already attempted to weaken the bases of that argument, and as explained in the previous chapter, Chapters 3 and 5 will further invalidate it by revealing the persistence long past Chaucer's death of the sort of aural references alleged to be obsolescent in his lifetime.

Nonetheless, it could still be pointed out that many aspects of medieval literature were purely conventional and cannot be taken at face value. Prologues, for example, often include a range of standard *topoi*: the author describes the lovelornness that set him to writing, excuses the rudeness of his composition or translation, prays to God or Mary, asks his readers to correct his errors, praises his sources and patrons, and recommends his text for reading or hearing. Are we to believe that all late medieval English writers were grovelingly modest incompetents perpetually nursing broken hearts? Obviously not.

A distinction can be made, I believe, between the author's various self-dramatizations and his comments on more practical issues, such as scribal error, translation processes, and expected reception formats. Certainly, critics of all persuasions do take many such references at face value. The pro-literacy Chaucerians often cite his comments on dialectal variation in the epilogue to *Troilus and Criseyde* (5: 1793-96), and of course place complete credence in the leaf-turning he describes in the prologue to the Miller's Tale (CT 1: 3177). Any references to reading are accepted calmly as evidence of (private) reading (see, e.g., Christianson 1976/77).

While it is possible that metatextual and other references to reading are pure reportage and such references to hearing mere convention, it is equally

possible that both sorts of references are reality-based (and as noted below, that many "read's" are actually format-neutral or represent special uses of the term). The refusal to credit the "hear's," after all, derives largely from the technological determinism of the standard orality/literacy model, which assumes that "orality" became obsolescent as soon as there were enough literate people and enough texts that everyone could read privately. If it is true, as argued below, that the preference for the social experience of literature preserved the popularity of public reading long past the technological watersheds, then it becomes at least *feasible* that the texts and metatexts genuinely mean what they keep on saying. Such a hypothesis follows Occam's venerable advice against multiplying entities needlessly, and is supported by both historical evidence and the co-occurrence of *non-conventional* phrases invoking aurality. Moreover, as the following chapters will reveal, this hypothesis seems to yield consistent and meaningful results until the late fifteenth century, where the evidence begins to peter out and its interpretation to become more difficult.

The ethnographic approach has limitations, and they become especially evident when we reach this gap in the record. Whereas the earlier, more gradual changes in modality configurations could easily be followed through the texts themselves, the late fifteenth century presents us with a quantum leap for which the texts provide little explanation. From the clumsy pseudo-humanism of Lydgate's *Fall of Princes* and the adroit client-pleasing of Caxton we jump to the uninhibited self-aggrandizement of Dunbar and Skelton and the other traits of other writers that manifest without explaining a significant change in the way some writers, at least, were conceiving of literature. While outside evidence points to the importance of such factors as humanism, the growth of private religious reading, the advent of the Tudors, and so on, limitations of time have forced me to confine my discussion to changes discernible in the texts themselves.

We must, finally, recognize that in interrogating the texts we are hearing an informed but not a disinterested testimony. We will discover, in short, what the authors thought was happening; and while that is important to know, it does not always give the whole story. Authors who speak to hearers may have been read, and those who did their best to recommend private reading may have been prelected. Audiences may have chosen to read (and even commissioned manuscripts that excerpted) only certain parts of a text, and not necessarily those the author considered his best. Nonetheless, the basic outlines that can be gleaned from examination of the literary texts are confirmed by historical reports of British (and French) reading.

THE ETIOLOGY OF AURALITY

Before moving into discussion of the late medieval period in England, it will be useful to review and, perhaps, set to rest several persistent misconceptions about the historical and functional sources of aurality. As background to their comments on Chaucer, in particular, some scholars make statements about reading practices and minstrels that are based on rather naïve evolutionist assumptions. In this section I will examine the evidence provided in the primary material concerning three interrelated concerns: the identification of aurality with the "transitional" stresses of the late-fourteenth-century rise in literacy; the role of minstrels as prelectors of books; and the perceived role of "deficiency" (illiteracy and lack of books) in determining the modality by which texts were received.

When Did Aurality Develop?

From the "march of literature" point of view, it seems clear that Chaucer marks the emergence in English of writing authors and privately reading audiences. The period previous to Chaucer is ascribed to minstrels and

memorial performance, with some hazy conception of public reading as an interim modality carried on by minstrels trying to keep their jobs or in households lagging behind the mainstream in literacy or reception preference. In claiming Chaucer as the first individual writer in English, moreover, scholars often imply that the learned Latin tradition was largely individual in orientation; since it involved people of assured literacy with good access to books, this would seem obvious. The perceived status of the Anglo-Norman tradition is vaguer; perhaps the sense is that it tended in earlier times to appeal to bluff old barons more interested in dynastic self-promotion than in reading, with the result that it relied generally on either memorial performance or aural reading.

Just as the triumph-of-literacy model seems too simplistic for Chaucer's time and after, however, so does the idea of the post-Conquest period being divided between a *pis-aller* vernacular orality and a complacent Latin individuality. "Cultural diglossia," the term Walter Ong has recently been applying to this situation (1984: 3-5), seems a reinvention of the Great Divide polarization, as dependent as ever on technological determinism and, in a pinch, on conflating aurality into "literacy." Rather than being a later, "transitional" development, however, it seems in general that aurality (or bimodality) was a popular format for the reception of secular texts in Latin, Anglo-Norman, and English for centuries before Chaucer. I will briefly review here the reports I have come across concerning public reading in that period, first of Latin and then of vernacular material.

Texts in Latin

An early reference to aural reception comes in William of Malmesbury's *Gesta regum anglorum* (1125). Praising Earl Robert of Gloucester, a natural son of Henry I, William claims:

You foster letters so, that while you are busy with the weight of so many duties, nonetheless you steal a few hours for yourself, in which

you can either read yourself, or listen to readers. (bk. 5, par. 447; ed. Stubbs, p. 519)

Since William was writing in Latin, he must have expected Robert either to be able to read that language, or to have readers who could translate for him.

Even in this very early report prelection is not associated with technological deficiencies, since the earl was clearly literate (at least as William presents him) and would presumably have had no trouble obtaining books. His behavior falls more into the "habit of mind" framework suggested by Clanchy (1979: 214); for Robert, public reading is a neutral, unstigmatized companion format with private reading, both conceived as pleasant ways to pass time stolen from official duties.

At the end of the twelfth century Giraldus Cambrensis not only describes Archbishop Baldwin of Canterbury graciously "reading or hearing attentively" Giraldus' *Itinerarium Kambriae* (1191; *Opera* 6: 20), but records "publishing" his *Topographia Hibernica* in 1184 or 1185 by prelecting it at Oxford on three successive days (*Opera* 1: 73). The premier rhetorical handbook by an Englishman, Geoffrey of Vinsauf's *Poetria nova* (bet. 1208-13), a Latin text advising on the composition of Latin poetry, assumes throughout that that poetry will be heard. He offers this law to poets:

let not the hand be in a rush toward the pen, nor the tongue be on fire to utter a word; commit not the management of either pen or tongue to the hands of chance, but let prudent thought ... suspend the offices of pen and tongue and discuss long with itself about the theme. (trans. Kopp: 34)

The famous bibliophile Richard Aungerville de Bury, bishop of Durham, was as bimodal a reader in 1344 as Archbishop Baldwin was in 1191. In *Philobiblon* he comments, using the episcopal "we": "we were constantly delighting ourselves with the reading of books, which it was our custom to read or have read to us every day ..." (trans. Taylor: 71).

Texts in Anglo-Norman or French

If the Latin tradition in England seems to have embraced aurality from the early post-Conquest period through the time of Chaucer's birth, it is not surprising to discover that the two vernaculars were equally committed to hearing books. In the Anglo-Norman *Roman de Rou* (bet. 1170-83), Wace advocated prelection of texts such as his own for Norman nobles in danger of forgetting their ancestors' deeds:

Men ought to read books and gestes
And histories at feasts.
If writings were not made
And afterward read and recounted by clerks,
Many would be the things forgotten (pt. 3, ll. 5-9)

In the Fairfax-manuscript version of the *Cursor mundi* (c. 1300), the author explains that he has translated his text because "Frenche rimes here I rede / Communely in iche a stede" (ll. 237-38). Similarly, in his *Chronicle* (1338), Robert Mannyng of Brunne complains that the books "That we of hym [Arthur] here alle rede, / There [France] were they writen ilka dede / Writen & spoken of Fraunces vsage" (ll. 10,969-71). By the fourteenth century, serious English authors were increasingly motivated to translate texts from French because, they felt, the francophone audience was growing too elite and restricted—while remaining nonetheless firmly aural.

Texts in English

Reports of English-language prelection begin turning up in romances at the end of the thirteenth century, just about when English-language romances begin turning up (see Newstead's chronological list in Severs 1967: 13). The coronation ceremonies in *Havelok* (c. 1280-1300) include mock-battles, wrestling, stone-putting, harping, piping,

Leyk [game] of mine, of hasard ok,
Romanz-reding on the bok.

Ther mouthe men here the gestes singe,
The glevmen on the tabour dinge (ll. 2327-30)

Ruth Crosby notes that line 2328 "probably means 'reading from the French book,' but the French book was no doubt a romance" (1936: 96 n. 6).

Other romances pick up the French fashion of depicting attractive young female prelectors (e.g., *Le Chevalier a deus espees* [early 13th c.], ll. 4249-73, 8951-53). The late thirteenth-century *Sir Tristrem* notes that Ysolde "gle was lef to here, / And romaunce to rede aright" (2d fytt, st. 13; ed. Scott, p. 204). Similarly, *Ywain and Gawain* (c. 1325-50), a translation of Chrétien de Troyes' *Chevalier au lion* (c. 1180), preserves Chrétien's scene of a young girl reading to her parents (Y&G: 3084-94; *Chev.*: 5364-74).

One authentically native evocation of female prelection occurs in a Harley lyric that Brook names "The Fair Maid of Ribblesdale" and dates to c. 1314-25. The author, having ridden to Ribblesdale in search of "wilde wymmen" (l. 2), praises his choice by claiming:

Heo hath a mury mouht to mele [speak],
with lefly rede lippes lele,
romaunz forte rede (ll. 37-39)

If prelection in these romantic contexts is associated with the celebration or contemplation of female beauty, other texts associate it with apparently all-male festivities, in which the hearing of idle tales or heroic romances forms a popular (in both senses) culmination to bouts of social eating and drinking. Robert Mannyng of Brunne notes in *Handlyng Synne* (1303), for instance, that he undertook to english his source for "lewed men ... / That talys & rymys wyle blethly here / Yn gamys, yn festys, & at the ale" (ll. 43, 46-47). Mannyng hopes his devotional manual will prove spiritually profitable to these men, not by diverting them to private reading and meditation, but by inducing them to listen together to his book rather than to their usual tales and rhymes. While it is unclear how those texts would have been performed, Mannyng certainly expects his book will be prelected:

"Lestene & lerne wan any hem [the book] redys" (l. 118), he advises; "Many thynges ther yn mayst thou here; / Wyth ofte redyng mayst thou lere" (ll. 124-25).

Mannyng makes a similar set of comments about his *Chronicle* (1338), which he translated so that Englishmen ignorant of Latin and French could "haf solace & gamen / In felawschip when thai sitt samen" (ll. 9-10). While he speaks of his own writing and that of his sources (e.g., ll. 12, 71), he consistently expects his audience to hear his text (e.g., ll. 16, 120). Elaborating on his view of the literary situation of his day, Mannyng draws a picture of professional performers--"disours," "seggers," and "harpours"--who confuse "symple men" and garble estimable works such as *Sir Tristrem* with their oversophisticated, French-influenced rhyme schemes and styles (ll. 72-110).

Mannyng's diatribe about "strange Inglis" (l. 78) suggested to H.J. Chaytor that the earlier fourteenth century harbored "three classes of readers: those who understood Latin or Anglo-Norman or both, those who preferred an elaborate and artificial diction of English, and those who required a plain tale simply told" (1945; rpt. 1967: 105). The preceding discussion has demonstrated that all of these groups, from the twelfth through the mid-fourteenth century, show a consistent affinity for public reading. While I have not attempted to assess the status of other modalities, it is clear that "orality" or memoriality did not evolve over this period towards aurality (as an interim or proxy stage for "literacy"), because aurality was present from the start for all three languages. It functioned in a variety of ways for a variety of audiences, just as (as Chapters 3-5 will show) it continued to do during and after Chaucer's lifetime. What emerged over the earlier period was not aurality but the use of English, with the fourteenth century seeing an escalating trend to translate the texts

previously prelected or read in Latin and related or prelected in Anglo-Norman or French into texts that could be related or prelected in English.

Who Were the Prelectors?

As noted in Chapter 1, many scholars associate public reading with minstrels, as in J.A. Burrow's implication that *Gawain and the Green Knight* was "intended ... for recitation to a listening audience" by such performers (1973: 357). This equation reinforces the sense that prelection is a transitional phase, an episode in the minstrels' decline from recreative memorial performers to musicians.

Of the material we have reviewed above, however, only *Havelok's* "romanz-reding on the bok"--placed as it is in a context of multiple amusements, including the no doubt professional singing of *gestes*--may be interpreted as a probable reference to minstrel prelection. In cases where the prelectors are either specified or can be inferred, they are:

- o authors (Giraldus; Geoffrey of Vinsauf's students);
- o priests (the Latin readers to Archbishop Baldwin, Bishop Richard de Bury, and, probably, Earl Robert, as well as Wace's Anglo-Norman clerks);
- o daughters of noblemen (Ysolde and the damsel in *Ywain and Gawain*);
- o or "wilde wymmen" (the fair maid of Ribblesdale).

The fact that this list mixes historical and fictional readers is irrelevant in this context; an attribution of public reading to a situation or character must have always been at least plausible, and usually (in the case of powerful patrons such as Earl Robert) flattering.

Mannyng and the author of *Cursor mundi* do not say who was reading the French rhymes and romances they were always hearing, nor does Mannyng mention who might read *Handlyng Synne* to the "lewed men." The prelectors in these cases might have been minstrels. Mannyng's vehement denunciation of professional performers suggests, however, that he anticipated plain, nonprofessional prelectors for his own work.

This small sample, therefore, reveals a variety of prelectors, of whom only one is fairly obviously a minstrel. Where the prelector's status is unclear, the data do not encourage an immediate assumption that he or she was a minstrel. That this is the situation coming up to the time of Chaucer may not surprise those who assume that minstrels took up prelection as the demand for their memorial skills dropped. The material surveyed from Chaucer's period through the late fifteenth century, however (see Chapters 3-5), provides no examples whatsoever of minstrel prelectors. Instead, it reveals more of the same kinds of nonprofessional performers: authors, priests or clerks, and maidens (although, alas, no more wild women), with the addition of valets de chambre, feudal subjects, lovers, husbands, and peer-group members.

Why Did People Read Publicly?

The evolutionist answer to this question is obvious: people read publicly because many of them were illiterate, and because even those who were literate had restricted access to books. These factors certainly affected audiences, and they may account for the habit's origin, but the "deficiency" explanation is one that never occurred to a medieval writer. In the texts reviewed above, the deficiencies seen as constraining reading behavior were not illiteracy but "lewedness"—i.e., ignorance of Latin or French—and not the scarcity of books but the scarcity of English-language texts.

Later authors note some other technological constraints: one thinks immediately of Chaucer's worries about dialectal variation, the mismetering of his poetry (T&C 5: 1793-98), and Adam scriveyn's *lapsus calami*. A didact such as George Ashby was certainly ready to advise that royal children "be lettred right famously," so that they might learn reason and discretion (*Active Policy*, l. 648). Even Ashby, however, writing c. 1470, does not insist

on private reading; in an earlier passage he had associated the same virtues, reason and discretion, with "Who that herith many Cronicles olde" (l. 204).

The context into which both early and late reports of medieval prelection put that behavior is not any form of deficiency but, rather, a highly valued and enjoyed sociability (cf. Coleman 1990b). As in the famous dictum from Horace's *Ars poetica*, this sociability "miscuit utile dulci" (l. 343; "blended profit with pleasure"; quoted in G. Olson 1982: 20). Public reading might have the immediate practical profit of enhancing the listeners' physical and mental health, according to the medieval medical theory explicated by Glending Olson (1982). It also provided a more theoretical kind of profit in the form of instruction and wise counsel. A rubric in Sir Gilbert Hay's *Buke of the Governauce of Princis* (1456), for example, notes: "Here declaris the noble philosophour how it efferis wele to kingis and princis to have and ger rede before thame oft tymes alde ancienne noble stories the quhilkis encrescis thair wisedome and mendis thair lyfis" (ed. Stevenson 2: 103). This view of chronicles as sources of "ensample and doctrine of gude lyfing" (p. 75) is a major factor in reports of French and Burgundian prelection, as the next chapter will demonstrate. As the section on "Public Reading and the Public Sphere" below will discuss, a similar rationale informed much of the theory behind fifteenth-century British *specula principis* (of which Hay's *Buke* is an example).

The testimonies to the *dulcis* side of public reading are manifold. "Men yhernes rimes for to here, / And romans red on maneres sere [various]" (ll. 1-2), notes the prologue to the Cotton version of *Cursor mundi* (c. 1300):

Sanges sere of selcuth rime,
Inglis, frankys, and latine,
To rede and here Ilkon is prest [each one is ready],
The thynges that tham likes best. (ll. 23-26)

Mannyng's Englishmen "haf solace & gamen / In felawschip when thai sitt samen" (1338; *Chron.*, ll. 9-10). "Sir John Mandeville," in the early fifteenth

century, explains that "men seyn all weys that newe thinges & newe tydynges ben plesant to here" (ed. Hamelius 1: 209). Hoccleve's suggestion that Prince Hal could "desporten hym by nyght" in reading his *Regement of Princes* "yf your pleasaunce it be to here" (1411; ll. 1903, 2127) is supported by historical reports of James I of Scotland spending the last night of his life "att the playing of the chesse, att the tables, yn redying of Romans, yn syngyng and pypyng, in harpyng, and in other honest solaces of grete pleasance and disport" (1437; Shirley, *Dethe*, p. 54). The *Wars of Alexander* (frag. C; c. 1450) invoke a similarly gregarious scene with its opening statement: "When folk ere festid and fed fayn wald thai here / Sum farand thing efter fode to fayn thare hert" (ll. 1-2). As V.A. Kolve has remarked, "hearing a tale in company was one of the great ceremonial pleasures of medieval society, and it was valued at all levels—by kings as well as commoners, by monks and lay, by 'lernyd and lewyd'" (1984: 14).

As far as my research uncovered, no late medieval British text ever associated prelection with illiteracy (as inability to read at all, rather than as inability to read Latin or French). The first such reference I found comes from 1513, when Gavin Douglas apostrophized his translation of the *Aeneid*:

Now salt thou with euery gentill Scot be kend,
And to onletterit folk be red on hight,
That erst was bot with clerkis comprehend.

(*Eneados*, "Ane exclamatioun," ll. 43-45)

Around 1537 John Twyne introduced a translation of the *History of Kyng Boccus and Sydracke* by counseling "euery man to rede this boke / or [those] that cannot rede to geue dylygent eere to the reder" (p. 2). Douglas' and Twyne's hierarchical formulations contrast with Caxton's habitual, indifferently bimodal address to, e.g., "alle them that shal rede or here" his book (c. 1484; *Royal Book*; in Blake 1973: 136). Their remarks suggest that aurality began in the early sixteenth century to achieve the proxy status often attributed to it for earlier periods. However, that is only part of the

story, since prelection also flourished throughout and beyond the sixteenth century in new humanistic and domestic contexts (see Chapters 3 and 5).

If we accept Brian Street's methodological guideline of allowing members of the culture we are studying "to be themselves active participants in ... model building" (1984: 69), we shall have to adjust our model of aurality to accommodate the evidence that, as far as they were concerned, medieval people read publicly because they benefited from and enjoyed the experience. While illiteracy and book-deprivation must certainly have influenced the development and persistence of this situation, these technological factors became deep background for what its practitioners perceived as an important cultural and social exercise.

A TYPOLOGY OF LATE MEDIEVAL ENGLISH LITERACIES

In his critique of Jack Goody's essentialist view of literacy, Brian Street (1984) shows how two forms of literacy in the Iranian village he studied configured reading behavior in two distinct but related ways. Along similar lines, James Hankins prefaces his recent analysis of the Renaissance reception of Plato with a working typology of seven "forms of reading and interpretation in use among fifteenth-century exegetes of classical and other kinds of texts." Hankins emphasizes that these reading modes overlapped—sometimes, he says, within the same page of a text (1990: 18-26; quote from p. 18).

The first step in the sort of "ethnography of reading" I hope to supply in the next chapters is to set out a similar typology, proceeding at the next higher level from Hankins'. This analysis, which derives most immediately from Chaucer, as the most prolific and informative source, concerns the basic functional divisions among late medieval English literacies. ("Literacy" in this case is understood to include both aurality and dividuality.) A revised and expanded form of M.B. Parkes' schema of professional, culti-

vated, and pragmatic reading (1973: 555), the system comprises the following forms and subforms of literacy:¹

PRAGMATIC	PROFESSIONAL
Public	Scholarly
Private	Public
	Private
RELIGIOUS	Literary
Clerical	Public
Public	Private
Private	
Lay	RECREATIONAL
Public	Public
Private	Private

Whether reading alone or with others, readers in each category--pragmatic, religious (clerical and lay), professional (scholarly and literary), and recreational--read different things, for a different reason, in a different way, and often in a different place. I will try to draw a brief profile of each mode, illustrating them with medieval miniatures when possible.

Pragmatic Reading

Pragmatic reading--"the literacy of one who has to read or write in the course of transacting any kind of business" (Parkes 1973: 555)--would consist of utilitarian papers and documents (see Fig. 1). The reader would read such items to achieve discrete, pragmatic goals, such as to carry on a court case, implement an order, or obtain information. These readers would tend to be administrators, lawyers, merchants, and so on, but women (see Fig. 2), and men whose professions did not require literacy, e.g., military leaders, might also be pragmatic readers. The activity would most likely occur within a formal "business" setting--an office or a study (or, as in Fig. 1, a worksite). In part this may be because pragmatic readers often need to

¹Two other subforms that turn up almost exclusively in Chaucer (secret and hypothetical reading) will be discussed in Chapter 4.

refer to other papers, records, or people in dealing with whatever they are reading. The goal of pragmatic reading is strictly to find out what the piece of parchment or paper says, and either public or private reading would serve--depending on the number of people who need and are qualified to know what the paper says, and the reader's or readers' literacy and preferences. Most likely, pragmatic goals tended to encourage private reading over time.

Religious Reading

Religious reading would be the reading of the Bible, commentaries, books of hours, devotional treatises, saints' lives, and so on with the primary aim of promoting one's spiritual well-being (see Figs. 3-6). Clerical religious reading would be the devotional reading of ecclesiastical hierarchs, priests, monks, friars, and nuns. Lay reading would, obviously, be the devotional reading of those outside the official religious castes.

Clerical and lay, public and private forms of religious reading could intersect in a variety of ways. Religious reading could take the public forms of sermons and Biblical passages read in church (clerical prelectors to clerical and/or lay auditors), mealtime and other domestic prelections within the frame of a religious order or academic college (clerical-clerical) or of a secular household (clerical or lay prelectors to lay auditors). In all these instances, the primary intent would be to create and strengthen a sense of spiritual community, although status tended to accrue to the preacher in church prelections and to the head of household, as sponsor of the reading, in domestic prelections.

Commentators on medieval reading have distinguished two important subforms: *lectio* and *meditatio*. I have had difficulty applying their insights to the present discussion, however, because these writers--in their comments on *lectio*, in particular--tend to conflate what I am calling clerical and

scholarly reading. Obviously the two areas overlap; but it would be useful to have a discussion that clearly differentiates the overlap as well as the reading-forms proper to either sphere. In default of such a survey, I will reserve a fuller discussion for the next section and rely in this one on Malcolm Parkes, who is unique in distinguishing a monastic from a scholastic *lectio*. The first, Parkes says, was "a spiritual exercise which involved steady reading to oneself, interspersed by prayer, and pausing for rumination on the text as a basis for *meditatio*" (1976: 115). Mary Carruthers (1990: 162-74; see also Leclercq 1962: 23-26) discusses *meditatio* at length, explaining it as "a process of completely internalizing what one has read" (p. 163).

The setting for religious reading would vary from sanctified locations such as church, cloister, cell, hermitage, and *prie-dieu* to the more informal locations characteristic of recreational reading (see below).

Scholarly-Professional Reading

Scholarly-professional reading would consist of abstruse or technical works on rhetoric, philosophy, religion, government, science, and so on (see Figs. 7-9). Scholars may have read in part for the pragmatic goal of professional advancement, but their reading would also, presumably, reflect a positive intellectual interest and pleasure; their reading material would have academic and moral dimensions lacking in business papers but would not be pursued with spiritual betterment as the primary goal.

It is well known that medieval higher education was premised to a considerable extent on auralty. The "ordinary" medieval lecture consisted of the prelection of a section of a text, followed by analysis and explication of its elements (Kenny and Pinborg 1982: 20), while "cursory" lecturers merely read the text aloud with little or no commentary. Public disputations provided the occasion for regent masters or students to demonstrate their

grasp of the complicated texts and arguments they had absorbed (Cobban 1988: 166-67).

While the reliance on aurality is often explained today as a result of the scarcity or expense of books, medieval theorists--like the writers discussed under "Why Did People Read Publicly?" (above)--bypassed any such "deficiency" explanation. Rather, they emphasized the excitement of a shared, enacted, and high-context reading. The Parisian scholastic Radulphus Brito, for example, commented around 1300:

I rightly contend that we learn more by being taught than we find through our own efforts, for one lesson heard is of more profit than ten lessons read privately. That is why Pliny says "the living voice affects the intellect much more than the reading of books." And he gives the following justification for his contention: the teacher's pronunciation, facial expressions, gestures, and whole behaviour make the pupil learn more and more effectively, and what you hear from another person is situated deeper in your mind than what you learn by yourself. (quoted in Kenny and Pinborg 1982: 16)

The scholastic *lectio*, according to Parkes, "was a process of study which involved a more ratiocinative scrutiny of the text and consultation for reference purposes" (1976: 115). Mary Carruthers elaborates on the distinction while conflating religious and scholarly varieties; she identifies *lectio* with reading for the "littera," the literal meaning, of the text. Carruthers notes that this was always a voiced reading, in which she includes instances both of private voiced reading and public reading in lectures, study-groups, and sermons (1990: 162-74). As Carruthers implies, the "ratiocinative scrutiny of the text" need by no means have been a silent one; *lectio* was in fact the term commonly applied to the academic lectures we have noted above. As Abelard remarks (cited by M.-D. Chénu), "Il y a la *lectio* du maître (lego librum illi), la *lectio* du disciple (lego librum ab illo), la *lectio* privée (lego librum) (1954: 67) ("There is the *lectio* of the master [I read the book to them], the *lectio* of the students [I read the book from him (i.e., I hear him read the book)], the private *lectio* [I read the book])." John of Salisbury also

tried to disambiguate *lectio*, by reserving that term for the students' private reading of the book and calling the master's public reading of it by the term I have borrowed from him, *praelectio* or prelection (*Metalogicon*, ed. Giles, p. 56).

The importance that these scholars placed on such distinctions reflects the hierarchical structure of scholarly reading. In their lectures, the masters ideally relayed their privileged understanding of canonized texts to a subordinate, submissive audience. In illuminations (see, e.g., Figs. 7-8), the lecturer sits in his academic robes on a raised chair, often with a tester (the sounding-board roof that amplified the speaker's voice), and with a lectern to hold the text he is prelecting. Avicenna, in Figure 8, is seconded by a beadle holding a mace. Usually, one of the lecturer's hands rests proprietarily on the book while the other points in the "speaking" gesture sometimes known as *declamatio*. Meanwhile, the students huddle on benches below him, some following in their own texts.

The category of *lectio*, therefore, does not map simply onto that of modality: we could speak of a public or private *lectio*, meaning a reading-for-sense conducted either aloud with others or alone, whether voiced or silent. The activity of *lectio*, according to Chénu, led naturally to glossing and even to lengthy expositions designed to assist in the understanding of the text's literal meaning (1954: 70). Carruthers seems to consider that *meditatio* applies to scholarly as well as religious reading, at least as far as it includes the reading and compositional practices of scholarly religious such as Ambrose, Hugh of St. Victor, and Aquinas (1990: 162-74).

The strict hierarchicalization of scholarly reading contrasts with both religious and recreational reading. As noted above, while the former observes certain status distinctions in certain contexts, these are somewhat suppressed in favor of the overriding emphasis on spiritual kinship. Recreational reading, as will be noted below and in the following chapters, tended in France and Burgundy to follow the model of religious household

reading, where the sponsor of the reading (not the prelector) dominates, and in England and Scotland to promote a general suspension of status distinctions.

One would assume that scholars would be the sort of people most likely to indulge in the page-turning and passage-comparison so often cited as one of the great advantages offered by literacy and books. As Carruthers (1990) has shown, however, the systematic training of medieval scholars enabled many of them to carry and consult key texts in their memories. And even students who owned study texts, Kenny and Pinborg note, used them

not as their only sources, but rather as abbreviations, reminders of what they had heard. They used written sources mainly as a source of useful arguments or distinctions, not as texts to be relied on for reconstructing the thoughts of others. The written records as we have them are only a limited reflection of a much richer oral culture. (1982: 17)

Nonetheless, we may assume that outwith the lecture halls and disputations, most scholarly-professional readers would probably have read privately, whether in a library, a study, or (if they owned or had borrowed their own texts) anywhere they liked. For impecunious students such as Chaucer's Clerk, bed might have seemed the best because it was the warmest place to read. Those who read to grasp and possibly add onto complex theological, philosophical, or scientific arguments would probably need the text (and, possibly, its diagrams and illustrations) before their eyes and under their control.

Literary-Professional Reading

Authors of recreational literature--what I am calling literary-professional readers--would bring to the reading of recreational material (see below) the specialist interest of a fellow author scanning his potential sources and analogues. They would thus combine recreational reading material with something of the attitude of the scholarly-professional reader (although, of

course, they were "professional" by avocation only). Authors might read privately, to study or enjoy the subtleties of their fellow-writers, or as part of a search for matter or *sentence* to recast in their own works. Or they might choose to share in a public reading, to observe the audience's reaction or simply to join in the general pleasure. As prelectors of their own work, they would be seeking feedback from their fellow authors or else "publishing" their texts in approved medieval fashion (see Root 1913). All but one of the illuminations I found depicting the reading of recreational material show the author prelecting his text (see Figs. 10-13; the exception is Fig. 19 [see Chapter 3]).

While "publication" prelections would take place in relatively formal settings such as an Oxford hall (e.g., Giraldus Cambrensis) or a lord's chamber (e.g., Froissart), most literary-professional reading would take place anywhere convenient or comfortable, like recreational reading. In a way, then as now, there would effectively be no such thing for a professional author as strictly recreational reading, because everything they read--as for Chaucer, everything he read (or heard), from tail-rhyme romances to *De consolatione philosophiae*--was likely to go into their writing in one way or another.

Recreational Reading

Finally, recreational reading--the reading of anyone outside of activities related to his or her actual vocation or literary avocation--would consist of "literature." Loosely, that category would comprise romances, poetry, chronicles, *specula principis*, etc., as well as "softer" versions or the less challenging of the professional readers' technical texts and devotional texts such as saints' lives read in large part for entertainment. Recreational readers read (publicly or privately) to relax, for pleasure or enlightenment or both; and they would read wherever they liked. Since the goal of recrea-

tional reading was instruction and entertainment (see previous section), readers might naturally think of it as a public event, an experience to be shared with other members of a household.

Grammatical theory in the Middle Ages had its own concept of *lectio*, different from and, in Martin Irvine's opinion, the foundation for monastic and scholastic *lectio* (1985: 858). As a grammatical category, this *lectio* may best be discussed here since it would include the reading of the secular Latin authors used in the study of grammar. Relatively few men would go beyond the grammar schools, where Latin literacy and literature were taught, to the higher intellectualisms of the universities and monastic *studia* (Orme 1973: 68). The *lectio* considered a subset of *prosodia* in the *artes grammatica* was defined "by long tradition," as "an artful rendering, or the various recitation of each kind of writing, preserving the dignity of persons and expressing the character of each mind" (Irvine 1985: 857-58 n. 23, quoting Diomedes, *Ars grammatica*). Such performances, whether recited from memory or read from a book, might obviously set a pattern for, or simply reflect, a similar expectation of public performance for those English-language texts these grammar students would encounter.

Clearly, as in the modality chart offered at the beginning of the Glossary, the categories within this reading typology overlap. Given the dominance of religious ideology within medieval society, in particular, it would be hard to effect a firm analytic separation between scholarly and religious reading of Augustine, for example, or between recreational and religious reading of a saint's life, or even of a popular text such as the *Roman de la rose*. Nonetheless, the various other aspects included in the profiles presented above--such as the setting and function of the reading--should make it possible to identify the dominant categorization of any reading event.

One useful point becomes clear when we distinguish kinds of *reading*, as opposed to kinds of *readers*--which is, that a given individual reader could

well indulge in two (or three) different forms of reading, and choose a different reading mode for each. A widow who has her maidens read romances to her might read her love letters in private; she would thus be a recreational public reader but a pragmatic private reader. A student who listens to a lecturer prelect philosophical texts in the classroom or reads to himself in a library might pass the evening at home reading a popular miscellany to his wife; he would thus be a scholarly-professional public and private reader and a recreational public reader. Chaucer himself qualified in at least two of these categories; as an administrator who needed to be literate to do his job he was a pragmatic reader, and as a professional man of letters he was a literary-professional reader.

The idea of "mixed-mode" reading further undermines the common evolutionist assumption that evidence of any sort of literacy is sufficient proof that the literate individuals would read literature privately. As I argue throughout, in Chaucer's time and long after, literate people would often choose to hear literature or read it aloud--constituting a class of recreational public readers. A scholar's ability to con over his texts, as a professional reader, or a merchant's ability to write and read business letters, as a pragmatic reader, cannot be considered evidence of how they would choose to read a romance or a saint's life. It is only the recreational private reader--the person who chooses to apply his or her literacy to the individual reading of literature--whose habits provide evidence for any contentions about the way in which literature was read in the later Middle Ages.

PUBLIC READING AND THE PUBLIC SPHERE

Further undermining the reductive assumptions of the evolutionists is the role of public reading in a form of literature aimed particularly at the elite, educated audiences of late medieval England. Drawing on a concept Jürgen

Habermas formulated to describe the impact of eighteenth-century periodicals, David Lawton claims that fifteenth-century English poets were engaged in "constructing a public sphere parallel to and connected with the structures of power" (1987: 793). Although Habermas himself has declared that feudalism precluded the formation of a medieval public sphere (1989: 5-9), his argument is based on Germany and does not take note of the social fluidity of post-feudal England. In fact, as Lawton suggests and this discussion may show, there are many interesting points of overlap between Habermas' conception and late medieval England.

Terry Eagleton defines the eighteenth-century public sphere as

a realm of social institutions--clubs, journals, coffee houses, periodicals--in which private individuals assemble for the free, equal interchange of reasonable discourse, thus welding themselves into a relatively cohesive body whose deliberations may assume the form of a powerful political force. (1984: 9)

Although notionally men of any class could contribute, the membership consisted mainly of "the bourgeois middle class and the titled gentry," Peter Hohendahl explains. Yet "status was suspended" in this environment, "so that a discussion among equals could take place" (1982: 53). This discussion addressed itself to the moral and civic issues raised in periodicals such as the *Tatler* and the *Spectator*, and it purported to base itself "not [on] power but reason. Truth, not authority, is its ground, and rationality, not domination, its daily currency" (Eagleton 1984: 17).

"The Coffee House became a sort of small-scale Club," Alexandre Beljame notes, "where people read newspapers and pamphlets aloud, or where impromptu orators held forth for or against Whigs or Tories" (1948: 163). Reading, whether public or private, was quickly transformed into public discussion and debate that often enough found its way into the letters section of the next issue; on the west side of Button's Coffee House, the venue favored by Addison and Steele, "a lion's head was attached through whose jaws the reader threw his letter" (Habermas 1989: 42). The

orality of the coffee-house reading and debates encouraged the periodical essayists to adopt the pose of "a speaker from the general audience [who] formulates ideas that could be thought by anyone. His special task vis-à-vis the public is to conduct the general discussion" (Hohendahl 1982: 52). The proper tone for such a modest author was what Eagleton characterizes as "at once mannerly and pellucid" (1984: 22). "The dialogue form too, employed by many of the articles, attested to their proximity to the spoken word," Habermas notes. "One and the same discussion transposed into a different medium was continued in order to reenter, via reading, the original conversational medium" (1989: 42).

While there are differences, the profile these theorists draw for the eighteenth-century public sphere has some striking similarities to theories of late medieval English "public poetry" (Middleton 1978). Of course, the medieval writers worked within a more pervasive religious framework, wrote poetry rather than essays, and reached a much smaller audience. Yet they addressed many of the same issues, from the same point of view, to a similar readership, adopting the same modest poses and accessible style, and relying on a similar mechanism for the publicization of their socio-political agenda--public discussion, promoted especially by public reading.

The idea of Ricardian public poetry, notes Anne Middleton, is "to be a 'common voice' to serve the 'common good.'" It emphasizes "secular life, the civic virtues, and communal service. ... its central pieties are worldly felicity and peaceful, harmonious communal existence." As the voice of "bourgeois moderation," it assigns "paramount value to peace" (1978: 95, 96 n. 6). Gower, Langland, and Chaucer, she observes,

are conscious of the "middle state" of the lay and vernacular poet of serious moral intentions, and believe that poetry justifies itself within society, or ought to, as a moral force, in essentially public terms. (p. 104)

Robert F. Yeager, in his book-length study of Gower, reaches a similar conclusion. Gower saw poetry, he notes,

as a powerful tool for moral and social reform. ... A poet (like a preacher--Gower would not have rejected the comparison) thus bears a responsibility, not only for the state of his own soul, but also to others, to keep them on the path with a right use of eloquence. (1990: 66)

Derek Pearsall describes Gower's tone as "that of a man speaking to other men and telling the truth: the simplicity, even transparency, of the English gives an impression of literal reality, of unimpeded communication" (1989: 16); one is reminded of Eagleton's characterization of the eighteenth-century periodical essay as "mannerly and pellucid" (1984: 22).

David Lawton's view of the fifteenth-century poets tallies closely with Middleton's analysis of the preceding period. He finds in the repeated self-proclaimed "dullness" of the writers he discusses a camouflage for their attempts to counsel the ruling classes. Their task was "to tell the truth, particularly to the great. ... to know on behalf of, together with, and as well as any men living. It is to be any man living--a supreme commonplace" (1987: 770-71). This "public voice," as Lawton describes it, was engaged in "a ceaseless attempt to create continuity and unity where in the actual center of power there is instability and 'dyuisioun'" (p. 793).

The genre most allied to this sociopolitical agenda was the *speculum principis*, a broad category that may embrace any text that undertakes to advise a ruler on the principles of good government. Middleton identifies this as a theme in several Canterbury tales (including the "Melibee," which could be classified as a *speculum*), as well as in *Piers Plowman*, *Confessio Amantis*, *Richard the Redeless* (the first fragment of the text discussed in this thesis as *Mum and the Sothsegger*), and other, shorter poems. Like Book 7 of the *Confessio Amantis*, many later *specula* were based on the *Secretum secretorum*, a twelfth- and thirteenth-century Latin version of a tenth-century Arabic text; another major influence was the late thirteenth-century *De*

regimine principum of Giles of Rome (also known as Aegidius Colonna) (Orme 1984: 88, 93). Notable fifteenth-century English *specula* include Thomas Hoccleve's *Regement of Princes* (1411-12), John Lydgate's *Fall of Princes* (1431-38), and George Ashby's *Active Policy of a Prince* (c. 1470). Apart from these, at least nine more or less direct translations of the *Secretum* survive from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

While the ostensible addressee of these texts is usually the king or the heir apparent, the tone, as Middleton observes of the *Confessio Amantis*, "is not a matter of deferential politeness to a ruler, but of rising to sufficient largeness of mind and of reference for a public occasion, and a broad common appeal. The king is not the main imagined audience, but an occasion for gathering and formulating what is on the common mind" (1978: 107; see also Orme 1984: 88-89). As Lawton notes, the scope of the fifteenth-century public sphere

was probably smaller still [than the 4,000 readers of the *Tatler*], but it reached across council and parliamentary factions, the party divide between court, administration and country, household and household, with a common culture and a uniform model of discourse. (1987: 793)

This breadth of audience, which replicates the social mixture Hohendahl identifies as characteristic of the eighteenth-century public sphere, is reflected in the manuscript histories of some of the most popular medieval *specula*. Apart from the presentation copies given to Prince Henry and to the dukes of York and Bedford, for example, owners and readers of Hoccleve's *Regement* are known to have included representatives of the "court, government, church, universities, and professions" (Seymour 1974: 257). The early ownership of Lydgate's *Fall of Princes*, commissioned by Henry V's brother Humphrey, duke of Gloucester, "greatly extends beyond the social range of Lydgate's initial patrons. It suggests that his audience encompassed the nobility, bourgeoisie, religious institutions and individual clerics—in fact a full spectrum of potential fifteenth-century readership"

(Edwards 1983: 22). The social mobility, the increasing bureaucratization of government, and the growing power of the middle classes were combining to create an articulate, interested audience for literature that expressed their social and political concerns. This conclusion is supported by May N. Hallmundsson's painstaking research through documentary records involving the Ricardian writers Scogan, Clanvowe, Usk, and Hoccleve. Taking her sources "in conjunction with the recurring themes in the works provided by and for the group," she notes, "it is possible to recreate the outline of a society in which poetry was read aloud, manuscripts circulated, and political and philosophical conversations were carried on" (1970: 7).

The easy mingling of people and activities characteristic of the coffee houses and invoked by Hallmundsson is reflected in some of the reports we have of late medieval reading. A notice in the household book (the *Liber niger*) of Edward IV, written about 1471, states:

Thes esquiers of houshold of old be acustomed, wynter and somer, in after nonys and in euenynges, to drawe to lordez chambrez within courte, there to kepe honest company aftyr theyre cunyng, in talkyng of cronycles of kinges and of other polycyez, or in pypyng, or harpyng, synging, other actez marciablez, to help occupy the court and accompany straungers, tyll the tym require of departing.² (ed. Myers, p. 129)

The squires, "straungers," and lords of various degrees who seem to congregate at every opportunity recall the coffee-house cliques, and their penchant for "talkyng of cronycles" seems to imply that for them prelection and discussion constituted one seamless, stimulating activity. The "polycyez" also discussed in these meetings might include specula such as Christine de Pizan's *Livre du corps de policie*, either in the original French or in the translation (*The Body of Polycye*, 3d qtr 15th c.) that its editor

²Paul Strohm (1989: 22) feels that the phrase "of old" marks this description as anachronistic for Edward IV's time; see Chapter 3 for my attempt to refute Strohm's argument.

attributes to Edward IV's stepson, Anthony Woodville, Earl Rivers (ed. Bernstein, pp. 31-36). Some such reception seems to be anticipated in the translator's epilogue, addressed to "knyhtis and noble men and all othre generally of what parte that euer they be of that heren or see this lytle wrytyng" (p. 193).

Expressing the common voice, promoting the sort of political exchanges constitutive of the public sphere, it seems that late medieval public poetry would achieve its goals most effectively via such public readings. In the Middle Ages, before periodicals had been invented, people interested in public affairs could find in *specula principis* a medium for exploring pressing social issues. While they had no lion's-jaw letterbox through which to send their ideas back to the author, Gower's continuous revisions of *Confessio Amantis* and the quick-change of royal addressee in *Mum and the Sothsegger* show authors responding sensitively to current events, while the continuous commissioning of new *specula* enabled the audience to conduct a sort of dialogue with the "public voice."

Read aloud to their original patrons, *specula* would give voice to the values championed by the upper echelons of those princes' subjects. Read aloud in the chambers of the nobility and the bourgeoisie, they would lead to joint consideration of the relationships among self-governance, power, and rulership. While readers must certainly have studied these texts in mute isolation at some times, it seems their inherent interest and agenda could be realized only when these readers went on to discuss what they had read with others, or shared in a group reading and discussion.

The egalitarian, fluid quality of British public readings of secular literature contrasts interestingly with the starchier, more hierarchical prelections reported in historical accounts of French and Burgundian reading (see Chapter 3). While there are relatively few such historical reports of British reading events, *specula* were certainly popular in late medieval Britain, and their authors (as Chapter 5 will show) consistently

refer to anticipated aural readings. Aurality, which is usually associated with deficiency or lack of sophistication, thus emerges as a key means of achieving very sophisticated sociopolitical goals, including what we today would class as propaganda, publicizing, or lobbying.

THE AURAL-NARRATIVE CONSTELLATION

The various elements we have been reviewing as native to the transmission and reception of late medieval court-oriented literature fit together into a complex system of reception-phrases involving tradition, source, author, modality, and audience. Positioned between the unintellectualism of popular romances and the aggressive self-aggrandizement of the English Renaissance, authors within this system maintained a relatively exophoric stance as recreative purveyors of traditional "solace and sentence" to their audience of participatory listeners and readers. The typology offered above will enable us to disentangle important, and hitherto often occluded, distinctions between the literary-professional, usually private reading of the author and the recreational, usually public reading of the audience.

The idea of fitting these elements into a transmission-reception system emerged gradually from analysis of the reception-statements included in late medieval British literature. The name "aural-narrative constellation" reflects this system's grounding in the characteristic narrative form of the period: usually brief stories that, as J.A. Burrow notes, represented "pre-eminently an example which illustrates some truth or concept concerning human life and conduct" (1971: 82). This duplex recreational narrative invited either or both a literal reading--reading for the story, corresponding to Horace's *dulcis* and Chaucer's "solace" or "game"--or a moral/instructive reading--reading for the lesson--the *utilis* and "sentence" or "earnest." The public-ness of public reading served both to augment the enjoyment and reinforce the morality.

The system forms a "constellation" because all of its various constituents--e.g., its references to writing, reading, and hearing--are equally valuable but necessarily understood only in relation to each other. In contrast, a "complex," like the monopole "literacy complex" often imposed by critics on Chaucer's writing (see Chapter 1), effects meaning by drawing all other phenomena into relation to one dominant, obsessive theme--"literacy." By selective quotation and emphasis, scholars may impose a "complex"-type, "literacy"-oriented interpretation on the constellation of interlinked professional and recreational, public and private reading that a less prejudiced approach may discover in medieval texts. That is what happens when scholars pick out Chaucer's references to private (professional) reading and ignore or downplay any references to public (usually recreational) reading--as though, looking at a pattern of dots, they connected only the ones that would make a straight line, refusing to "see" the dots left over.

Surface Structure

The aural-narrative constellation is constituted and can be recognized by the use of certain recurrent verbs and phrases indicating transmission and reception. These stock elements are superficial markers that alert us to the system's operation and that reliably direct energies along the accustomed conceptual channels. They may be scattered indiscriminately through the text or packed closely together within a prologue or proem, while the text may or may not invoke actual reading events as well. I will outline the chief points here, based largely on the work of Chaucer (for more illustrations of many of his phrases cited here, see the appendices to Chapter 4). Chapter 5 will follow the course of this constellation through to its declination in the late fifteenth century.

This analysis will look mostly at the verbs "write," "read," and "hear" or "hearken." Given the limitations of time, I have not attempted to collect and analyze statements that use the verbs "say" or "tell" to carry a source-reference, or "make" and "endite" to describe composition.³ I have also refrained, on the same grounds, from investigating "see," "look," and "behold." While these sometimes refer obviously to private reading, they often seem, until the late fifteenth century, to float around in a very loose semantic space, suggesting any form of experience from actual visual contact to understanding, experiencing, or interior visualization.

Invitations to "hear" or "hearken" what an author is about to "say" may also be no more than metaphorical or rhetorical. As "read" becomes more private over the late fifteenth century, references to oral delivery sometimes do begin to seem more figurative. This is especially so with the aureate fashion for what may be called "afflatus imagery"; the author of the *Court of Sapience* (mid-15th c.), for example, implores Clio "that my mouthe maye blowe and encense oute / The redolent dulcour aromatyke / Of thy depured lusty rethoryck!" (ll. 26-28). Such "oral" imagery obviously cannot be cited as evidence of the reception format the author was anticipating for his work. Yet as D.H. Green points out, "to establish the possibility that *hoeren* and *sagen* [*hear* and *say*] can be used figuratively is not the same thing as demonstrating that they must always so be used" (1984: 296-97). The aurality of "hear" is often quite clear, bolstered by explicit statements. In *Knyghthode and Bataile* (1458-59), for example, the author speaks of "mony a

³Anne Middleton's succinct discussion of "endite" and "make" suggests, in any case, that neither verb carries the precise sense, important in the current context, of writing with pen to parchment (or stylus to wax). Beyond its "most basic sense 'to compose,'" Middleton notes, "endite" "seems to connote rhetorical composition, usually in a serious manner or elevated style. ... It is distinguished from the physical act of writing" (1980: 50-51 n. 13). "Make" "refer[s] to verbal composition," including of peroral and memorial texts (p. 53 n. 14).

chiualere" who will "of antiquitee the bokys here, / And that thei here, putte it in deuoyre" (ll. 1696-97). In collecting the "hear" verbs assessed below and in Chapters 3-5, I have tried to weed out any obviously figurative cases.

The complexities inherent in the reception-verb "read" will be discussed briefly in the section below entitled "Audiences 'Hear' (or 'Read'), or 'Read and/or Hear.'"

Sources "Write"

There is no doubt about the textuality of the transmission end of the aural-narrative constellation. Chaucer speaks in many ways of sources that "write." These include specific or generic sources who provide common-places--"sovereyn notabilitee[s]," as Chauncleer calls them (CT 7: 3209)--as well as specific authorities mentioned generally or cited as the source of a particular tale. Several formulas may be noted. The idea of generic authority--tradition concatenated into anonymous "clerks," "philosophers," "men," or even impersonal constructions--seems, appropriately, most allied to formulicity. Sometimes this authority seems genuinely diffused, as when the Manciple declares it foolish "To spille labour for to kepe wyves: / Thus writen olde clerkes in hir lyves" (CT 9: 153-54). At other times the same formula stands in for or conceals some actual authority. Chaucer uses nearly the same phrase as the Manciple in describing Criseyde embraced by Troilus--"As writen clerkes in hire bokes olde, / Right as an aspes leef she gan to quake" (T&C 3: 1199-1200)--although he has elsewhere identified his source as "Lollius" and it was in fact Boccaccio and the *Roman de Troyle*.

Another popular phrase is "as I/men writen find"; e.g., the Second Nun's comment that Cecilia "nevere cessed, as I writen fynde, / Of hir preyere" (CT 8: 124-25). The "Melibee" has a penchant for the solemn "it is written"; Prudence, for example, announces: "For it is writen that 'he that

moost curteisly comandeth, to hym men most obeyen'" (CT 7: 1857). Also contributing to the sense of traditional authority is Chaucer's frequent use of the word "old" to describe authors and books, as seen in the quotes given above; at one point he even reads "a bok, was write with lettres olde" (PF: 19). These phrases and terms serve to reinforce—even within Chaucer's only obliquely didactic texts and despite his endophoric ironies and masks--his commitment to the idea of a massed, communalizing force of traditional wisdom lying behind any given writer's personal variations.

Chaucer's direct references to named authorities are less formulaic, consisting usually of some arrangement of some or all of the basic syntactic elements: author writes book about subject. The Clerk states simply, "Petra writeth / This storie" (CT 4: 1147-48), while the Monk apostrophizes at length: "Lucan, to thee this storie I recomende, / And to Swetoun, and to Valerius also, / That of this storie writen word and ende" (CT 7: 2719-21).

The insistent invocation of written sources characteristic of Chaucer and other authors of court-oriented literature (that is, of the more ambitious vernacular literature) contrasts with the easy-going sourcelessness of the earlier and contemporary popular romances in English. The authors of these were content to establish the provenance of their stories with vague phrases--"as it is told in tale" (e.g., *Emaré* [c. 1400], l. 465), for example; or "as says the book" (e.g., *Ywain and Gawain* [1325-50], ll. 9, 3209). If a romance cites a purportedly academic source, it is with considerable and un-ironic naïveté; *Le Bone Florence de Rome* (late 14th c.), for example, reaches heights of self-authentication with its:

Pope Symonde thys story wrate
 In the Cronykyls of Rome ys the date
 Who sekyth there he may hyt fynde (ll. 2173-75)

Although, as noted, Chaucer seeks to build the sense of a large body of generic authority lying behind his and his characters' statements, authority for him does not reside in bookless tales or authorless books. His state-

ments about sources generally specify either (or both) that they are written and that somebody wrote them. Instead of "as it is told in tale," he has, "as writen folk biforn" (CT 5: 551); instead of "as says the book," "as seyth myn autour" (T&C 3: 502). This balance between the exophoric communality of tradition and the endophoric authority of the individual is characteristic of the aural-narrative constellation.

Author "Reads" Sources

If there is no doubt that the source is written, there is equally little question that the author reads it privately. A standard phrase by which Chaucer introduces his source material is "as I read" (e.g., "In sondry wises shewed, as I rede, / The folk of Troie hire observaunces olde" [T&C 1: 159-60]); the words readily evoke a picture of the author working with his sources open before him. The common use of the phrase "as I read" in contemporary vernacular sermons⁴ adds to the connotation of serious consultative reading. Chaucer is usually less direct than most preachers in identifying his sources, however. He dodges behind the putative inadequacies of the nonexistent Lollius in claiming, for example: "But whether that she [Criseyde] children hadde or noon, / I rede it naught, therefore I late it goon" (T&C 1: 132-33).

In four of his dream visions--the *Book of the Duchess*, the *House of Fame*, the *Parliament of Fowls*, and the prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*--

⁴Numerous examples can be found quoted in G.R. Owst's *Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England* (1961; e.g., pp. 150, 161, 168, 191). The sermon of one anonymous fifteenth-century preacher is of particular interest, as reflecting the authority felt to reside in a clerical "I read" and the resistance of some parishioners to its migration towards secular literary authority. "I rede in haly wryte," he begins--"I sey nocht as I rede in Ovidie, noyther in Oras. Vor the last tyme that I was her, ich was blamyd of som mens word, be-cause that I began my sermon with a poysy. And ther[fore] I say that I red in haly wryt, in the secund book of haly wryth, that [I] suppoise be sufficiant inowgh of autorite ..." (Owst 1961: 179, citing MS. Worc. Cath. Libr. F. 10, f. 42).

Chaucer also depicts himself reading. As argued in Chapter 4, while Chaucer usually introduces his bibliophilia casually, as though it were a purely recreational pastime, each poem eventually connects his reading to the creation of further poems (especially the one in which the reading is recounted). These dramatized reading-events thus align with the emphasis on the sources that the poet is recycling into his own, re-narrated tale; along with the "as I read" phrase borrowed from pulpit rhetoric, they promote a sense of the author as a professional reader conning over and creatively reinterpreting established sources.

Author "Writes"

Having read, and probably with his books still open around him, the author writes. Chaucer does not have any regular formulas for this process, unless "I write" could be considered a formula. Nonetheless, he refers to his writing numerous times, either directly in his own voice or through that of the Man of Law and the God of Love. One of the most famous examples may be his appeal to "Thesiphone" to "help me for t'endite / These woful vers, that wepen as I write" (T&C 1: 6-7). His awareness of writing as the process of creating physical texts comes through in another couplet rhyming the same two carefully distinguished verbs (see note 3 above): "And now my penne, allas, with which I write, / Quaketh for drede of that I moste endite" (T&C 4: 13-14). The issue of writing comes up several times as part of an *occupatio*; this becomes a poignant motif in the *Legend of Good Women*, where for the third time in the tale of Phyllis, for instance, Chaucer declines to carry on: "But al hire letter wryten I ne may / By order, for it were to me a charge" (LGW: 2513-14). Here "write," as an activity pursued under mounting difficulties, seems to verge on the reduced sense of "transcribe."

These various uses of the verb "write"—in invocations, to comment on or condense the narrative—create a sense of the author actively engaging with his tradition, his sources, his own resources, and the innumerable professional issues of narrative content, procedure, and style to produce the text his audience is experiencing. Those scholars used to explaining Chaucer's references to hearing as holdovers from minstrel tradition have not noted that these typically "Chaucerian" references to the process of writing also have antecedents in the romance tradition (see Baugh 1967: 5-9). The author of *Arthur and Merlin* (last half 13th c.), for example, refers to "this Naciens, of whom y write" (l. 8909). A century or so before Chaucer was to "make / A-nyght ful ofte thyn hed to ake / In thy studye, so thou writest" (HF: 631-33), the author of *Havelok* (c. 1280-1300) was asking his audience to pray "For him that haueth the rym maked, / And ther-fore fele nihtes waked" (ll. 2999-3000).

Audiences "Hear" (or "Read"), or "Read and/or Hear"

The author may envisage an actual audience, whose traits he will describe and whom he will address directly (sometimes in apparent jest, as in the common reference to irate female hearers). When he speaks of his audience receiving his text, the author may occasionally refer unambiguously to private reading (although Chaucer rarely does); far more often, however, he uses an apparently format-neutral "read" or else a "hear" or "now hearken." Chaucer's audience, for example, "may the double sorwes here / Of Troilus in lovyng of Criseyde" (T&C 1: 54-55); or they are told, "Now herkeneth, as I have yow seyde, / What that I mette" (HF: 109-10). Audiences are sometimes enticed with a "whoso list it hear" (T&C 1: 398, 5: 1770), a phrase famously negated in the Miller's Tale's "whoso list it nat yheere" (CT 1: 3176).

Chaucer uses the verb "read" infrequently in referring to his audience's reception of his own work (see Chapter 4, Appendix B). The two clearest indications of a possibly private reading both occur in poems addressed to a particular friend: his advice to Bukton, "The Wyf of Bathe I pray yow that ye rede" ("Lenvoy a Bukton," l. 29); and his plea to an unknown woman, "Shewe by word, that ye wolde ones rede / The compleynte of me" ("Complaynt d'amours," ll. 67-68). It may be significant that he expected his own intimates to "read" but his larger, unknown audiences to "hear." By contrast, Chaucer uses "hear" verbs to refer to his audience's reception some 44 times (Chapter 4, Appendix A).

The bread-and-butter work of keeping the narrative organized is often done with "hear" phrases. Chaucer's Cook, for example, "seyde his tale, as ye shul after heere" (CT 1: 4364), and when Pandarus goes to visit Criseyde Chaucer reminds us brusquely: "Ye han wel herd the fyn of his entente" (T&C 3: 553). Although "as ye shall hear" is also a common phrase in popular romances, Chaucer seems to use it fluently, with no suggestion that he is quoting from a minstrel phrase-book. The one unmistakable carryover from such usages comes in the mock-minstrel tale "Sir Thopas," with the repeated "Listeth, lordes ..." (CT 7: 712, 833); this phrase occurs nowhere else in Chaucer. There are no standard reception-phrases along the lines of "as ye shall read" or "as ye have read above"⁵ (although Gower has a weakness for "as ye have heard above"; see below).

The reception-phrase most common in metatexts--prologues, epilogues, and rubrics--is "read and/or hear," which is very often used in excusing the "rudeness" of one's writing to one's future audience or in asking for their

⁵The famous "Thow, redere" in *Troilus* (5: 270) does indeed suggest a private reader--particularly by being in the second person singular--but the expression occurs too rarely (only in *Troilus* and above the gate in the *Parliament of Fowls* [l. 132]) to qualify as a stock phrase. See Chapter 4 for further discussion.

prayers. An example comes in the introduction to the *Treatise on the Astrolabe*:

Now wol I preie mekely every discret persone that redith or herith this litel tretys to have my rude endityng for excusid, and my superfluite of wordes, for two causes ... (ll. 41-44)

The phrase is also recognizable in the "Retraction" to the *Canterbury Tales*, where Chaucer uses it to deflect any supposedly undeserved praise:

Now preye I to hem alle that herkne this litel tretys or rede, that if ther be any thyng in it that liketh hem, that therof they thanken oure Lord Jhesu Crist, of whom procedeth al wit and al goodnesse. (CT 10: 1081)

The modest authors of such formal and wordy self-excusations may be invoking two different reception channels out of a desire to list all possible reception formats--so that "read" means "read privately" and "hear," "read publicly" (a "hard" contrast). Or "read or hear" may mean "whether you are reading the book aloud or hearing someone else read it" (a "soft" contrast). Or the entire phrase may be "format-neutral"; i.e., the author is content for the phrase to mean whatever the reader thinks it means.⁶ Often a series of "read's" or "hear's" in a prologue or epilogue will be capped by a "read and/or hear" in a final "sweep" position that seems intended to embrace all possible preferences.

Chaucer is far from the only late medieval author who tends to speak of his audiences "hearing" or "hearkening" his work. "Barons an burgeises and bondemen als," says Langland, "I seigh in this assemblee, as ye shul here after" (late 14th c.; PP B prol.: 217-18). Hoccleve advises his audience, "And

⁶Paul Zumthor considers that phrases such as "audire et legere," "audire et videre," "voir et écouter," and "hören und sehen" probably connote what I call a soft contrast. At the very least it remains clear, he notes, that such terms "constituèrent ainsi, pour des générations, un champ lexical mouvant, dont le seul trait commun permanent était la dénotation d'une oralité" ("thus constituted, for generations, a fluid lexical field, whose sole shared and permanent characteristic was to suggest orality") (1987: 43-44).

what I schal eek seyn, herkneth wel nowthe" (1412; RP: 4585). Bokenham will recount St. Margaret's life "As they shul heryn wych lyst attende" (1447; LHW: 82). When Malory's Bors and Perceval meet, "aythir told other of their temptacions, as ye have herde toforehonde" (1470; MD, p. 975). Caxton prays "al them that shal here or rede this lityl treatys" to remember Tiptoft's soul (1481; *Of Friendship*, in Blake 1973: 123). If the phrases are survivals, they are remarkably long-lived ones. Even when such authors use "read" to describe their audience's reception, they do not relinquish their "hear's" and "hearken's," thus supporting the assumption that "read" as a verb of reception remained format-neutral, or that bimodality persisted, at least until the late fifteenth century.

The general pattern of authors and source-consultation attracting primarily "read" (or "see") verbs and of audiences attracting primarily "hear" verbs leads to the hypothesis that two different kinds of reading are being described. As a clerical or professional activity, "read" generally implies the sort of scholastic *lectio* that Malcolm Parkes describes as "a more ratiocinative scrutiny of the text and consultation for reference purposes" (1976: 115). Preachers, teachers, and writers read source texts in this manner, usually privately, in order to generate (re)interpreted texts. Chaucer explicitly connects the two processes, explaining his love of reading in the *Parliament of Fowls*:

For out of olde felde, as men seyth,
Cometh al this newe corn from yer to yere,
And out of olde bokes, in good feyth,
Cometh al this newe science that men lere. (PF: 22-25)

Many medieval illustrations of authors writing show them surrounded by other books, open and closed (see Figs. 14-16). In one manuscript of the *Grands Chroniques de France* (Valenciennes, Bibl. mun. 637, f. 1; see Fig. 15), the following instructions for illustrating the author survive: "Docteur seant en une chere ... vestu en guise de moine et devant lui une table plane de

livres" ("Scholar sitting in a chair ... dressed as a monk and having before him a table full of books") (Avril 1981: 100). The "table plaine de livres" is as much an attribute of authors as a lily was of Mary or a scallop-shell of St. James.

While authors were actively reformulating written sources through their private consultative reading, however, they expected their audiences, as lay or recreational readers, to accept their new versions in the relatively passive, evaluative role of participatory listeners. Congregations listened to preachers, students to lecturers, and audiences to authors or their surrogate prelectors. V.A. Kolve is one of the few Chaucerian scholars to have noted this concatenation of authorial and audience modalities; he concludes a discussion of several reception-statements in *Troilus* by noting that "Chaucer's is a lettered art shaped by, and continually responsive to, an oral-audial environment" (1984: 15). "Read" as applied to nonprofessional and recreational audiences would be more open-ended--format-neutral or bimodal. That is, the verb "read," in this context, seems not to select between private and public reading. Only towards the middle of the fifteenth century does its semantic weighting apparently begin to shift towards the private pole, although as late as 1490 Caxton could still cap a string of seemingly dividual "read's" by attributing them to "a good redar and enformer" (*Eneydos*; in Blake 1973: 80).

Invitations to "Read" Sources Function as Covert Assertions of Authorial Reading

The poet may refer to the general idea of sources existing and being read--a move that in Chaucer often introduces a morsel of folk or clerical wisdom: e.g., "Men sen alday, and reden ek in stories, / That after sharpe shoures ben victories" (T&C 3: 1063-64); or "We han no fre chois, as thise clerkes rede" (T&C 4: 980). Many other references in Chaucer build up a sense of authorities available for consultation by competent readers--"Eek Plato seith,

whoso kan hym rede" (CT 1: 741), for example. The formulas "whoso can him read," "(as) men (may) read," "men read (that) ...," and the imperative "Read (a cited author)" occur in numerous variations (see Chapter 4, Appendix C).

Whether such a comment comes from Chaucer himself or from one of his in-frame narrators, it seems generally intended more to bolster the authority of the one making it than actually to encourage the listener to turn away from the narrator towards the written source. When the Merchant tells his auditors, "In Claudyan ye may the stories rede" (CT 4: 2232), he surely doesn't expect them to gallop off in search of the nearest monastery library; rather, he naturally hopes that they will listen, duly impressed, to his own retelling of Proserpine's capture. Chaucer himself, speaking more or less *in propria persona*, maintains a rather shy but knowing relationship in his oblique source-references. Often a daunting list of authorities is combined with an *occupatio*, as in his summary of Aeneas' descent to Hell: "Which whoso willeth for to knowe, / He moste rede many a rowe / On Virgile or on Claudian, / Or Daunte, that hit telle kan" (HF: 447-50). One is reminded of a lawyer rattling off precedents from his casebooks in order to convince a client to trust his interpretations of the law.

These source-references usually use the verb "read." As with the overt references to the author's reading (see above), this usage seems tied to the (in this case covert) professionalism of the reading. "Read" as attached to an authorial or author-like activity of consulting sources, that is, carries a sense of aggressive, interpretive and recreative interaction--distinct from the more receptive stance of the recreational listener or reader. Even so, the interpretive act is not necessarily a dividual one. As described in a preceding section, academic, or scholarly-professional, reading had a strong aural component. Thus it is no surprise to read the Squire's learned allusion:

They speken of Alocen, and Vitulon,
 And Aristotle, that writen in hir lyves
 Of queynte mirours and of perspectives,
 As knowen they that han hir bookes herd. (CT 5: 232-35)

Speaking directly as narrator, Chaucer remarks in another place, concerning Troilus' martial prowess: "His worthi dedes, whoso list him heere, / Rede Dares" (T&C 5: 1770-71).

This ostentation of authors is unique to aural court literature; romance authors, as noted above, give minimal attention to the question of sources and authentication. Even though most of these texts were translated directly from French, few of the earlier, shorter English romances seek to build any mystique about the translator's special access to the source text.

In-Frame Narrators Replicate the System

If a character within the text starts to tell a story, he or she is likely to refer to written sources and to move the narration along with standard "as I read's" and "as ye have heard devise's." The Pardoner strikes the original clerical note, intoning "For whil that Adam fasted, as I rede, / He was in Paradys" (CT 6: 508-9); Chaunticleer admonishes Pertelote (in a tale within the Nun's Priest's Tale), "Lo, in the lyf of seint Kenelm I rede ..." (7: 3109). The Knight, in relating Arcite's death speech, introduces it with "Thanne seyde he thus, as ye shal after heere" (1: 2762); the Man of Law summarizes a bit of Custance's story with "As heer-biforn that ye han herd devyse" (2: 613). Chaucer's pilgrims are even more ready than he is to instruct their listeners to read various sources; even the loathly lady in the Wife of Bath's tale advises Gawain, "Reedeth Senek" (3: 1168). Such duplication and double-duplication of basic phrases (and modes) within embedded narratives seems to support the hypothesis that aural phrases are the basic building blocks of narrative structure, rather than evidence of any nostalgia-creating strategy or lame-duck minstrelisms.

Occasionally, In-Frame Narrators Replicate the System Too Much

Due perhaps to this isomorphism of narrative phrases, authors presenting in-frame oral narrations sometimes mix their own voice in inappropriately with that of their ostensible narrator. The most famous example is the Second Nun who, in introducing her tale to her fellow-pilgrims, beseeches the indulgence of "yow that reden that I write" (CT 8: 78). The Nun is not alone, however; the Knight (1: 1201), the Franklin (5: 1559), the Monk (7: 2653), and Chaucer the pilgrim himself (7: 964) also speak of themselves as "writing" their oral narrations.⁷ It is usual to attribute the Knight's and the Nun's mistakes to Chaucer's carelessness in adapting these tales--known from references in the *Legend of Good Women* (G prol.: 408-9, 416) to have been written earlier--to their new framework (see, e.g., Pearsall 1992: 228). That the Franklin, the Monk, and Chaucer in the link to "Melibee" make the same mistake, however, despite the apparent contemporaneity of their tales' composition, suggests a more systemic problem.

Moreover, Chaucer is not alone. Lydgate, as the in-frame oral narrator in the *Siege of Thebes*, not only repeats his master's error--claiming of Oedipus' marriage "I am wery mor therof to write" (l. 823)--but trumps it with an aural back-reference--"And of his exile the soth he told also, / As ye han herde in the storye rad" (ll. 1406-7). Gower shows a similar affinity for a different form of crossed wires; his Confessor has a habit of referring

⁷The relevant lines are:

- o The Knight: "But of that storie list me nat to write" (CT 1: 1201)
- o The Franklin: "he was so weel apayd / That it were impossible me to wryte" (5: 1548-49)
- o Chaucer-the-pilgrim: "Shul ye nowher fynden difference / Fro the sentence of this tretys lyte / After the which this murye tale ["Melibee"] I write" (7: 962-64)
- o The Monk: "For though I write or tolde yow everemo / Of his knyght-hod, it myghte nat suffise" (7: 2653-54)
- o The Second Nun: "Yet preye I yow that reden that I write" (8: 78)

Amans to tales the latter has "heard above" (e.g., CA 4: 3274-75; see Chapter 5), a form of reference also found in Hoccleve (*Series*, ll. 631-34, 657-58), and in a different form in Chaucer himself (the falcon in the Squire's Tale manages a back-reference with "as I have seyde above" [CT 5: 540]).

As psychologists, linguists, and others know, it is often a speaker's "mistakes" that offer the most telling evidence of underlying structures. As a characteristic mistake within the aural-narrative constellation, the ascription of writing to oral narrators or of textualized experience to oral narratees suggests the fundamental aurality of the process. Creating a fictional situation involving a speaker narrating to listeners, that is, authors have trouble keeping it separate from the "real-world" event of a writer writing a book that will be read aloud to a listening audience. They are liable to give the oral narrator "their" lines--e.g., "But of that storie list me nat to write" (the Knight; CT 1: 1201)--and to describe the in-frame oral audience as "hearing read" or "hearing above."

Texts Exist in Manuscript

The aural-narrative constellation's overall mixture of private and public reception formats, ascribed to author and to audience, co-exists easily with references to the present or future writtenness of the story being related--to, that is, its textuality. This text may be invoked in its most physical aspect, as recorded in a manuscript, on parchment, with ink, and as handled by its readers. The obvious example is Chaucer's "turne over the leef" passage (CT 1: 3177), whose aurality has often been ignored (see Chapter 1).

Like Chaucer, Lydgate has no problem combining scribal mechanics with a listening audience. Recording Fortune's words to "Bochas," for example, he continues: "But as soone as she gan disapeere, / He took his penne [&] wrot as ye shal heere" (*Fall of Princes* 6: 986-87). As late as 1481, when Caxton issued a translation called *Tulle of Olde Age*, the epilogue hoped

"that by experyence of deth, ye may preue tho thyngys whiche ye haue herd of me / which be by me wretyn in this my boke callid olde age" (trans. Scrope, p. 95), unconcernedly assuming his audience will hear his written, printed book.⁸

Cultural Role

In summary, the aural-narrative constellation reflects a cultural matrix in which texts are derived from written sources by a literary-professional private reader who in turn is writing for a bimodal recreational audience of public or possibly private readers. Whether or not he will be the prelector, if there is one, this author maintains a strong sense both of his authority as professional reader/mediator of an authoritative tradition and of his actual or vicarious presence to his audience (as narrator or in the person of the prelector). This authority underlies an important cryptotypical distinction between the text's citational "read's"--designating a consultative, recreative activity proper to authors and others imitating the authorial stance--and the receptive, format-neutral "read's" applied to the audience. The first almost always designates a diindividual, the other an aural or bimodal form of engagement.

The author, and his characters, are strongly aware that stories become texts, which become physical books, which, most likely, become prelected words. Neither the presence in this system of a privately reading author, nor the ready acknowledgment that the recreated story is stored on the

⁸"Herd of me" may have only a general meaning of "found in my book." However, the previous sentence had used a standard aural phrase--"as ye haue herd here"--and at another point the author/translator speaks of the importance of old men "redyng or heryng good historyes" (p. 35). Scrope's translation predates its publication, but Caxton was not shy about revising texts he felt inappropriate for their late fifteenth-century audiences. See Chapter 5 and Coleman 1990a for more discussion of Caxton's "hear's" and "read's."

pages of a manuscript, exclude aurality as the medium for the audience's experience of the text. Oral narrations by characters within the fiction show the same profile of authority-claiming author mediating tradition to his or her audience--which in in-frame narrations, of course, obviously consists of listeners. As suggested by the behavior of the Canterbury pilgrims, however (see Chapter 1), this authorial stance was no guarantee of docile, gratefully passive audiences.

This system was a carrier of basic exophoric social orientations; authors and audiences are equally embedded in a highly valorized tradition, which the author reinterprets and the audience selects and critiques. They find both security and individual scope in a system that recognizes their respective contributions, that ensures their joint and mutual continuity within a communalizing, homeostatizing cosmology. Narratives were free to work at either or both of their dual levels, resonating their impacted messages into the public forum created by public reading of a communally reworked text.

No given text is likely to have every aspect and phrase of the narrative constellation operating within it; but many have enough to be judged as participating in the reception-culture the constellation entails and enacts. While aspects of the constellation can be found in Mannyng, it seems to make its first strong appearance in Chaucer. It is not very present in his two greatest contemporaries--the *Gawain*-poet and Langland--but can be found flourishing in Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, written in 1390. Thereafter it appears in the works of many of Chaucer's successors--as a result either of direct imitation or, more likely, of operating within the same tradition and under the same literary-cultural conditions. One notable change involved a development in the corpus of prestige-conferring *auctores*: while Chaucer flaunted his access to a written tradition that was almost all in Latin, French, or Italian, later writers also could and did cite a venerable English-language tradition, of which Chaucer was the "first findere" (Hoc-

leve, *Regement*, l. 4978), with Gower and Lydgate soon added as fellow triumvirs.

As Chapter 5 demonstrates, the aural-narrative constellation persisted throughout most of the century following Chaucer's death, beginning a slow demise in the later fifteenth century that concluded with its effective supercession by the beginning of the sixteenth. With endophorically oriented writers such as John Skelton, we see didacticism and authority take a back-seat to virtuoso, source-juggling originality. In his "Garlande or Chapelet of Laurell" (c. 1495), Skelton, the laureate poet, has Chaucer, Gower, and Lydgate (whose lack of laurels he condescendingly notes) step forward to sponsor his induction to the House of Fame. "Of there bounte they made me godely chere," he notes, "In maner and forme as ye shall after here" (ll. 398-99). This is Skelton's one and only use of the commonest of aural-narrative phrases, "as ye shall hear." Its use in this context and at this date marks it to be as much a deliberate "quotation" of a bygone conceptual framework as was the "Listeth, lords" of "Sir Thopas."

With the passing of the aural-narrative constellation, intertextuality, first invoked only in passing by the romance-writers, then flaunted in the aural-narrative constellation as a device of self-authentication, is finally relatively suppressed again, in favor of a humanistically inspired authorial narcissism. Simultaneously, narrative loses some of its pre-eminence as the sovereign means of organizing and presenting human knowledge. A new emphasis on originality deprives narrative, and audiences, of their exophoric connection to the many, resonating, and socially integrating functions of "books which told them what they already knew" (Lewis 1964: 200). It is a transposition not merely of storage mechanisms, as the Ongian point of view has it, but of many basic social, cultural, and literary relationships. However, as future chapters will show, it was not a straightforward transformation of modalities. The passing of the Middle Ages in England saw the passing of the aural-narrative constellation as a way of conceiving and organizing the rela-

tionship among author, tradition, and audience. It did not see the passing of aurality or orality. Rather, both survived in newly or intensified endophoric forms, while literacy embarked down some new exophoric paths.

By giving equal time to the various participants in the literary communication-loop, the idea of the aural-narrative constellation allows us to model the reading behavior in Chaucer's texts more accurately than a literacy-biased "transitional" model. Rather than conflating professional with recreational reading and focusing obsessively on evolution along the one narrow track from "oral" to "literate," it frees us to perceive subtle shifts of influence and weighting across a complex system of transmission and reception.

CROSSOVER LITERACIES

The agent working most noticeably towards a more serious engagement with the late medieval English recreational text and towards a greater recognition of the importance of the authors of such texts was, perhaps not surprisingly, the author. The following discussion applies Brian Street's (1984) model of the crossover of Iranian religious ("maktab") literacy into commercial literacy to an analysis of the crossover of scholarly- and literary-professional literacy into late medieval recreational literacy. Having distinguished among the kinds of reading employed for late medieval English literature, we can perceive more clearly the intersections among them.

As noted in the methodology section above, I have necessarily limited myself to the literary-textual traces of these interactions. Thus while lay religious literacy clearly had a significant influence on the reading habits of the middle classes in this period, the literary texts, and authors, did not seek to invoke this model. Chaucer recalls it in a few but significant humorous contexts (see Chapter 4); *Criseyde*, for example, associates private reading with a troglodytic anchoress perusing saints' lives (T&C 2: 117-

18). And a few decades later Hoccleve lists among the lamentable consequences of the glutton's habitual stupefaction the fact that it impedes his private religious reading:

Who-so that than wolde yeue him reed
To looke in a book of deuocioun,
I trowe in ydel were his mocioun. (*Regement*, ll. 3883-85)

But there is no hint even in the texts of these authors that their readers should approach their own texts in the spirit of a religious *meditatio*. In contrast, Chaucer and Gower could be said to have provided two models of crossover literacy that did suggest at several levels an importation into recreational reading of, respectively, literary- and scholarly-professional literacy.

The Chaucerian model appears most clearly in the four dream visions in which he dramatizes his own reading: the *Book of the Duchess*, the *House of Fame*, the *Parliament of Fowls*, and the prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*. Presenting his persona initially as an ordinary person who simply derives much pleasure from reading, Chaucer draws his audience into a process that soon becomes overtly one of reprocessing sources (and experience) into new poems. While laying on the required thickness of moral *sententiae*, Chaucer and the poets who imitated this model to some extent seem eager to exercise their readers' intellect by involving them in their own literary and personal dilemmas. Chaucer achieves a similar effect in *Troilus and Criseyde* by emphasizing (at several levels) his struggles to rework his sources. By enacting for their audience this process of literary-professional reading, these authors call attention to their ongoing self-invention as contributors to tradition.

Although Chaucer thus seems to entice his audience with the glamour of his virtuosic professionalism, the device seems, however (as noted in the discussion of source-citations above), more a subtle form of self-advertisement than an earnest request that they should go and do likewise--

i.e., read his text in a serious, analytic, critical fashion. It is not clear that Chaucer himself would have had any model for critical, engaged reading that was not intended to result in a new text--unless he had encountered such practices during his travels abroad, or had invented it. Thus, although we now recognize Chaucer's attitude as an anticipation of the Renaissance and the "modern," it could not be said that he was the real source of the gradual semantic shift of "read" towards the pole of dividuality.

Oddly enough, that endophoric watershed seems much more indebted to the much more distinctly exophoric efforts of Gower and those who imitated his importation of scholarly-professional literacy into recreational contexts. The Latin glosses and rubrics Gower provided to the vernacular narrative (or narratives-within-the-narrative) of his *Confessio* evoke the superliterate interpretive aids employed for the presentation of important academic texts. While not ignoring the importance of interesting narrative, he and those who followed his model seem to hope their readers would study their texts in the scholarly mode described in the typology above, like a student of high-prestige religious and/or academic works.⁹ As the discussion below will emphasize, however, a more serious "read" was not necessarily a more dividual one.

A.J. Minnis traces the Gowerian model to the influence of the "scholastic literary theory" evolved by the writers of academic prologues to the Bible and to important theological texts. He explains that the "central event" in this process

⁹Along with the academic model provided by his Latin prose glosses and commentaries, Gower also flaunted a much more consciously literate style in the Latin verses he placed at the beginnings of the *Confessio's* major sections and at its conclusion. While the spectacle of Gower "gather[ing] round himself, with immense deliberateness and ostentation, the cloak of the poet" (Pearsall 1989: 16) may have influenced his fellow poets, however, it did not constitute a model of reading in the way that his prose glosses did.

was the emergence (in Bible commentaries) of the view that the human author possessed a high status and respected didactic/stylistic strategies of his very own--in short, *auctoritas* moved from the divine realm to the human. (1988: vii)

"It would seem," Minnis remarks elsewhere,

that academic prologues provided Gower with models for the composition of his own prolegomena; the literary theory channelled through these same academic prologues provided him with principles for the description and justification of his own works. (p. 190)

Some followers of this model employed clearly scholastic frameworks such as "Aristotelian prefaces," while others relied on a more general display of academic terminology.¹⁰

This crossover impulse is also reflected in the French and Burgundian miniatures of authorial prelection. Pictures of scholarly-professional authors reading their own texts (see, e.g., Figs. 7-8) often show them in the guise of academic lecturers, wearing university robes and sitting in a chair with a lectern and perhaps a tester-roof to amplify his voice. Their students sit below them in bench-rows, some with their own books; in later miniatures, the whole event is usually taking place within a clearly delineated, sometimes elaborately decorated indoor space (see Fig. 8). Illuminations of literary-professional authors reading their own texts (see, e.g., Figs. 10-13)

¹⁰Minnis also places Chaucer within this tradition, remarking that although he "did not employ any of the traditional prologue-paradigms, ... many of his literary attitudes seem to have been influenced by scholastic literary theory" (1988: 190). While the case for Gower is strong, this argument for Chaucer, as the quotation suggests, is rather weak. Minnis (pp. 190-210) tries to prove that Chaucer was deliberately adopting the pose of an academic *compiler*. But the fact that Chaucer purports to be presenting tales supposedly heard (usually in full) from the mouths of a random assortment of people does not in itself prove that he was imitating academics such as Vincent of Beauvais, who compiled selected passages from authoritative texts (pp. 197-201; see also Parkes 1976: 130-31). Most of the usages and attitudes Minnis seeks to establish as scholastic seem, once redefined to apply to Chaucer, simply basic and familiar strategies of medieval narrative--e.g., the humility topos (1988: 192).

clearly pick up one element of this model: the author's academic robes and furniture. That the audience, though perhaps impressed, remains relatively enfranchised may be reflected by their unregimented seating/standing arrangements and the usually undefined, open space in which they stand or sit.

In seeking to borrow for his text the prestige of the scholarly or religious tome, through the Latin glosses and verses he added to his vernacular *Confessio*, Gower had begun a process of "scholasticizing" the idea of recreational reading. Gower's glosses conferred prestige in many directions: on himself, as the superliterate author who wrote them; on his narrative, as endowed with a rich moral double-meaning; and on his audience, as putatively equipped to read and interpret both the glosses' language and "sentence." From the audience's point of view, recreational literature thus begins to acquire a suggestion of prestige. Even if most laypeople could or would not have read Gower's glosses, they would have understood that to absorb the full meaning (or prestige-value) of the *Confessio* required such a reading.

It makes sense that the scholarly model should involve both author and, potentially, audience in studious reading, while the literary one reserves the consultative project for the author. Literature presupposed an author performing his specialist function for an audience whose role was to receive his text relatively passively. If the author chose to flaunt his reading one way or another, it did nothing to transform the audience into writers themselves, ready to derive a new text from his, as he had derived his from his sources. The whole point of scholarly reading, on the other hand, was, notionally, to educate students to become lecturers in turn. An author who presents himself in the guise of a scholarly exegete of other men's (or his own) texts thus can implicitly invite his audience to construe his text, as a master might who prelected his commentary to those who might in due course comment upon it themselves. This stance seems particularly appropriate to the *speculum principis*, whose stated purpose is to educate and

guide opinion. This affinity emphasizes the continuing relevance of aurality to even Gowerian reading--since both academic lectures and public-sphere discussions were premised on prelection.

Rather than immediately biasing "read" towards private reading, therefore, this trend ran a more subtle course, gradually imbuing "read" with the idea of reading as a serious engagement with the moral/instructive or doctrinal overtones of the text. Since both the clerical and scholarly *lectio* had a strong aural component, as noted above, it took some further time, and perhaps an infusion of humanistic influences from abroad, for "read" to begin tilting palpably in the direction of dividuality.

Chaucer's and Gower's models could not be said to have been in conflict. Each seems to have wended its way over the course of the fifteenth century, sometimes appearing alternately in the same author--Hoccleve was "Gowerian," in the current sense, in the text proper of the *Regement of Princes* but "Chaucerian" in its prologue and in the *Series*--or occasionally crosscutting rather oddly (see Chapter 5's discussion of the *Fall of Princes*).

Gower's *Ordinatio*

A closer consideration of Gower's *ordinatio* may illustrate the rather unfamiliar idea that a serious, scholarly sense of "read" does not militate against an aural connotation. It seems clear that Gower's glosses and rubrics could only have been written for private, scholarly reading by someone educated in Latin and interested in deciphering the didactic intent behind the story. Yet the whole thrust of the *Confessio* was a public one, at several levels. Like David Lawton's "dull" fifteenth-century writers (see above), Gower sought to position himself as a wise counsellor to kings, or even (in the revised form of the famous line) to "Engelonde" (CA prol.: 24). His medium was the concept of the writer as public voice addressing the public sphere created by means of a public reading of his text. The *Confessio*

contains many aural phrases to substantiate that contention, most notable of which may be its prefatory invocation of the "worldes eere" (l. 10).

It may not, therefore, be too far-fetched to hypothesize that Gower hoped his poem would be read aloud along the lines of an academic lecture. His ideal reading situation, perhaps, would have been for someone who had by private study mastered his text, the glosses, and their interrelationship to read and expound the *Confessio* to a "lay" audience, just as an academic lecturer would read and expound a set text to his students. If both prelector and audience knew Latin, the former could have followed academic precedent to the extent of reading the Latin metatexts aloud along with the text.¹¹ Such a reading, while capitalizing on the entertainment value of the work, would also broadcast Gower's underlying philosophy to a wide audience and create the opportunity for discussion and application of his wisdom. Alternatively, the prelection could have taken the form of a more communal "study-session," with the reader prelecting the glosses and rubrics either in Latin (if his audience knew that language) or in improvised translations. Listeners could comment upon the metatexts and discuss their relevance to the English narration.

The idea that glosses might be provided in part as a sort of "study aid" for prospective prelection is supported by an interesting passage from Richard de Bury's *Philobiblon* (1344). "While continually refreshing ourselves by the reading of books, which it was our custom to read or hear every day," he comments,

we noticed clearly how much the action of the intellect is impeded by the imperfect knowledge of even one word; for the sense of no utterance is understood whose slightest part is unknown. Wherefore

¹¹Beryl Smalley notes that (in the century before Gower) the Parisian master of theology "reads out the text and its glosses. His students, judging by the custom of a later date, were supposed to bring Bibles to class with them, and possibly these would be glossed. Nevertheless, text and glosses seem to have been read aloud" (1952: 217).

we were at special pains to order explanations of exotic words to be recorded and gave consideration with constant watchfulness to the orthography, the prosody, the etymology, and the syntax of the ancient grammarians; and terms the meaning of which had become obscure by great age we took care to explain by suitable descriptions, to the end that we might make ready a smooth path for our students. (trans. Taylor, p. 71)

In order to leave no utterance un-understood, Richard sponsored the creation of annotated grammars. Students were expected to con over these texts so that as prelectors they could explain, or as listeners recognize, the "exotic words" and archaic terms in the texts de Bury enjoyed hearing read aloud. In this instance private reading is a service function enabling the more effective operation of de Bury's preferred reception channel, prelection.

An interesting counterpoint to Richard de Bury's bimodality can be found in the *Myroure of Oure Ladye* (before 1448), a devotional manual written for the Bridgettine nuns of Syon Abbey. In explaining some aspects of his text's organization, the anonymous author comments: "And therefore they that se this boke and rede yt may better vnderstande yt then they that here yt, and se yt not" (p. 70). Yet in other contexts the superior understanding obtainable by private reading is also subordinated to the requirements of public reading. "They also that rede in the Couente," he says,

ought so bysely to ouerse theyr lesson before . & to vnderstone yt; that they may poynte yt as it oughte to be poynted . & rede . yt sauourly & openly to the vnderstandinge of the heres [sic]. And that may they not do; but yf they vnderstone yt . & sauoure yt fyrste themselfe. (p. 67)

It seems, thus, that both in scholarly and in clerical contexts, at least one function of academic-style apparatus and *ordinatio* was to equip prelectors to present their texts more intelligibly. Gower would thus have models

from which to derive the hope that his text would be prelected by a similarly well-prepared reader.

Failing such an ideal setting for the reading-aloud of the *Confessio*, Gower's text simply accommodates the idea of bimodal reading: i.e., that individual audience members would choose the reading format--public or private--most appropriate to themselves and their circumstances at any given moment. Readers interested in relaxation only could simply enjoy Amans' story, and the many smaller stories related by the Confessor. Those who had the ability and the desire, meanwhile, could go on to pursue the moral significance of Amans' confession, whether privately or publicly.

Scholarly Apparatus in Fifteenth-Century Literary Manuscripts

The ambitions of authors are not necessarily, of course, a good index of actual reading practice. The importation of procedures from scholarly-professional literacy, however, is also increasingly clear in the paraphernalia of scholarly superliteracy added to the first *Canterbury Tales* manuscripts and to those of later poets such as Hoccleve and Lydgate. Whether employed at the instigation of authors or of those commissioning copies of their works, these devices ranged from glosses and interlineations to the elaborate *ordinatio* that organized important academic texts into chapters and books, adding such aids as running heads and tables of contents (Parkes 1976: 137; see also Manly and Rickert 1940: 527).

Until recently, however, critics have tended to ignore the glosses in the *Canterbury Tales* manuscripts, since they are generally considered not to be authorial (but see Silvia 1965). They were important to the manuscripts, however: Graham Caie notes that the Ellesmere glosses "are written in as large and as careful a hand as the actual text, which is placed off-centre to make room for the glosses. ... In a sense it is a misnomer to call them

'marginalia' at all" (1976: 350).¹² More recently, scholars have begun to recognize such glosses as important evidence of the response of early readers to Chaucer's last work (see Schibanoff 1988: 91 n. 46 for a recent bibliography).

The Ellesmere glosses vary in origin, purpose, and language (Chaucer, *Ellesmere*, ed. Furnivall). Some are in English, some in Latin. Many are simply indexical, annotations of the content of the texts they stand next to, e.g., "Of the vertu of the steede of bras" (next to l. 115 of the Squire's Tale). Others act as scholarly footnotes, e.g., short source-citations, such as "Petrus Comestor" (next to l. 4399 of the Nun's Priest's Tale), or the longer quotations from Petrarch's Latin original that accompany the Clerk's Tale. The most intriguing glosses seem to cluster around the texts dealing with women, particularly the energetic refutations of the Wife of Bath's readings of St. Paul, Jerome, and other *auctoritates*.

Chaucer was not the only author to attract glosses in this period. The two earliest manuscripts of Hoccleve's *Regement of Princes* (BL Arundel 38 and Harley 4866, both early 15th c.), the copying of which was supervised by the author himself, both carry Latin annotations. BL Harley 4826 (after 1450) contains Lydgate's *Fall of Princes*, with many indexical English glosses, while its version of Hoccleve's *Regement* includes many marginal Latin maxims, identified as from Augustine, Barnardus, and Genesis, among others. Similar maxims adorn the pages of even the anonymous *Mum and*

¹²Glosses occur in almost half of the 58 complete manuscripts of the *Canterbury Tales* (Schibanoff 1988: 71). Doyle and Parkes (1979) note that although Hengwrt 154 is probably the earliest surviving copy of the *Canterbury Tales* (p. xix), "the size and design of the pages were not really adequate for all the content they were to take, for apparently the extent of the Latin marginal annotations to some tales was not anticipated at the outset of the enterprise" (pp. xxxiii-iv). The essay provides a useful discussion of the complex relationship between the Hengwrt and Ellesmere versions of the glosses (p. xxxiv). See Fichte 1988 (126-31) for an analysis of these glosses' function and speculations on their origins.

the Sothsegger (BL Add. 41666, 2d third 15th c.). These examples have been collected at random, from manuscripts I have seen or from editions of the texts; such non-Chaucerian glosses have not, to my knowledge, been studied by any scholar.

It is rarely clear who wrote all these glosses, when, for what reason, and with what intention. Their manuscript history can be complex: glosses in the same manuscript may be in different languages and hands; scribes (or editors) did not necessarily copy all or only the glosses in front of them; and some manuscripts may accompany a text from one exemplar with glosses from another (Caie 1976: 351). Interpretation of the juxtaposition of text and comment can be difficult: e.g., the perhaps fanciful lengths to which Susan Schibanoff (1988) takes her readings of two glossators' approaches to the Wife of Bath's Prologue.

To what extent do literary glosses imply that the author, scribe, commissioner, or editor (if any) of the manuscript expected it to be read privately? Many glosses, especially those in English, are simply indexical; like the running heads and pictures in the Ellesmere manuscript, they would help you find the tale or the passage you wanted to read. This function would serve a private or public reader equally. Any reading of the Latin glosses citing authorities and quoting maxims or sources, however, would clearly tend to be private.

But how often were these glosses read? Their presence certainly served other functions than the edification of potential readers. Tatlock and Brusendorff regarded the glosses as window-dressing, "an indication of the medieval 'love of learning' and fondness for citing authorities rather than as a specific comment on or response to the text" (quoted in Schibanoff 1988: 73). Glosses also, clearly, confer prestige on vernacular writings, presenting them as serious literature and their authors as deeply read individuals. The glosses would not have to be *read* for these messages to get across; they are,

in this sense, a kind of phatic textuality. They communicate by their existence.

Not, of course, that the glosses were not read. No doubt they sometimes were; and no doubt they sometimes weren't. For whatever the glosses and the *ordinatio* imply, the texts they are in refer many times and unambiguously to public reading. This applies not only to the *Canterbury Tales* but also to later texts such as the *Fall of Princes*. The conclusions reached above about Gower would seem still to apply to the first half of the fifteenth century. Latin glosses could evoke many responses in those who handled the manuscript. They were available for private reading and study if educated people wanted to plumb the text's *auctoritas*. They were there to impress anyone else who looked at the manuscript. And they were there for any educated prelector who wanted or was asked to comment on the text as he was reading it aloud. The bimodality of reading behavior and the duality of narrative still provide a viable framework within which to interpret such visual elements of text presentation.¹³ Nonetheless, the proliferation of these visual elements further establishes for the readers a prestige-conferring atmosphere of scholarship.

¹³This conclusion is supported by Anne Hudson's comments on Lollard reading (not included in my main discussion, since I am not considering religious reading). Hudson notes that the "method of citation with precise reference to sources is reflected through a great number of vernacular Lollard writings, even when the intended audience would appear to have been far removed from the academic world" (1989: 129).

Hudson also notes "the high value that Lollards set upon literacy, and the lengths that they would go to educate themselves first to read books and then to comprehend their arguments" (p. 125). Nonetheless, these Lollard texts were often read aloud. Hudson cites as a typical example of Lollard reading that of "William Follegh, a parishioner of Devizes, who in 1434 admitted to the officials of Bishop Nevill of Salisbury that he, along with other heretics, 'was woned an vsted to here in secret place, yn holkys and hynes, the redyng of the byble yn englyssh and to thys redyng gaffe entendance by many yerys'" (p. 132).

"Read" was beginning to slide--not towards private reading per se so much, as towards a sense of intensified engagement with a text, on the model of scholastic or humanistic reading. Since scholastic and humanistic reading could well be public, "read" was not becoming exclusively private;¹⁴ but since these scholarly forms of reading also *could* be private, much more often than recreational reading traditionally had been--and since the glosses would usually be read privately if at all--"read" was also picking up some sense of privacy. At the same time, the texts in which these academicisms flourished were often *specula principis*, whose frequent references to aural reception recall their intended role of promoting public-sphere discussions of important sociopolitical issues. The intensified sense of "reading" might thus correspond to an authorial desire not for private reading but for a more thoughtful public reading, perhaps bolstered by previous private consultative reading of the glosses and other aids. The influence of England's late-blooming humanism on this mix of modalities will be reflected in the discussion of the *Fall of Princes* in Chapter 5.

CONCLUSION: PUBLIC READING ON THE MODALITY PLATEAU

The preceding sections unite along the one axis of public-ness, discovering in many aspects of late medieval English literature a consistent attraction to

¹⁴Petrarch's interaction with Boccaccio's *Griselda* story offers abundant evidence of aurality among the humanists. As he related in 1373, Petrarch first memorized and recited the tale in Italian; his "auditors were delighted," he comments (in Robinson and Rolfe 1898: 192). When he had completed his translation into Latin, he tried it out on two friends in succession; we find out that both were reading it aloud when Petrarch tells us that the first one had to stop because his voice was too choked with tears, whereas the second read on firm-voiced to the end (pp. 195-96).

English and later French and Italian humanism also institutionalized a domestic form of scholarly-recreational aurality through the common upper-class practice of employing scholars to read and expound classic texts--bringing the academic lecture into the home (see Chapter 3).

publicly mediated forms of experience. Any facile equation of aural and individual as modalities with "oral" and "literate" as cultural categories breaks down under this analysis. Rather, the ethnographic approach reveals aural-ity playing an important role in such "literate" (or endophoric) domains as Richard de Bury's bibliophilia, university lectures, and public-sphere discussions of sociopolitical issues. At the same time it went on providing profit and delight to companionable groups engaged in the relatively exophoric activity of hearing familiar stories retold. Medieval writers portray public reading not as a byproduct of technological deficiencies but as an emotionally and/or intellectually engaging, multisensory, sociable, satisfying, and productive focus of human interaction. It is not until the early sixteenth century that any writer associates aural-ity with the factor that dominates modern scholars' explanations: illiteracy.

The preference for publicly formulated experience is reflected in many ways. As Chapter 4 will argue, Chaucer's depictions of reading show a consistent positive association for public recreational reading and for private professional reading that returns to the public realm via preaching, teaching, or writing. Secretive private reading that serves the individual's profit only (there are both pragmatic and professional instances) attract negative connotations, while several humorous hypothetical cases associate private reading with the loss of physical or mental health. This analysis is supported by Peter Goodall's recent examination of "privy" behavior in Chaucer. Associated usually with forlorn or scheming lovers, he notes, solitude "is most characteristically a tragic predicament, forced upon one. ... Nobody seems to enjoy solitude or to seek it for pleasure's sake. It seems to be viewed as an unnatural condition to be remedied" (1992: 4). The discussion of Malory in Chapter 5 will show a similar profile in cases of "privy" and "opyn" reading. Indeed, the final, fatal episodes of the *Morte* could be plotted out through the interplay of these two words, in which "privy" carries consistent associations of treachery.

The idea of literature as an inherently communal activity comes through in the illuminations depicting writers and readers. As noted above, writers may be shown alone, surrounded by the books from which, we are meant to understand, they are drawing their own text (see Figs. 14-16). This is literary-professional reading; but almost every picture of recreational reading I have yet seen shows the author reading to a group (see, e.g., Figs. 10-13). Few of these miniatures could be considered as records of actual reading events (see Chapter 5 for a discussion of one that may be), yet even as symbolic statements they make it clear that the literary experience was held to be innately communal. In every picture, no matter how much room there is, the listeners cluster tightly together, a motif that seems to express the bonding effect of a shared reading. Of course, such an evocation of aural reading could only be appreciated by someone holding the manuscript in his or her hands. But that undisputed fact does not pose a paradox, since textuality is no bar to aurality. The manuscript was there, available for reading or viewing, privately or publicly, as occasion and taste suggested.

The literary, theoretical, and artistic testimony reviewed in this chapter--along with the detailed discussions in the following chapters--provide the basis for the contention I have been making throughout this thesis: that their preference for public, shared experience encouraged medieval English readers to go on reading publicly long after technological improvements had removed the "deficiencies" with which modern scholars associate the practice. While literacy and the middle classes rose, paper became available, the book-trade expanded, and Gutenberg was floating loans from Fust, people kept right on reading aloud. It had not occurred to them that they did so only because of illiteracy and the shortage of books, and it did not occur to them to stop as these conditions changed. They went on reading aloud because they went on deriving from the experience the many and

complex benefits that, as far as they knew, had always been the reason they liked reading aloud.

It is beyond me to identify and analyze all the social, historical, economic, intellectual, and other factors that placed reading on this long modality plateau, and that moved it, at last, onwards again; but all the data I have reviewed convince me that the plateau happened. Those data do, however, suggest that authors such as Gower--along with the other literary professionals who prepared later glossated manuscripts--instigated a crossover of scholarly-professional literacy into recreational environments. Over the course of the early and mid-fifteenth century, this tendency mingled with a common emphasis on the didactic benefits to be derived from reading and discussing literary texts to foster the displacement of "read" towards an increasingly endophoric and a relatively more dividual connotation. This process, carrying on slowly into the late fifteenth century, then abruptly flips into endophoric high gear.

The following chapters take us into the data upon which this and the previous chapters have been basing their discussions. Chapter 3 reviews historical reports of both Franco-Burgundian and British reading. Chapter 4 will look exclusively at Chaucer; and Chapter 5 will survey other recreational texts from the late fourteenth through the early sixteenth century.



Figure 1: Pragmatic public reading: Vitruvius prelecting to masons (right); presenting the book to his patron (left). (c. 1400-5; France; Vitruvius, *De architectura*; Bibl. Med. Laur., Plut. 30.10, f. 1.)



Figure 2: Pragmatic private reading: Pandarus hands Criseyde the first love-letter from Troilus (right); Criseyde reads the letter privately (left). (3d qtr 15th c.; W. France; *Roman de Troilus*; Bodl. Douce 331, f. 19v.)



Figure 3: Clerical-religious public reading: Lector reads to monks at meal. (Mid-15th c.; Flanders; Suso, *Horloge de Sapience*; Bibl. Roy. IV.111, f. 20v.)

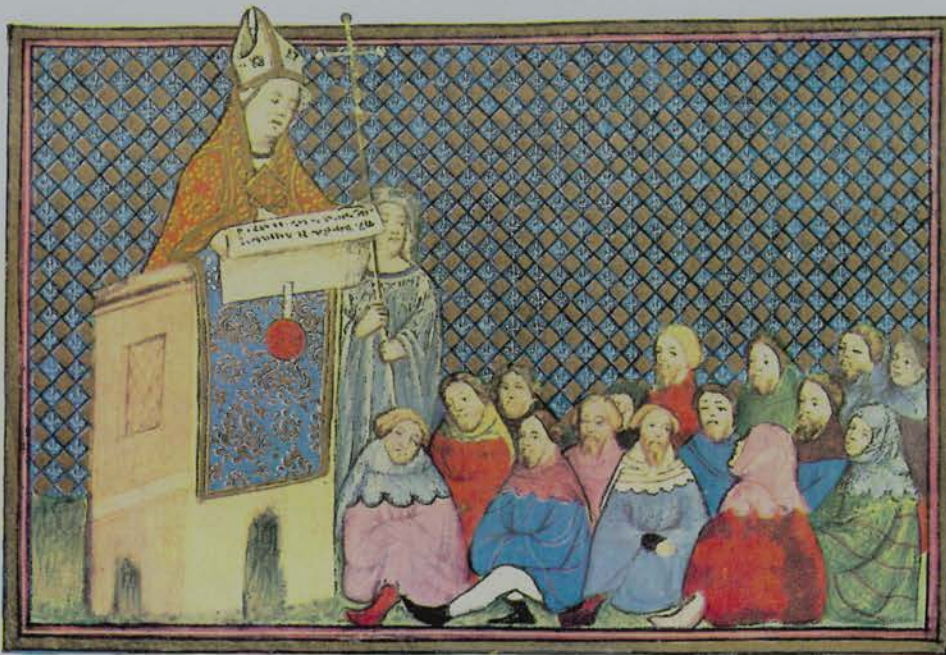


Figure 4: Clerical-religious public reading: Archbishop Arundel preaching in the cause of Henry IV. (Early 15th c.; London; Jean Froissart, *Chroniques*; Brit. Lib. Harley 1319, f. 12r.)



Figure 5: Lay-religious public reading: Annunciation (detail); in upper right, woman reading to Mary as she spins. (2d half 15th c.; Northern Low Countries; panel painting, Musée d'Art Ancien, Brussels.)



Figure 6: Clerical-religious private reading: Richard the Hermit reading alone in the wilderness. (Note that by cutting off the sky above Richard, this reproduction obscures the fact that he is not reading in total solitude; above him, in the manuscript, hover three angels.) (2d qtr 15th c.; England; Brit. Lib. Cotton Faustina B.vi., pt. 2, f. 8v.)



In hac anima
 dilectissimi et omni
 dilata. F. et. D. ut
 alias qdes dologi
 ans qd dicit legem
 do hinc oromani
 q qm mactet p aca
 came mltis debilib;
 i par mē i omni reo
 ga volu ē vie lem
 uolēne pūctas q
 per uera lica itatis
 pccatē moice n mīq
 dūget auitēs. F. m.

Daba tū ipse id qd uie scirene utatis altitudo p scelt
 et ei meū fluctuātē qm ueniat ad nū. ut ea q ouo
 legēto cō. us seplem ad quibā cōmthencōis uota
 bles solent a pūctē redigē: nōtāre scāz mathe.
 arismetice pēti ul' geometē qz dāi seqūa pccētē
 b' iūmūt: uelut fūns icēmū tablīb; filiamtis. S. d.
 illeall' aīmū acpielat aces. ut supōues pūctēnē
 Al' iūctat mī uoce hales tōl' edifiq; qd' ipr' siūne
 ut libū seqz iūctē: scitua. Sicq; seq' tūl' dūm' uitas
 et pccōtū filon' uitate pēctē a' uelō' aīmū' autis
 iūctōl' ut' p'atē' uitas nōbles fūntē' cathene a' i' p'auo
 amōib' i' hūis iactus tōa' op'is artificōse surgēt arbor

Figure 7: Scholarly-professional public reading: The Cistercian Pierre de Ceffons lecturing at the College Saint-Bernard de Paris. (Mid-14th c.; Troyes, Bibl. Mun. 62, f. 1.)



Figure 8: Scholarly-professional public reading: Avicenna portrayed as a medieval university lecturer. (Bet. 1475-1500; France; Gerard of Cremona, *De medicina*; Hunterian 9 [S.1.9], f. 1.)

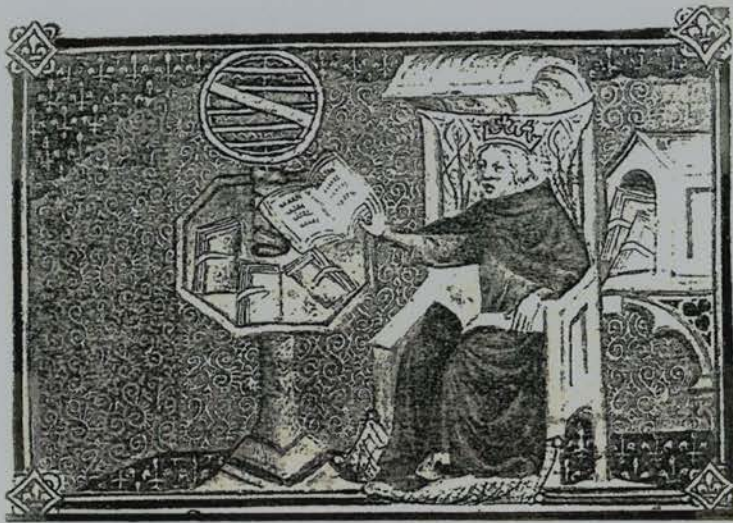


Figure 9: Scholarly-professional private reading: Charles V of France, in the robe of a university master, reading an astronomical treatise alone in his study. (c. 1364-73; Paris; St. John's Coll. Oxford MS. 164, f. 1.)



Figure 10 (left): Literary-professional public reading: Jean Froissart reading to three little people. (Bet. 1362-94; France; Froissart, *Poésies*; Bibl. Nat. fr. 831, f. 1v.)

Figure 11 (right): Literary-professional public reading: Guillaume de Machaut reading to a small group. (c. 1380; France; Machaut, *Poésies*; Bibl. Nat. fr. 22545, f. 75v.)



Figure 12: Literary-professional public reading: Flavius Vegetius reading *De re militari* to an emperor and his knights. (Early 15th c.; France; Flavius Vegetius, *De re militari*; Bodl. Laud lat. 56, f. 1.)



Figure 13: Literary-professional public reading: Sappho reading to three men. (Early 15th c.; France; Boccaccio, *Des cleres et nobles femmes*; Brit. Lib. Royal 16 G.v, f. 57v.)

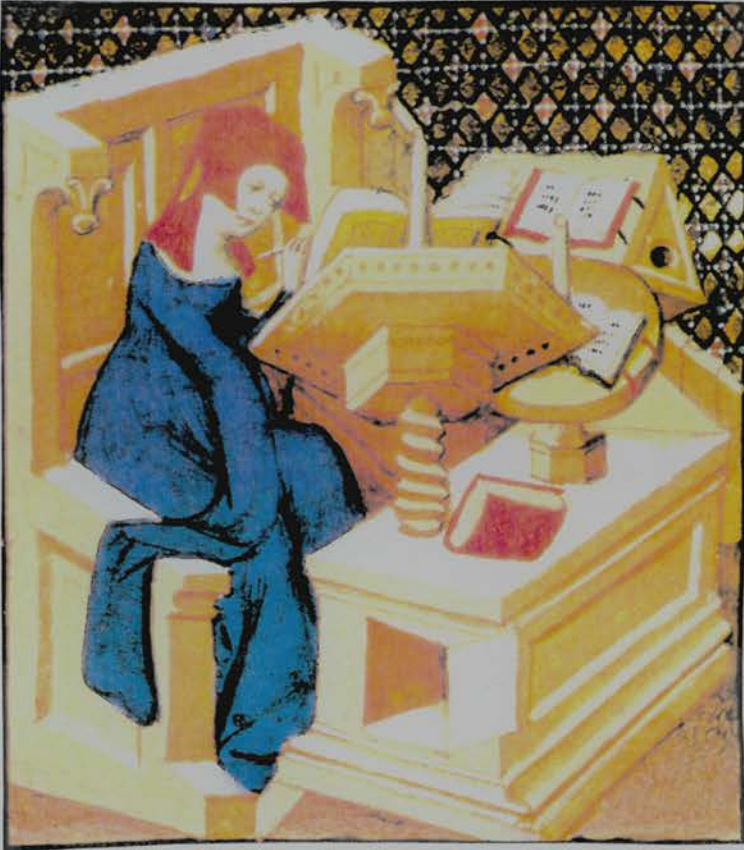


Figure 14: Author writing. (1402-3; France; Bibl. Nat., fr. 598, f. 43.)

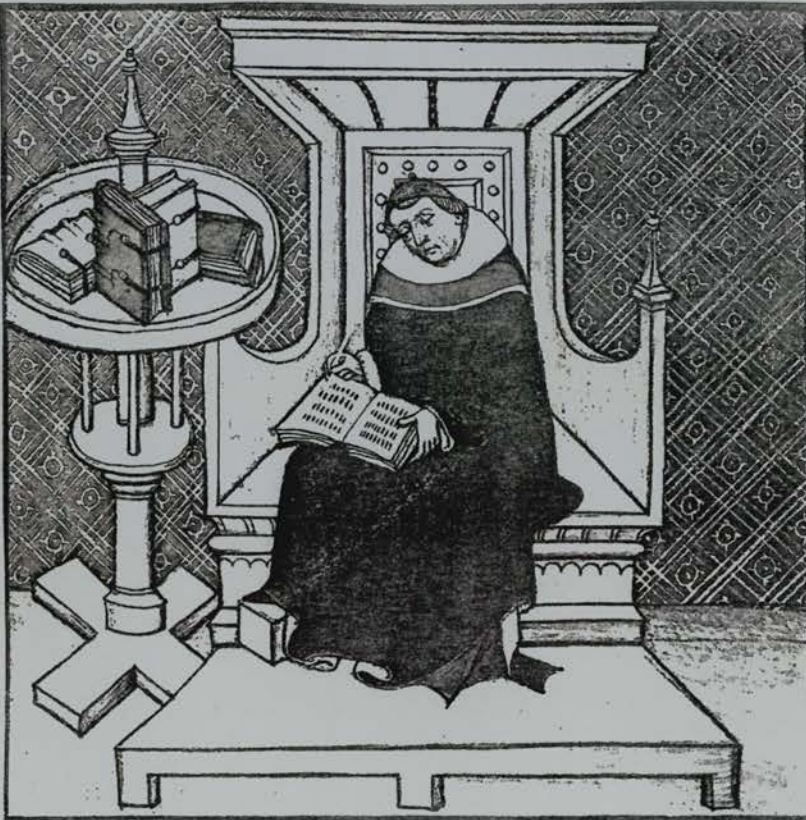


Figure 15: The author at work: "Docteur seant en une chere ... vestu en guise de moine et devant lui une table pleine de livres." (c. 1400; Paris; *Grandes Chroniques de France*; Bibl. Nat., fr. 73, f. 86v.)



Figure 16: Author writing in his study. (1455; Lille; Jean Miélot, *Avis pour faire le passage d'outre-mer*; Bibl. Roy. 9095, f. 1.)



Figure 17: Jean Wauquelin (author) or Simon Nockart (intermediary) presenting the translation to Philip the Good. (1448; Flanders; Wauquelin, *Chroniques de Hainault*, v. 1; Bibl. Roy. 9242, f. 1.)



Figure 18: Philip the Good visiting Wauquelin as he writes the book. (Mid-15th c.; Flanders; Jean Wauquelin, *Chroniques de Hainault*, v. 3; Bibl. Roy. 9244, f. 3.)



Figure 19: Man reading book to Philip the Good and his court. (1468; Flanders; Jean Wauquelin, *Chroniques de Hainault*, v. 2; Bibl. Roy. 9243, f. 1.)



Figure 20: Chaucer in pulpit addressing Richard II and court. (1st qtr 15th c.; London; Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*; Corpus Christi Cambridge MS. 61, f. 1v.)



Figure 21: Chaucer holding an open book. (15th c.; London; Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*; Brit. Lib. Lansdowne 851, f. 2r.)



Figure 22: St. David holding an open book. (Before 1483; London; Hastings Hours; Brit. Lib. Add. 54782, f. 40.)



Figure 23: The Clerk with some of his books. (Early 15th c.; London; Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*; Ellesmere MS., f. 92.)

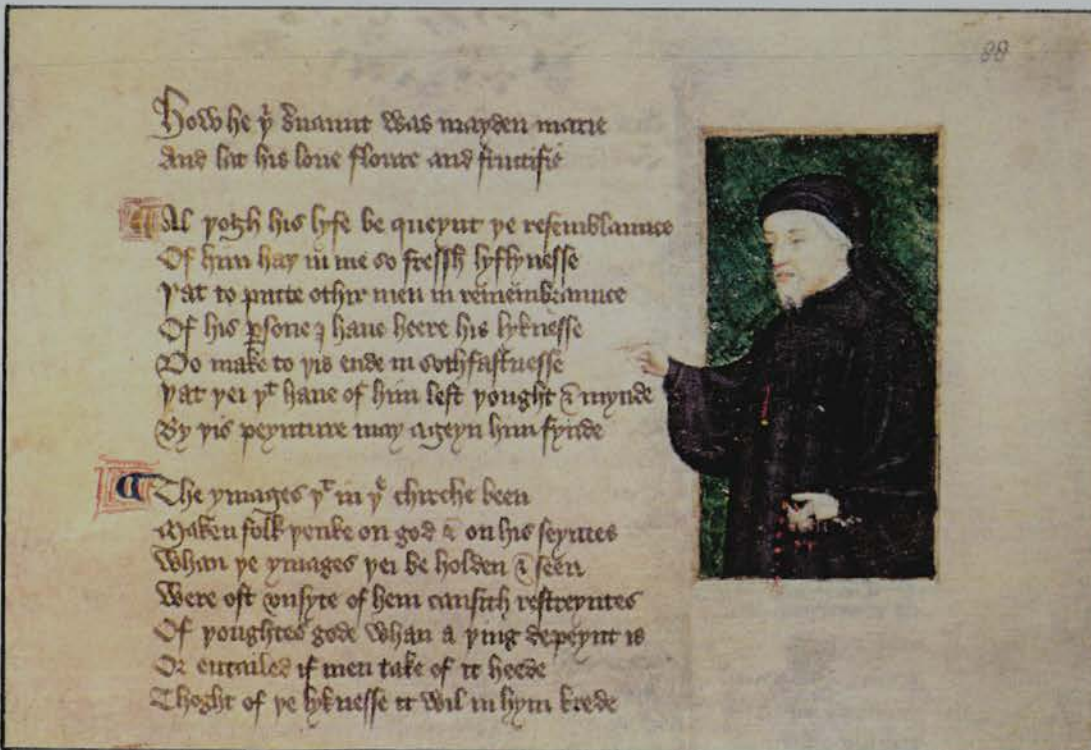


Figure 24: Portrait of Chaucer. (Early 15th c.; London; Thomas Hoccleve, *The Regement of Princes*; Brit. Lib. Harley 4866, f. 88.)



Figure 25: Teaching scene: "Vox audita perit / littera scripta manet." (1481; London; woodcut; *Mirroure of the World*, pub. William Caxton.)

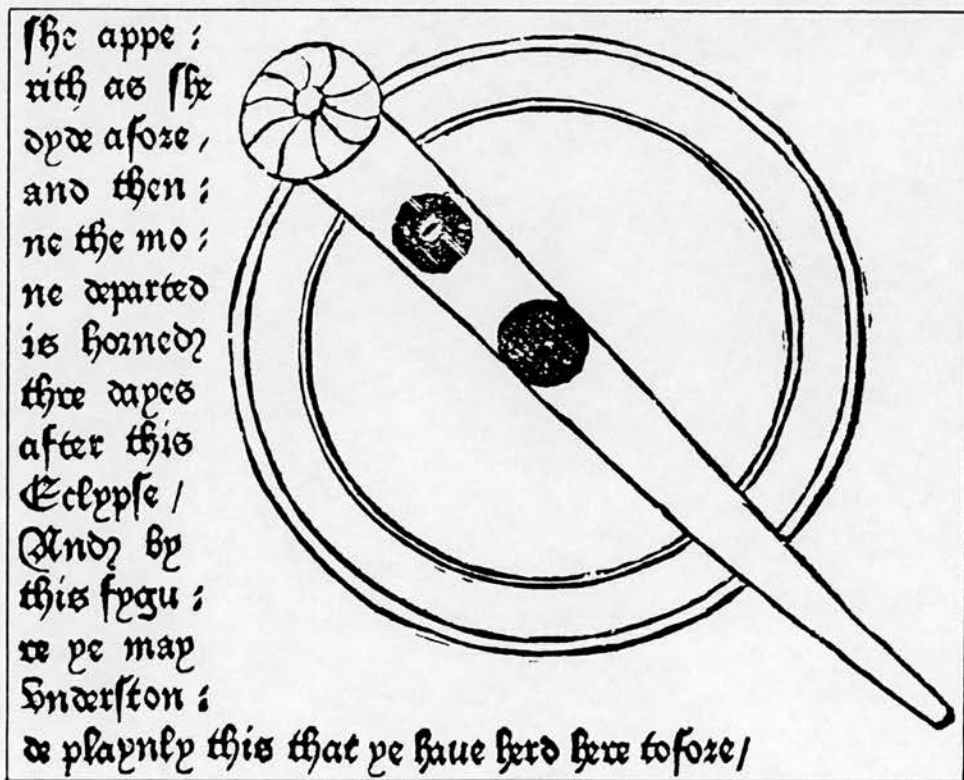


Figure 26: Eclipse: "And by this fyguere ye may vnderstonde playnly this that ye haue herd here tofore." (1481; London; woodcut; *Mirroure of the World*, pub. William Caxton.)

CHAPTER 3

AURAL HISTORY

In amongst the battles, intrigues, and acts of ostentation that form the substance of their accounts, medieval chroniclers also preserved for us an occasional, often fascinating glimpse of contemporary reading habits. In this chapter I will quote and analyze these passages, from chronicles and other historical texts. I have not attempted a full ethnography of these sources, along the lines laid down in the previous chapter and applied in the following two chapters' discussion of literary sources. That is, I haven't read in the historical texts widely and at random, searching for anything of interest, since I hadn't time to read in full the dozens of medieval chronicles and other records available, in three languages. Rather, I have followed up references in secondary works that have led me to historical descriptions of the recreational reading of secular vernacular texts, in England and Scotland, and in two regions with which England had close cultural ties. Within the collection thus assembled, however, I have applied an ethnographic methodology of bracketing the texts in time and place, reading them in their full context, and seeking to work outwards from the detail they provide.

Although these texts are not infrequently cited in discussions of medieval reading, the citations are usually made in passing, an example or two paraphrased in a sentence. A good deal more can be learned, I believe, by pooling a number of such key examples and quoting them in greater detail. I will also cite a few discussions of the lay reading of devotional

material,¹ which seems to move fluidly between private and public formats. The Franco-Burgundian material is included both because there are more "field reports" to draw on from those regions and because they make a highly instructive contrast to the British texts.

Overall, the extracts that follow below reveal monarchs, nobles, lawyers, theologians, and assorted other high-born and indubitably literate people reading lyrics, romances, or histories (and, lumped with the histories sometimes, philosophical and devotional texts). The evidence comes from France, the Burgundian court in and around Flanders, England, and Scotland, and from the mid-fourteenth to the late fifteenth century. In almost every case the reading is a public one; the duke or whoever is being read to. As support to my thesis that prelection was the preferred method of late medieval reading, the evidence below amounts almost to overkill.

These findings would not be vitiated by any reports of a monarch, noble, or other person choosing to do their recreational reading privately. More such reports may indeed exist than the few I found and excerpt below. But the two formats do not cancel each other out; as noted in Chapter 2, nothing prevented the same individual from reading privately one time and publicly another. What matters, in this context, is not that people may have sometimes read privately, or even that some people only read privately, but that many people--and many important people--went on reading publicly at the same time. Although the evidence below chiefly concerns members of the upper classes, it would seem logical to assume that less notable readers would also tend to have read publicly, both because they too preferred that format and, possibly, in imitation of the habits of their social superiors.

While the votes for public reading pile up over the coming pages, the texts will be able to make a further, more focused, and unique contribution.

¹For convenience, the category "devotional" will be understood to include religious material such as the Bible and biblical commentaries.

Quoted at length, they provide many fascinating details about the personnel, manner, time, and places involved in actual instances of public reading. They confirm, too, that public reading took as many and as complex forms as any other form of reading; within genres and across them, and from one country to the other, we will see a wide variety of motives and functions underlying the experience of public reading. Exploration of these various auralitys may help to dispel the essentialist assumption that orality or aurality always entails a fixed set of cultural and literary traits.

These records, assembled here for their first in-depth analysis as evidence of reading behavior, will thus enable us to conceptualize in unaccustomed detail the medieval experience of public reading. They also pile up overwhelming evidence that upper-class, indubitably literate people enjoyed public reading both during and long after Chaucer's lifetime.

HISTORICAL RECORDS OF READING FORMATS

We turn now to the historical records to build a picture of reading as the medievals themselves saw it. Within my limited range, as noted above, I will proceed "ethnographically." That is, rather than construct a composite report based on selective quotes from my material, I would prefer to let the texts speak for themselves first (in the original language if not English), and then comb them over to derive as much information as possible. The translations below are mine unless otherwise noted; I have tried to follow the text as closely as possible, despite the sometimes awkward phrasing that results. This way, my readers will be able both to assess the accuracy of my translations and interpretations, and, perhaps, to discover other points of interest for themselves in the texts.

The material will be reviewed in two large sections, the first dealing with French and Burgundian reading, and the second with English and Scottish reading. Each section will begin with a list of the texts to be quoted

and an introduction. Then, according to the generic breakdown appropriate to the section, the texts will be quoted and analyzed. This method will demonstrate that both across and within the two large cultural areas, there are contrasts of aural reading behavior that could be considered to constitute distinct auralities and subauralities.

FRANCE AND THE DUKEDOM OF BURGUNDY

LOVE POETRY

Eustache Deschamps, 1364, 1392

Jean Froissart, c. 1370

Les Cent Ballades, 1390

ROMANCE

Jean Froissart, c. 1370, 1388-89

HISTORIES (WITH PHILOSOPHICAL AND DEVOTIONAL WRITINGS)

Charles V, 1364-80

Jean de Berry, 1360-1416

Louis de Bourbon, 1356-1410, 1407

Jean le Maingre de Boucicaut, 1409

Philip the Good, 1462, (1468)

Charles the Bold, 1450s-77

Dedications, 15th c.

Libraries, 15th c.

I will begin with the reports from France and from the dukes of Burgundy. These regions and their courts are generally considered to have always been "ahead" of England in various ways, including in the sophistication and self-awareness of their writers and artists. The rulers actively patronized these groups with an energy unknown to England; Charles V, for example, commissioned many translations; he and his brothers the dukes of Berry, Anjou, and Burgundy sponsored writers such as Christine de Pizan; and the dukes of Burgundy in the later fifteenth century underwrote a book industry that produced some of the most splendid illuminated manuscripts of the

Middle Ages. If private reading is a symptom of a more sophisticated, "literate" audience, and if it is to be found anywhere in the Middle Ages, then we surely should find it in the courts of France and Burgundy.

The reports of Franco-Burgundian reading behavior fall into three clear categories, by genre of text read: love poetry, romance, and histories (often grouped with philosophical and devotional works). The discussion below will present the primary texts, followed by a general analysis, in each category, with a concluding comparative analysis at the end of the section.

Love Poetry

For the purposes of the present discussion, "love poetry" can be defined very generally as any form of verse dealing primarily with the personal experience of romantic love, in either an autobiographical or theoretical vein.

Eustache Deschamps, 1364, 1392

Eustache Deschamps (c. 1346-c. 1406) describes the performance of love poetry in two different contexts. The first is a ballade recounting how he prelected the *Voir Dit*, his friend Guillaume de Machaut's autobiographical account of his love affair with a young noblewoman. Addressing Machaut, Deschamps relates how he presented the poem to Louis de Male, the count of Flanders, at Bruges in 1364:

Je lui baillié voz lettres en papier
 Et vo livre qu'il aime chierement;
 Lire m'y fist, present maint chevalier;
 Si adresçay au lieu premierement
 Ou Fortune parler si durement,
 Comment l'un joint a sens biens, l'autre estrange.
 De ce parlent, mais nulz n'en va parlant,
 Qui en die fors qu'a vostre louenge. (balade 127, ll. 17-24)

(I delivered him your letters in paper
 And your book that he loved dearly;
 He made me read it, before many knights;
 Then discussed in the first place
 [The lines] Where Fortune speaks so sternly,
 How one gives away his goods, and the other withholds them.
 Of this they spoke, but none left speaking
 Who said anything that wasn't praise of you.)

In this ballade Deschamps helpfully gives Machaut a taste of the audience feedback, and demonstrates the way in which public reading promoted audience participation and bonding.

In his famous *Art de dictier*² (1392), a theoretical and practical guide to the short verse forms used primarily for love poetry, Deschamps cannot even conceive of these verses as silently or privately read. Rather confusingly, he places such poetry in the quadrivium, as a form of "music"; and he notes that there are two forms: artificial and natural. Artificial music is, essentially, instrumental music or words sung, ideally with a proper three-part harmony. Natural music "est une musique de bouche en proferant paroules metrifées, aucunefoiz en laiz, autrefoiz en balades, ..." (p. 270) ("is a music of the mouth offering metrical words, sometimes in lays, sometimes in ballades, ..."). That is, it is poetry spoken, not sung. "Les faiseurs d'icelle," Deschamps says,

ne saichent pas communement la musique artificiele ne donner chant par art de notes a ce qu'ilz font, toutesvoies est appellée musique ceste science naturele, pour ce que les diz et chançons par eulx faiz ou les livres metrifiez se lisent de bouche, et proferent par voix non pas chantable, tant que les douces paroles ainsis faictes et recordées par voix plaisent aux escoutans qui les oyent, si que au Puy

²The full title of this work is *L'Art de dictier et de fere chançons, balades, virelais et rondeaulx, et comment anciennement nul ne osoit apprendre les .vii. ars liberaulx ci après declarez, se il n'estoit noble* ("The art of writing verse and of making songs, ballades, virelais and rondeaux, and how formerly no one dared learn the seven liberal arts discussed here below, if he wasn't noble").

d'amours³ anciennement et encores est acoustumez en plusieurs villes et citez des pais et royaumes du monde. (p. 271)

(These makers don't usually know about artificial music nor how to sing their compositions with the art of notes. Still, this natural knowing is called music, because the *dits* and songs or metered books they make are read with the mouth, and proffered by voice if not sung. Thus the sweet words thus made and repeated by voice please the listeners who hear them, just as it formerly was and still is the custom in the puy d'amour [see note 3], in many towns and cities of the countries and realms of the world.)

Deschamps seems to struggle to evolve a concept of spoken, not sung poetry; he notes that such a choice is sometimes necessary,

comme entre seigneurs et dames estans a leur privé et secretement, ... ou [on pourrait] lire aucun livre de ces choses plaisans devant un malade, et autres cas semblables ou le chant musicant n'aroit point lieu pour la haulteur d'icellui, et la triplicité des voix pour les teneurs et contreteneurs neccessaires ... (p. 272)

(as between lords and ladies in secret and private retreat, ... or [one might] read a book of pleasant things before a sick person, and other such cases where musical song wouldn't be suitable because of its loudness, and because you need three voices, with tenors and countertenors ...)

The "seduction context" here invoked would naturally encourage a poet to recite or read his poem aloud himself. Even when recorded in "livres metrifiez" ("metered books"), however, this poetry "se lisent de bouche" ("is read with the mouth"); Deschamps never considers any other format possible. So much for a sophisticated French poet and contemporary of Chaucer's, writing a theoretical treatise on vernacular poetry.

³Beginning as a poetical competition among troubadors, the puy spread across France, varying in character between a guild and a confraternity and including bourgeois amateurs among the contestants (Chaytor 1945, rpt. 1967: 134-35; see also Faral 1971: 139-42).

Jean Froissart, c. 1370

The supposedly autobiographical *Espinette amoureuse*⁴ of Jean Froissart (c. 1337-c. 1410), written c. 1370, provides a very circumstantial "field report" of the reading of romances and love poetry. (Since the two genres are closely linked in this text, I will include the romance-reading here and mention it again in the section on "Romance," below.) This charming account of a youthful courtship, wound around exchanges of books, prelection, word games, gifts of flowers, and dancing, begins with an account of Froissart's sentimental education, self-administered in his adolescence. He spent one winter, he says, reading romances, especially "les traitiers / D'amours" (ll. 315-16) ("treatises / Of love"). His "reading" in this passage is ambiguous: perhaps private or perhaps public. The latter may be suggested by his remark that

... plaisance avoie au retraire
Les fais d'amours et al oïr,
Ja n'en peuisse je joïr. (ll. 322-24)

(... I had pleasure in relating
And in hearing the deeds of love,
Which as yet I couldn't enjoy.)

When the weather improves, he goes about town and spies a young woman reading by herself:

Droitement sus l'eure de prime
S'esbatoit une damoiselle
Au lire .I. rommanc. Moi vers elle
M'en ving ... (ll. 696-99)

(Right upon the hour of prime
There was a damsel amusing herself

⁴While the autobiographical content is surely fictionalized to some extent, the poem may be acceptable evidence in a chapter on history in that it keeps to a contemporary, detailed, and plausible narrative in the manner of Machaut's *Voir Dit* (see Burrow 1971: 48-49).

In reading a romance. I towards her
Betook myself ...)

Because the reflexive verb "s'esbatoit" is singular in number, and because it is obvious, once Froissart joins her, that he and the demoiselle are alone, we can be sure that she was reading not to friends or family but to herself, privately. (Indeed, Ruth Crosby cites this passage as "one of the few instances I have found in the romances in which mention is made of any-one's reading to himself" [1936: 97 n. 4]). The next minute, however, Froissart has approached the young woman, learned that her book is the romance *Cleomadès*, and accepted her offer to read some of it to him. Then he reads a few folios to her. Later, she asks to borrow a book from him, "Car lires est uns douls mestiers" (l. 850) ("For reading is a sweet occupation"). He sends her a copy of the *Bailli d'Amour*,⁵ into which he inserts a ballade he has written for her, but he is disappointed when she returns the book with the poem evidently undisturbed and unread (ll. 870-959).

From this point on the budding poet writes and sends his lady a series of verses, each of which is duly reproduced in the text. In each case her method of receiving and reading, or not reading, these tributes reflects her response to Froissart's suit. A friend of hers whose sympathy he has enlisted, for example, "finds" one of his poems and exclaims,

"J'ai chi escript une cançon.
Par amours, voelliés le me lire."
Et ma dame prist lors a rire,
Qui tost pensa dont ce venoit,
Et dist: "Cha!" [Ca!] Quant elle le voit,
Souef en basset le lisi.
De sa bouce riens el n'issi

⁵According to the *Espinette's* editor, the *Bailli d'Amour* is an allegorical romance better known now as the *Cour d'Amour* (Paris, Bibl. Nat. fr. nouv. acq. 1731). In it, various people come to the Court of Love, which is presided over by the "grant Baillie d'Amours," to present their complaints and sorrows (p. 176 note to l. 871).

Fors tant, par maniere de glose:
 "Ce qu'il demande, c'est grant cose!" (ll. 1288-96)

("I've got here the text of a song.
 For love, please read it to me."
 And my lady then started to laugh,
 Who quickly thought from whom it came,
 And said: "So!" When she saw it,
 Softly and very low she read it.
 From her mouth nothing issued
 But this, by way of gloss:
 "He's certainly asking a lot!")

By mumbling the poem to herself, rather than reading it aloud as requested to her friend,⁶ the lady symbolizes her reluctance to validate Froissart as her lover—a testimony in reverse to the bonding quality of public reading. Gradually his luck improves, or his ardor finds reward; the next time the friend produces a ballade Froissart has written, the lady asks him to read it to her (ll. 3327-37): "Et elle m'en sceut trop grant gré, / Tant saciés bien, de mon secré" (ll. 3336-37) ("And she was very gracious to me, / Thus she knew my secret well"). Finally, disporting with her friends in a garden,

Lors [elle] me dist: "Porïons avoir
 Une balade?" Et je respons:
 "Oïl, dame, car en lieu sons
 Ou j'ai moult bien matere et cause
 Dou dire ent une. Vechi clause: ..." (ll. 3533-37)

(Then [she] asked me: "Could we have
 A ballade?" And I responded:
 "Yes, lady, for I'm in a place
 Where I have full good matter and cause
 To make one such. Here's the rhyme: ...")

⁶The lady was evidently one of those who vocalized even their private reading; she had also been reading *Cleomadès* aloud to herself, when Froissart first met her. He notes that as he approached her and asked her the name of her book, "Elle cloy atant la bouce, / Sa main dessus le livre adoise; / Lors respondi comme courtoise" (ll. 702-4) ("Then she closed her mouth, / Laid her hand on her place in the book; / And responded courteously").

After the recitation they discuss the content and flirt; but although he seems finally to win her love, Male Bouche turns her against him and their relationship fades away.

In this mid-fourteenth-century French literary courtship, public and private forms of reading seem to flow gracefully together, demarcating not zones or eras of illiteracy and literacy, or of Old and New Readers, but the variable permeability of personal, sexual boundaries. When the lady finally allows Froissart to read his poetry to her, it means she has accepted his love. Thus the poet's struggle is, in a way, to give himself a voice, to create an audience, and thereby to achieve both literary and (at least partial) sexual viability.

Froissart himself apparently expected that his poem about this early affair would be read aloud; in his *Joli Buisson de jonece*, he describes it as "l'Espirette Amoureuse / Qui n'est pas al oyr ireuse" (ll. 447-48; quoted in *Espinette*, p. 31) ("*Espinette amoureuse* / Which is not unpleasant to hear").

"Les Cent Ballades," 1390

In 1389, returning from the Holy Land, four French noblemen—Jean de Saint-Pierre, called le Seneschal; Jean le Maingre de Boucicaut; Philippe d'Artois, count of Eu; and Jean de Crésecque—co-wrote a courtly divertissement, the *Cent Ballades*. Back in France, probably in Avignon during Charles VI's residence there in early November 1390, the authors entertained the king and his court with a reading of their composition (who actually did the reading is not clear). Thirteen of the nobles present then responded with ballades of their own (no doubt prepared in advance) to the pilgrims' *demande d'amour*, which was: Is it better to love one person loyally, or freely to follow one's inclinations? (Raynaud 1905: xxxiv-lvi). The length of the text (200 printed pages, without the responses) suggests that

the reading may have taken place over several days, consecutively or otherwise.

Analysis

The love poetry we have surveyed above includes short, occasional pieces, in the sense of poems (ostensibly) written for a particular lady, with a great deal of coyness expended in the process of delivering the text and getting it read or reading it oneself. Other texts are of greater length and usually retrospective of a bygone love or of an alleged love-debate; these longer poems often serve among other things as the setting for many of the shorter, occasional verses.

The reports cited above agree in describing public readings (or recitations) by the author (or an author-surrogate, in the case of Deschamps' prelection of Machaut's *Voir Dit*), either to his lady or to the indisputably literate members of royal or ducal courts. In either case, public reading (or recitation) seemed best adapted to serve the author's purpose. While a lady's individual reading of a love poem might advance the poet's suit, surely he would prefer to recite or read it to her himself in some "private retreat," as envisioned by Deschamps. Yet one wonders if even this ideal reading environment would fulfill the poet's whole desire, since it is often hard to believe that the love endlessly announced and analyzed in such poetry was much more than the vehicle for the poet's attempts at linguistic virtuosity, or the ambitious man's entrée to the court's attention. Such certainly seems the case for Froissart, who spent a winter priming himself with romances before venturing out, come spring, in search of a *demoiselle* to whom he could write verses of his own--which he thoughtfully preserved for later reproduction in *L'Espinette amoureuse*. And why else would Deschamps have written a how-to book for noblemen likely to be struck by *amour courtois* and needing a little advice on how to decant their passion

into a virelay? As in the case of the *Cent Ballades*, having a poem to read entitled one to take center-stage before the court, dominating its attention and advertising one's skill or, more simply, one's existence. Thus beyond any amatory ambitions, the publicity entailed in the courtly mode of reading poems of courtly love was of itself a key inducement to take up the muse.

While the ladies responded with more or less encouraging comments, seemingly directed more at the content than the style ("He's certainly asking a lot!" was the demoiselle's gloss on Froissart's second poem), we can assume that Charles VI's court greeted the *Cent Ballades* with sophisticated appreciation, and the thirteen responses, probably, with laughter and applause. Louis de Male and his "many knights," on the other hand, provide an interesting contrast. After hearing Deschamps read Machaut's *Voir Dit*, they walked away discussing not his love affair but his comments on the role of Fortune. Their reaction resembles those we will encounter in the section on histories, below, more than what one would imagine appropriate to a love treatise. In this they provide an instructive example of the audience's interpretive autonomy.

Romances

The evidence of reading events includes a surprisingly small number of romances, although one of them is the single best-known and most often-cited public reading: Froissart's prelection of *Meliador* to Gaston de Foix. For this reason if no other it is interesting to bracket that reading by its genre and contrast it to reading of other genres (and to reading in Britain), in order to bring out ways in which it may or may not typify medieval prelection overall.

Jean Froissart, c. 1370, 1388-89

In the section above we noted several cases of romance-reading in Froissart's *Espinette amoureuse* (c. 1370). The young poet himself read, either privately or with others, various romances or treatises of love (he seems to equate the two terms). Later, he met his demoiselle reading *Cleomadès* to herself, shared in a public reading of the same text with her, and sent her the *Bailli d'Amour* to read.

Much more famous than any of these, of course, is Froissart's vivid description of the ten weeks in 1388-89 he spent reading his romance *Meliador* to the court of Gaston, count of Foix, in his castle of Orthez. The poet, no small admirer of himself, proudly recounts the incident twice, in book 3 of his *Chroniques* (1390) and in the *Dit du florin* (1389). According to the latter (the full account fills ll. 282-387), Froissart's patron, Guy, count of Blois, had written a letter of introduction for Froissart to Gaston, who received him very kindly and with whom he stayed for three months. The celebrated reading began six weeks before Christmas and lasted until four weeks after. Every night over that span, Froissart left his lodgings at midnight⁷ and went, often through rain and wind, to the count's castle. Gaston's smile soon dried him if he was wet, however, and in the bright chamber, lit like a terrestrial paradise, Froissart every night read seven pages of his text. The count "ooit volentiers" ("listened willingly"), remarking, "C'est un beaus mestiers, / Beaus maistres, de faire tels choses" (ll. 295-97) ("It's a good trade, / Fair masters, to make such things"). At the

⁷ The count was not an insomniac, as William Nelson assumes (1976/77: 112); he was simply a "night person." "L'usage du conte de Fois," Froissart notes, "est telle ou estoit alors, et l'avoit tousjours d'enfance tenu, que il se descouchoit à haulte nonne et soupoit à my-nuit" (p. 85) ("The habit of the count of Foix is such or was then, and had always been in childhood, that he rose at high noon and supped at midnight"). Latter-day "night people" will envy the count's power to make everyone around him live according to his own internal clock!

end of the reading the count (who was by now often in bed) sent the poet the rest of his wine to drink, from a golden goblet; then they said good night. As a parting gift when Froissart left Orthez, Gaston bestowed on him 80 Arragonese florins (the *Dit du florin* is Froissart's comic lament to the one coin remaining of all that loot).

The *Chroniques* account is shorter but adds a few details. As he read, Froissart notes complacently,

nulluy n'osoit sonner mot, ne parler, car il [le comte] vouloit que je fusse bien entendu. Certes, aussi il prenoit grant soulas au bien entendre, et quant il chéoit aucune chose où il vouloit mettre argument, trop volentiers en parloit à moy, non pas en son gascon, mais en bon et beau franchois. (ed. de Lettenhove 11: 85)

([in Berners' translation] none durst speke any worde, bycause he wolde I shulde be well vnderstande, wherin he tooke great solace; and whan it came to any mater of questyon, than he wolde speke to me, nat in Gascoyne, but in good and fayre frenche.) (Berners 2: 71)

The editor of *Meliador*, Auguste Longnon, substantiates Froissart's account. At 7 pages a day for 10 weeks (7 pages x 70 days), he notes, Froissart's manuscript must have had about 500 pages, which presents "une disposition sensiblement analogue à celle des deux manuscrits aujourd'hui connus" (p. v n. 2) ("an organization essentially analogous to that of the two manuscripts known today").

Analysis

Romances seem, on this little evidence, to attract some private but mostly public reading; only in the one notable case of the *Meliador* was the prelector the author. For the Froissart of *Espinette amoureuse*, shared reading was a ready medium of flirtation. He accepts the lady's offer to read the book, for example, with the compliment: "N'est sons d'instrument ne de lire / Ou je prende si grant esbat" (ll. 722-23) ("There's no instrument or reading [or "lyre"; *lire* could bear either translation] in whose sound / I

would take so great a pleasure"). Here literary romance serves as prelude to ... well, to more literary romance: to the loan of the *Bailli d'Amour* and to the composition of industriously fervent poems aimed as much at the ear as at the heart of his lady.

Gaston de Foix's willingness to sit through weeks of *Meliador* has puzzled modern scholars. Pierre Tucoo-Chala, for instance, supposes that Gaston subjected himself and his court to "cet interminable poème" in hopes that Froissart would give him a good write-up in his *Chroniques* (1981: 128-29). Whether the count would have considered Froissart's detailed account of his marital problems and filicide a due return for such long-suffering is debatable. Ten weeks, moreover, is a lot of flattery; it is difficult to think that a listener at once so autocratic and so sophisticated as Gaston would have given away so much of his time if the readings produced no pleasure at all. One might suppose, rather, that Froissart's prelections were the medieval equivalent of a soap opera, with every evening bringing the latest installment. They may have seemed an enjoyable way to pass time during the darkest, coldest months of the year. As the sponsor of this event, Gaston had the opportunity to exhibit his dominance over his courtiers, to exercise his connoisseurship by intelligent comments to the author, and, perhaps, to strengthen his links with Froissart's patron, Guy of Blois.

The single feature that seems to characterize these few and rather dissimilar cases of romance-reading (all from Froissart) is an exploitation of the genre's episodic nature (see Taylor 1992). This is what allows Froissart and his demoiselle to dip into and out of the text as their flirtation develops, and what keeps Gaston de Foix and his court on the hook (if that's where they were) from night to night over ten winter weeks. Romance seems to go with an atmosphere of relaxation; it offered an interesting narrative relieved of the intensity of the love poem or the truth-claims of history.

Histories (with Philosophical and Devotional Writings)

"Histories," in this discussion, includes chronicles, memoirs, and biographies but excludes documentary records. It may seem odd to lump this relatively informal genre in with philosophical and devotional works, but that is what several of the readers do in the reports examined below--or at least, what their chroniclers undertook to ascribe to them.

Charles V, 1364-80

Christine de Pizan's father served in the court of Charles V of France (1337-80; r. 1364-80), so that when Charles' brother, Philip the Bold of Burgundy, commissioned her to write the king's biography she was able to speak both from personal knowledge and from conversations with the late king's intimates. Her *Livre des fais et bonnes meurs du sage roy Charles V* (1404) ("Book of the deeds and good customs of the wise king Charles V") describes approvingly his taste for being read to:

En yver, par especial, s'occupoit souvent à oyr lire de diverses belles ystoires, de la sainte Escripiture, ou des fais des Romains, ou moralitez de philozophes et d'autres sciences jusques à heure de soupper, auquel s'asséoit d'assez bonne heure et estoit légierement pris; après lequel une pièce s'esbatoit, puis se retrayoit et aloit reposer: et ainsi, par continuel ordre, le sage Roy bien moriginé usoit le cours de sa vie. (bk. 1, ch. 16; Petitot 5: 280)

(In winter, especially, he often occupied himself in hearing read various fair histories, holy Scripture, or the *Fais des Romains*, or the *Moralités des philosophes* and other [works of] knowledge until the hour of supper, to which he sat down rather early and at which he ate only lightly; afterwards he amused himself for a while, then retired and went to bed: and thus, by constant order, the wise and well-educated king conducted his life.)

Christine gives some valuable insight into the role of the reader in this situation; Charles had a favorite man, his valet Gilles Malet, who also served as the first librarian in the Louvre palace. Among the "plusieurs

vertus" ("several capacities") for which Charles favored Malet was "celluy, par espécial, sur tous autres, [qu'il] souverainement bien lisoit et bien ponctoit, et entendens homs estoit" (bk. 3, ch. 21; Petitot 6: 43) ("this, especially, above all others, [that he] read and 'pointed' magnificently well, and was an intelligent man"). Christine's word "ponctoit" is a technical term of rhetoric; it means that Malet read with a dramatic emphasis that underlined the key emotional or intellectual points of the text.

The everyday nature of Malet's reading duties emerge in an anecdote Christine tells to illustrate the man's character. One day, she relates, Gilles' little son was running with a knife in his hand when he fell down and (as in every parent's nightmare) wounded himself fatally. The event, she continues,

n'est mie doute, fu grant douleur et perplexité au pere; néantmoins, cellui propre jour, fu devant le Roy, lisant longue piece par autel semblant et chiere, ne plus ne moins que à coustume avoit. (bk. 3, ch. 21; Petitot 6: 43)

(there's no doubt, caused great sorrow and perplexity to the father; nonetheless, the very same day he was before the king reading for a long time, with an appearance and expression neither more nor less than he usually had.)

Of course, the king, when he heard about the accident, was confirmed in his high opinion of Malet.

Jean de Berry, 1360-1416

John Harthan notes that the four sons of Jean II of France, of whom Charles V and Jean de Berry (1340-1416; r. 1360-1416) were two, "patronized the arts with a gusto and extravagance never before or since encountered in a single generation of one family" (1977: 53). Jean, famous as a collector of books, is often considered to have paid relatively little attention to their content. But in her biography of his royal brother, Christine depicts Jean as deeply interested in reading. Jean, she says,

se délicte et aime gens soubtilz, soyent clercs, ou autres, beaulx livres des sciences morales et histoires notables des pollicies rommaines, ou d'autres louables enseignemens; moult aime et volentiers en oit, tous ouvrages soubtilment fais et par maistrise beauls et polis. (bk. 2, ch. 12; ed. Petitot, 5: 351-52)

(delights in and loves subtle men, whether clerks or others, fair books of moral teachings and worthy histories of Roman government, or other laudable teachings; he dearly loves and gladly hears all subtly made and masterfully fair and polished works.)

Among such "louables enseignemens" may have been the *Decameron*; according to Glending Olson, in dedicating his translation of Boccaccio to the duke, Laurent de Premierfait explained "that reading or listening to the *Decameron* will enable him and others to 'acquire three profits that are mingled with three honest pleasures.'" Olson gives only the last two of Laurent's mingled pleasures-and-profits. Number two is that reading restores the body's energies; number three is that it is appropriate for lords to create occasions of joy for their people (Bib. Nat. fr. 129, f. 2v; cited in Olson 1982: 76).

Louis de Bourbon, 1356-1410

Christine's discussion of Jean de Berry occurs in a section devoted to short biographies of Charles V's brothers and sons; among these she also includes Charles' brother-in-law (his wife's brother), Louis II, duke of Bourbon (1337-1410; r. 1356-1410). In words reminiscent of her description of Berry, she says of Bourbon:

[II] en toutes choses bonnes, soubtilles et belles se délicte; livres de moralitez, de la sainte Escripiture et d'enseignement moult luy plaisent, et volentiers en ot, et luy mesmes par notables maistres en théologie a fait translater de moult beaulx. (bk. 2, ch. 14; ed. Petitot 5: 362)

([He] delights in all things good, subtle, and fair; books of morality, of the holy Scriptures and of teaching please him greatly, and he

willingly hears them, and he himself has had notable masters of theology translate many such fair books.)

Although there's no doubt that Christine thinks a taste for reading is praiseworthy, there's equally no reason to think she imputes it to anyone she's trying to praise. As eagerly as she eulogizes her other subjects, among them Philip the Bold (who commissioned her to write this book), it is only Jean de Berry and Louis de Bourbon whom she mentions as readers (or listeners).

Louis' own biographer, Jean Cabaret d'Orville, gives a corroborating account of the duke's reading that recalls Froissart in its circumstantiality. Jean describes the dangerous period after the assassination in November 1407 of Charles VI's brother, Louis d'Orléans, at the instigation of their uncle Jean the Fearless, duke of Burgundy. Charles VI was in one of his periodic fits of insanity and not holding court, so that Paris was full of dissatisfied and possibly disaffected courtiers. The 71-year-old Louis de Bourbon undertook to fill the gap by holding open house, running himself into serious debt in the process. His biographer relates how the tables would fill up with hungry "nobles hommes et officiers" ("noblemen and officers"):

et volentiers [le duc] mangeoit en tinel, pour veoir celle compaignie. Et pour ce que nul n'entendist se non à ce pour quoi séoit à table, c'estoit à estre bien aise, il vouloit que nul ne parlast, et affin que plus grande silence fust tenue, lui estant à table, avoit ordonné que devant lui ne fussent nulles gens, ou pou, se non ceulx qui estoient ordonnés à le servir, ... Et pour ce que nul ne l'occupast en son mangier, aux deux bouts de sa table estoient barres closes, si que on ne peust passer au derrière de lui pour tourber son entendement; et pour estre plus ententif aux grans affaires que il avoit au royaume, tant en conseil comme ès autres choses, dont il savoit bien venir à fin, et pour avoir plus haulte mémoire, faisoit lire à son disner continuellement les gestes des très-renommés princes, jadis rois de France, et d'autres dignes d'honneur, et en ce se délectoit après le service divin, ... Et le disner estre fait, grâces dictes à Dieu, s'en partoît chascun, et après retournoient souvent. Si dura si longuement

ceste dance, que le duc de Bourbon se trouva bien endebté ... (ed. Chazaud, pp. 272-73)

(and [the duke] willingly ate on a platform, in order to see this company. And in order that no one should listen to anything but that for which they sat at table (which was for his great comfort) he willed that no one should speak, and in order to see that silence was better kept while he was at table, he had ordered that no one, or hardly anyone, should stand before him, except for those who were ordered to serve him, ... And so that no one should interrupt him when he was eating, at either end of his table were closed gates, so that no one could pass behind him to disturb his concentration; and to understand better the great affairs he had in the kingdom, as much as counsellor as in other things, which he knew well how to manage, and to renew his memory, he had read continually at his dinner the *gestes* of the most famous princes, the former kings of France, and of other men worthy of honor, and in this he delighted after [second to] the divine service, ... And when dinner was over, and grace said to God, everyone left, and afterwards returned frequently. This dance went on so long, that the duke of Bourbon found himself well in debt ...)

Jean le Maingre de Boucicaut, 1409

Although he contributed to the courtly *Cent Ballades* (see above), the maréchal Boucicaut (1365-1421) seems to have generally favored more serious reading material. In *Le Livre des fais du bon messire Jehan le Maingre, dit Bouciquaut* (1409) ("The book of the deeds of the good master Jehan le Maingre, called Bouciquaut"), which records his life until 1399, the anonymous author relates that

Moult lui [Boucicaut] plaist ouyr lire beaulx livres de Dieu et des sains, des *Fais des Romains* et histoires autentiques. (ed. Lalande, p. 416) ... Aux jours des dimenches et des festes, il occupe le temps a aler en pelerinages tout a pié, ou a ouyr lire d'aucuns beaulx livres de la vie des sains, ou des histoires des vaillans trespassez, des Romains ou d'autres, ou a parler a aucunes gens de devocion. (p. 433)

(He [Boucicaut] takes great pleasure in hearing read fair books about God and the saints, the *Fais des Romains*, and true histories. ... On

Sundays and feast-days, he spends the time going afoot on pilgrimages, or in hearing read some fair books of the lives of saints, or histories of old heroes, of the Romans or others, or in speaking with various people of devotion.)

Philip the Good, 1462, (1468)

Amongst all the conspicuous splendor of the courts of Burgundy, books were not neglected. Many of the most beautiful surviving manuscripts derive from there; many of the texts were translations or new works commissioned by the dukes. It was during his short exile in Bruges from 1470 to 1471 that Edward IV, brother of the then duchess, picked up the taste and the manuscripts that later formed the basis of the English Royal Library (Backhouse 1987).

Not surprisingly, the chroniclers unanimously credit Duke Philip the Good (Philippe le Bon: 1396-1467; r. 1419-67) with, in the words of the *Cent Nouvelles nouvelles* (1462), a love of the "tresgracieux exercice de lecture et d'estude" (ed. Sweetser, p. 22) ("most gracious exercise of reading and study"). Writing in 1472, after Philip's death, Guillaume Fillastre testifies:

iamais [Philippe] nestoit oyseulx quil ne soccupast ou en estudes des liures ou de tirer de larc ou pour excerciter en quelque esbatement honneste ou au conseil des haultes choses quant le cas le requeroit. (1: 135v)

([Philip] never had leisure that he didn't occupy in studying books or in practicing archery or in undertaking some decent sport or in discussing high matters, when the case required it.)

We might seem to be on the track of a private reader at last, except that David Aubert, in a passage from his *Chronique des empereurs*⁸ (1462; see

⁸The full title of this work is *Croniques abregies commençans au temps de Herode Antipas, persecuteur de la chrestienté, et finissant l'an de grace mil Ilc et LXXVI* (Doutrepoint 1909: 17) ("Abridged chronicles beginning in the time of Herod Antipas, persecutor of Christianity, and finishing in the year of grace 1276").

below for fuller quote), notes that Philip "a dès longtemps accoutumé de journallement faire devant lui lire les anciennes histoires" (quoted in Doutrepoint 1909: 467) ("has since long ago been accustomed to have old histories read before him every day").

Philip was, then, a literate who liked to hear read both the chronicles noted by Aubert and the other, unspecified improving texts mentioned by Fillastre and, no doubt ironically, by the author or editor of the decidedly unimproving *Cent Nouvelles*. This is a conclusion bolstered by the very massiveness of the books themselves; as the cataloguers of the British Library's Royal collection note:

The Ghent and Bruges illuminators evidently catered for a class that wished to be read to, rather than to read. ... These huge volumes are not to be handled. They are to be placed on a high desk and read aloud by a standing lector, over whose shoulder the noble master or mistress may occasionally take a glance at a miniature, without inspecting it too closely in detail; for these pictures look better at a little distance. (Gilson and Warner 1921: xi-xii)

Aubert's portrait of Philip is supported by an extraordinary piece of pictorial evidence. Each of the three volumes of the *Chroniques de Hainault* (Bibl. Roy. 9242-44), Jean Wauquelin's translation of Jacques de Guise's *Annales illustrium principum Hannoniae*, features a frontispiece describing some stage in the work's creation and presentation. For volume 1, an artist associated with the workshop of Rogier van der Weyden painted Duke Philip receiving the book from a kneeling man, variously identified as Wauquelin or Simon Nockart, the Burgundian official who arranged the commission (Fig. 17). For volume 3, Loyset Liédet painted Philip visiting Wauquelin, who's in the middle of writing the book (Fig. 18). And for volume 2, Guillaume Vrelant painted Philip, his son Charles, and his court listening to a kneeling man read the book to them (Fig. 19).

Although this miniature is actually dated to 1468, the year after Philip's death, the duke had commissioned the translation in 1446, and twice

reviewed the draft before it was committed to parchment. The duke's treasurer noted the payment to the messenger who brought the manuscript to the duke in Bruges, in February 1447, and waited five days until Philip "eust viseté lesdis livres pour les faire grosser" (quoted in Doutrepoint 1909: 416) ("had inspected the aforesaid books in order to have them engrossed"). Camille Gaspar and Frédéric Lyna, the cataloguers of the manuscripts in the Bibliothèque Royale of Brussels, speculate that the prelection frontispiece in volume 2 of the *Chroniques* depicts the duke's "inspection" of the text in 1447 (Gaspar and Lyna 1944: 10, pl. 26 caption).

It would be wonderful to have such a "snapshot" of an actual reading event, but the history of the manuscript dilutes the idea considerably. Volume 2 of the *Chroniques de Hainault* was received into the ducal library in 1455, but for whatever reason, Vrelant didn't start illuminating it until much later; he finished his work in 1468 (Doutrepoint 1909: 416-17). Twenty years on from the event, it's unlikely that Vrelant's picture represents anything like an eyewitness report. It's worth noting, though, that in the picture Philip and Charles look closer to 51 and 14 (their ages in 1447) than to 71 and 34 (their ages in 1467, the last year of Philip's life). What Vrelant painted, perhaps, is his stylized idea of how the duke, his son, and his court would have looked during their early interaction with the text, in the old duke's prime.

In any case, the picture is powerful testimony that prelection was considered the normal way in which the duke's court would experience literature. As part of a set of miniatures explicating the relationship between the duke as patron and the textual process he is sponsoring, it clearly establishes public reading as the capping event in the book's production. Moreover, compared to the more or less obviously stylized prelection pictures reproduced in Figures 10-13, this one seems much more "lifelike." The prelector, for one thing, seems not to be the author but rather some skilled functionary, perhaps like Gilles Malet, whom the artist at least

assumes would be assigned to read the *Chroniques* to the court. Deprived of the featured position and the academic furniture and dress of the authors in the standard "publication" or "performance" picture, the prelector kneels off to the side, in the shadows, reading from a bench. The emphasis falls much more on the duke and his son, along with the courtiers flanking them--as well as on the highlighted pages of the open book.

The illumination reiterates the familiar iconography of prelection pictures in one respect, however: by crowding the listening courtiers into a tight group. In this picture the grouping makes a stark contrast to the randomly distributed people in the street outside the palace, emphasizing the bonding effect of group listening. As in many pictures of people listening, however--whether they're hearing a preacher, a reader, or a reciter--this one shows a few people not listening. Most of the audience seems to be looking toward the reader, but in the second row of courtiers on the right, two men are evidently carrying on a private conversation. Are we to understand that the speakers are commenting on what they are hearing, or that they are talking about something unconnected? The award for least enthusiastic listener, however, would have to go to the man shown slipping out the door (left-center foreground) to join his friends outside for some hawking (is the saddled horse held by the squire further down the street waiting for him as well?).

Charles the Bold, 1440s-1477

The boy standing with Philip the Good in the frontispiece of volume 1 of the *Chroniques de Hainault*, and the young man looking affectionately at the duke in the volume 2 frontispiece, is Philip's son and heir, Charles the Bold (Charles le Téméraire, whose epithet is also translated as "the Rash"; 1433-77; r. 1467-77). Olivier de la Marche records in his *Mémoires* (written c. 1490) that as a boy Charles "s'applicquoit a lire et faire lire devant luy, du

commencement, en joyeux comptes et ès faitz de Lancelot et de Gauvain" (ed. Beaune and D'Arbaumont 2: 217) ("applied himself to reading and to having read before him, from the beginning, in joyous accounts and in the deeds of Lancelot and of Gawain").

As he grew up Charles continued to enjoy being read to, although his tastes moved on to more serious material. When he has reached the period of 1453-55, Olivier pauses for an assessment of Charles as an adult. Since the *Mémoires* were written about 1490, however, this reminiscence may well describe Charles' habits until his early death in 1477:

Jamais ne se couchoit qu'il ne fist lire deux heures devant luy, et lisoit souvent devant luy le seigneur de Humbercourt, qui moult bien lisoit et retenoit; et faisoit lors lire les haultes histoires de Romme et prenoit moult grant plaisir ès faitz des Rommains. (2: 334)

(He never went to bed without having someone read before him for two hours, and there often read before him the lord of Humbercourt, who read and retained [remembered] very well; and he [Charles] used to have read in those days the high histories of Rome and took very great pleasure in the *Fais des Romains*.)

The anonymous translator of the *Anciennes Chroniques de Pise en Italie* (Bibl. Roy. 9029) implies that Charles felt such readings helped imbue him with the virtues of the ancients. Charles, he notes, "moult volentiers preste temps à oyr lire pour retenir les fais des anciens dignes de recommandacion" (quoted in Doutrepoint 1909: 468) ("full willingly takes time to hear read in order to retain the deeds of the ancients [who are] worthy of recommendation").

Charles' favorite reader was not a valet-librarian, like Gilles Malet, but a warrior more on the lines of Boucicaut. Guy de Brimeu, lord of Humbercourt, was also count of Meghen, chamberlain to the dukes of Burgundy, captain of the castle of Remy, and so on. Sometimes suspected of collusion with Charles' enemy, Louis XI of France, he was convicted of treason and beheaded in 1477 by the people of Ghent (Prevost and D'Amat 1956: 323).

Dedications, 15th Century

A survey of "historical" incidents of reading might well include dedications by literary authors to their immediate patrons. Presumably, the prologue written to a commissioned text or manuscript would accurately reflect the author's expectation about how the patron would read the manuscript. Moreover, such a prologue would not be the place to impute low-status reading formats to the powerful recipient of the work, so that mentions of "hearing" must count in such contexts as both socially acceptable and pragmatically correct descriptions of the immediate audience's probable reception channel.

Not surprisingly, given the reading habits we've seen ascribed to assiduous patrons such as Charles V and others, many such prologues do speak of books being heard. One example would be Christine de Pizan's introductory letter to her collection of *Epistres du débat sus le "Roman de la rose"* (1401). Addressing Isabeau of Bavaria, wife of Charles VI of France, she declares:

Tres haulte, tres puissant et tres redoubtee dame, ... je aye entendu que vostre Tres Noble Excellence se delicte a oïr lire dittiéz de choses vertueuses et bien dictes. ... s'il vous plaist moy tant honnourer que oïr les daigniéz ... (ed. Hicks, pp. 5-6)

(Most high, most powerful and most redoubtable lady, ... I have heard that your Most Noble Excellence delights in hearing read well-endited works of virtuous matters. ... if you would please to honor me so much, as to deign to hear these ...)

From many references in her works, it is clear that Christine herself often read privately. In addressing Isabeau in the most groveling terms, however, Christine speaks of hearing that the queen delights in hearing books read.

Dedications to male patrons are no less aurally oriented. The anonymous author of the *Histoire de Charles Martel*, dedicated to Philip the Good around 1463, begins his prologue:

Ces haulz nobles et vertueulz fais des anciens doit len volentiers
oyr lyre et tresdilligamment retenir pour le bien et prouffit que len y
poeult acquerir ... (Bibl. Roy. 6, f. 9r)

(These high, noble and virtuous deeds of the ancients should one
willingly hear, read [or, "hear read," as one thing; without punctua-
tion either translation is possible] and most diligently retain for the
good and profit that one may acquire thereby ...)

Along the same lines, many chronicles and biographies routinely assume that their audience is hearing the work. Christine decides to end the first book of her biography of Charles V at a certain point because the listeners' attention might be flagging: "Pour ce que trop longue narracion souvent-foiz tourne aux oyans et refférandaires à ennuy, comme la fragilité humaine en peu d'espece soit ennuyée ou lasse" (bk. 1, ch. 36; Petitot 5: 324) ("Because an overlong narration often begins to annoy the hearers and referendaries [official reporters], since human weakness quickly becomes bored or fatigued"). Boucicaut's biographer also expects his own book to be read aloud; he repeatedly offers variations on the phrase "ceulx qui ce present livre verront et orront" (ed. Lalande, p. 10) ("those who will see and hear this present book"). Froissart, too, is typically exhaustive in addressing "vous qui le [son livre] lisez, ou le lirez, ou avez lu, ou orrez lire" (ed. Buchon 3: 1) ("you who are reading it [his book], or will read it, or have read, or will hear read").

As always, it is difficult to know how to interpret references to "seeing" or "reading" books. These terms may imply private reading, or they may not. The best approach may be to regard them as creating an open semantic field that the speaker has the option of delimiting by providing further context. A good example here are the prologues to volumes 1 and 2 of the *Croniques et conquestes de Charlemaine* (Bibl. Roy. 9066-68), another of Philip the Good's commissions that was copied out and perhaps written by David Aubert in 1458. In a now-familiar formulation, the author begins his book by commenting: "Les fais des anciens doit on volentiers lyre, ouyr et

diligemment retenir, car ilz peuent valoir et donner bon exemple" (ed. Guiette, 1: 13) ("One should willingly read, hear, and diligently retain the deeds of the ancients, for they can be valuable and give good example"). In the prologue of the second volume the author asks for correction from "tous ceulx qui le lirront ou orront lire" (2: 16) ("all those who will read it or hear it read"). In between, however, the author has addressed Philip's agent, monseigneur de Créquy, complimenting him that "de sa nature il est affecte a veoir, estudier et auoir livres et croniques sur toutes-riens" (1: 14) ("by nature he enjoys seeing, studying, and having books and chronicles about everything" [literally, "everything and nothing"]).

In the general statements it seems that the references to "reading" are, simply, general. If we could ask the author whether he meant private or public reading, his answer might be, "Yes." The context that the prologuist builds around de Créquy, however, makes it more likely that the "seeing" in that passage implies private reading—although nothing explicitly excludes public reading.

Libraries, 15th Century

Finally, it is worth briefly considering one feature of late medieval French culture that is frequently cited as an index of literacy and literate habits (see, e.g., Saenger 1982: 408): the libraries assembled by the kings and nobles of France and Burgundy. Charles V built a library (administered by Gilles Malet) that reached 1200 volumes. Jean de Berry mustered some 300 (Doutrepoint 1909: xiv-xvi), René d'Anjou over 200. Jean d'Orléans, count of Angoulême, had only 148 volumes but distinguished himself for the intensity of his involvement. He clearly read his books privately, because their margins are full of his comments (*ibid.*: 466; see also Strohm 1971). René d'Anjou was himself an author, and may have drawn on his book collection when writing his own books—which, if it certifies him as a private reader,

also puts him, of course, in the category of professional-literary private reader (see Chaytor 1945: 102).

After the texts we have examined concerning Charles V and Jean de Berry, however, it should be clear that contrary to the common assumption, owning a lot of books is no guarantee that the books were read privately. A perfect example is Philip the Good, who, having inherited a library of 248 volumes in 1420, left behind almost 900 when he died in 1467 (Doutrepoint 1909: 480). Philip personally commissioned many books, and he liked to read every day--but as the texts quoted above have shown, he read by being read *to*. Aubert's dedication of the *Chronique des empereurs* shows that to a medieval bookman this conjunction of serious book-collecting and a preference for hearing rather than privately reading them was entirely unproblematic--indeed, praiseworthy:

Très renommé et très vertueux prince Philippe duc de Bourgogne a dès longtemps accoustumé de journellement faire devant lui lire les anciennes histoires; et pour estre garni d'une librairie non pareille à toutes autres il a dès son jeune eaige eu à ses geiges plusieurs translateurs, grans clers, experts orateurs, historiens et escripvains, et en diverses contrées en gros nombre diligemment labourans; tant que aujourd'hui c'est le prince de la chrestienté, sans réservation aulcune, qui est le mieux garni de autentique et riche librairie, comme tout se peut pleinement apparoir. (quoted in Doutrepoint 1909: 16-17)

(Most famous and most virtuous prince, Philip duke of Burgundy, has since long ago been accustomed to have old histories read before him every day; and to be provided with a library beyond all others he has since his youth had in his employ several translators, great clerks, master orators, historians, and writers, and in various countries a great number diligently working; so much so that today he of all Christian princes, without a single exception, is the best provided with an authentic and rich library, as everyone can plainly see.)

Analysis

Compared to love poetry and romance, the primary texts provide an abundance of evidence concerning the Franco-Burgundian reading of histories. The hands-down winner in the genre is clearly the *Fais des Romains*, an anonymous history in French prose composed between 1211 and 1214 and concerned mostly with Julius Caesar. That its success, was, as Guenée claims, "immédiat, général et durable" (1976: 262-63) is confirmed by its popularity with Charles V, Boucicaut, and Charles the Bold. Besides the *Fais*, Charles V and the various nobles surveyed above favored histories of Roman, "ancient," or French worthies. As noted at the head of this section, these histories seem to keep impressive company: Charles V, Jean de Berry, Louis de Bourbon, and Boucicaut are all mentioned as hearing them interchangeably with the Bible, saints' lives, and books of morality and philosophy.

The frighteningly high seriousness evidenced by these aural readers seems part of what Doutrepoint considers a deliberate attempt by fourteenth- and fifteenth-century laypeople to "s'initier à la science des clercs" (1909: 120) ("initiate themselves into the learning of the clerks"). Crossover literacy in France and Burgundy, in Doutrepoint's opinion, was a phenomenon encouraged by the audience. Whether or not this audience ever unbent enough to simply enjoy the narratives, the histories themselves always emphasize their didactic supertext, the "*utilis*" aspect of the Horatian duality that serves to justify their genre's association with high-status philosophical and devotional texts.

While prestige in many forms thus converged around these readings of history, every case reviewed here involves a public reading. None of the listeners noted above—a king, a queen, four dukes, and a *maréchal* of France—could conceivably be constrained by problems of literacy or access to manuscripts. In only two cases do we have (indirect) evidence of

apparent or possible private reading: Jean d'Angoulême, who annotated the books in his library, and monseigneur de Créquy, who liked to see, study, and have books.

Although the texts served an allegedly didactic function, and may have served a covertly propagandistic one (see below), they seem to be read during times of relaxation: on winter evenings before supper (Charles V), at dinner (Bourbon), on Sundays and feast-days (Boucicaut), just before bedtime (Charles the Bold). For many it was a regular habit; on the day Gilles Malet's son died, he read to Charles just as normal.

Unlike the love poetry, which was always prelected by the author or by an author-surrogate, the histories in these reports are prelected by someone who is *not* the author. Even in the illumination showing the *Chroniques de Hainault* being read aloud, the standard iconography of authorial prelection is ignored in favor of a "real-life" setting in Philip's throne room and a prelector who seems not to be the author.

We also have reports of two named prelectors, which provoke the very interesting observation that although their backgrounds and status differ markedly, the texts use almost the same vocabulary in describing their reading skills. The bourgeois court functionary Gilles Malet managed to please even so "moriginé" ("well-educated, sophisticated") a patron as Charles V, Christine notes, because he "read and 'pointed' magnificently well, and was an intelligent man." In very similar words, Olivier de la Marche remarks that the lord of Humbercourt became the favorite prelector of Charles the Bold because he "read and retained very well." The chronicler Philippe de Commines adds that Humbercourt was "ung des plus saiges chevaliers et des plus entenduz que je congneü jamais" (ed. Calmette 1: 104) ("one of the wisest and most intelligent knights that I ever knew"). Thus both the bourgeois bookman and the noble warlord are singled out as intelligent men who read well; Malet has the extra talent of "pointing," while Humbercourt is noted for his memory. That this congruence occurs

between texts written many decades apart in different regions suggests a well-understood contemporary idea of what makes a good prelector. As we do today, when listening to tapes or the radio, the medieval listener preferred a reader who could understand and effectively interpret a text when reading it aloud. Thus, rather than being a jury-rigged substitute for private reading, prelection seems to have been viewed as a serious encounter governed by a well-understood performance esthetic.

Olivier's praise of Humbercourt's memory is interesting. Since he was reading from a manuscript, Humbercourt wouldn't have needed his memory for recitation of any kind. Presumably, then, he used it in commenting on what he was reading. Since Charles the Bold liked Roman history so much, perhaps his prelector would be able to compare different versions of the same story that they had read together; he might also be able to explain things in the text, or add further details he had recalled. Any such comments by Humbercourt might very well turn into a critical discussion with his audience, since Charles, too, was noted for his memory. Olivier comments that Charles retained the stories he heard read about Lancelot and Gawain better than other boys, and the anonymous author of the *Anciennes Chroniques de Pise en Italie* praises him for the time he took to "hear read in order to retain the deeds of the ancients."

Such statements are a commonplace in the dedications of these histories. The emphasis on memory is a feature of the French texts that does not seem to turn up in the English cases to be reviewed below. It recalls Mary Carruthers' explanation that medieval "public memory," the shared culture of key exemplary texts, could be the medium for the construction of the self and an internalized guide in the making of crucial decisions (1990: 179-82). Carruthers builds this analysis around the example of Heloise's citation of Lucan to explain her decision to become a nun, and it may not be a coincidence that Heloise was also French.

Charles the Bold's case, however, makes an instructive counterpoint to Heloise's. In his desire to "ensuyre et contrefaire" ("follow and imitate") Caesar (quoted in Doutrepoint 1909: 182)--whose life story he absorbed through Humbercourt's nightly public readings--Charles decorated his throne room with tapestries depicting the ruler's life (Guénée 1976: 283) and tried to persuade the princes of Germany to award him the title of king of the Romans (Prevost and d'Amat 1959: 554-55). Most ill advised of all, he spent the ten years of his dukedom in constant intrigue and warfare as he sought to build an independent empire by connecting his southern and northern provinces, before being hacked to death before the walls of Nancy (*Enc. Brit.* 1991, 3: 104-5).

Although the authors or translators of all these bespoke chronicles and biographies we have been considering always emphasize their virtue of offering "patrons de noblesse et parfaite cheualerie" (Aubert, ed. Guiette, 1: 13) ("patterns of nobility and perfect chivalry"), one final factor may have ensured not only that the patrons meant to read these texts themselves but that they meant lots of people to read them: their propaganda value. It was surely no accident that these patterns of nobility were usually based on French or Burgundian heroes, and that the prologues usually underlined the patron's participation in that lineage. With such self-promotion in mind, and given the difficulties of mass-producing texts (and ensuring that they would be read if so produced), what better way to spread such propaganda than a public reading--such as the one Philip presides over in the volume 2 frontispiece of the *Chroniques de Hainault*? Similarly, the habit of commissioning biographies of powerful men--Boucicaut, Charles V, Louis de Bourbon--must reflect not only a historical impulse and family piety, but also a desire to strengthen the authority of the dynasty concerned (see Hindman 1986: 9).

Charles V's program of commissions seems to have incorporated an explicit attempt to legitimize the Valois monarchy, in the face of persistent

counter-claims from the kings of England and of Navarre (Bossuat 1940: 84). Even the *Cité de Dieu* translated by his *avocat* Raoul de Presles at his request (completed 1375) reflects this effort. The prologue informs Charles that he as king is the equivalent of Augustine as church father, both like the eagle that flies higher and sees more than all others. Next Raoul tells the story of Clovis' conversion, with God sending both the device of the three fleurs de lys and the baptismal oil, and of the oriflamme sent to Charlemagne (printed in de Laborde 1909, 1: 63-67). These legends, elaborated and promulgated by Charles' translator, demonstrated God's direct personal endorsement of the French line. Jacques Krynen hypothesizes that the king's men (and woman, i.e., Christine de Pizan) formulated an ideology meant for general dispersal as propaganda. "Pamphlets, ballades, et chansons diffusés par un personnel souvent spécialisés, hérauts, jongleurs ou prédicateurs," he asks, "ne vulgarisent-ils pas thèmes et idées nés chez les apologistes de la royauté?" (1981: 243-44) ("Pamphlets, ballads, and songs circulated by performers who were often professionals--heralds, jongleurs, or preachers--did they not popularize themes and ideas developed by the apologists of royalty?"). One wonders if the ideology even trickled down as far as Domremy, whence Jeanne d'Arc emerged with a ready-made belief in the rights of the Valois line to secure the succession of Charles V's grandson Charles VII.

We have an illustration of the propagandistic use of historical texts in the dinnertime prelections described by Bourbon's biographer. D'Orville frames his account with political events: Louis d'Orléans' assassination, the king's madness. While describing the meals, however, d'Orville emphasizes only the old duke's generosity and the didactic function of the reading. Bourbon supposedly uses it to improve himself, wishing "to understand better the great affairs he had in the kingdom, ... and to renew his memory." His guests, listening in enforced silence, presumably are meant to derive similar apolitical benefits. Yet politics seem to lurk throughout the

scene; the elaborate seating arrangements that Bourbon demands, and that d'Orville attributes strictly to his desire to hear the reading without distraction, seem designed to prevent all but a few trusted people from approaching the duke. In opening his house to Charles VI's hangers-on in the wake of the murder of Louis d'Orléans, was Louis afraid that he'd let in a potential assassin? Did he enforce silence because he was afraid that conversation would become conspiracy--or, at least, be a vehicle for criticisms of the king and his regime? Into this charged situation, Louis chose to launch a public reading of "the *gestes* of the most famous princes, the former kings of France"--i.e., royal propaganda designed to induce continued loyalty to the line currently represented by the mad Charles. Perhaps d'Orville signals his awareness of the undercurrents and ironies in this chapter of his authorized biography by ending his respectful account with the surprisingly blasé comment: "This dance went on so long, that the duke of Bourbon found himself well in debt."

While, as exemplary narratives or as propaganda, histories raise the sort of issues that could potentially provoke public-sphere debate (see Chapter 2), Franco-Burgundian readers seem not to have responded with such general discussion. Rather, the readings proceed in an atmosphere of strict if benign hierarchy, dominated by the high-ranking patrons who sponsor the event. Any *assistants* are expected to admire the patron's role as learned listener, and to submit meekly to the propaganda incorporated into the customized text they are hearing. As we shall see, British prelection of such material falls into a very different pattern.

Conclusion

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, this discussion of French and Burgundian reading derives from a relatively shallow survey of a rich corpus of texts. Even so, the data collected and analyzed above have

provided an embarrassment of riches. They are hard to summarize because they point in so many directions; but that is one of the most important facts about them. They clearly demonstrate that public reading in late medieval France and the Burgundian court was as complex in nature and function as any kind of reading, anywhere. It's not a case of an "oral mind" being inevitably "additive rather than subordinative," "aggregative rather than analytic," and all the other traits ordained by the polarized Ongian approach (Ong 1982).

In the material above, we've seen texts read aloud by their authors (Froissart, the *Cent Ballades* authors), by author-surrogates (Deschamps for Machaut), by a professional bookman (Malet), by a professional warlord (Humbercourt), by anonymous court functionaries (the kneeling man in the *Hainault* frontispiece), by a young noblewoman (Froissart's demoiselle). The readings have provided their audiences (always, in these samples, a courtly one) with amusement, literary sport, flirtation, titillation, edification, propaganda, useful information, political aggrandizement, and role models. Audience members have kept still or interrupted (or slipped out to go hunting); they've commented on the author's chutzpah or his philosophy; perhaps they've critiqued the text with the prelector. At least one listener (Jean de Berry) seems to have appreciated the same things we do in literature, i.e., the writer's subtlety and skill.

Each of the three genres involved (love poetry, romance, histories) has revealed a distinctive profile that, even so, displays intrageneric variation. As the most personal form, love poetry is usually prelected by the poet himself. It combines intensity of feeling with great formalism of style and acute self-consciousness. Its focus on women alembicates it subtly with its society's manifold ambiguities about gender relations, so that in bemoaning, usually, the poet's utter helplessness before the power of love, it yet stands out as the most sophisticated, artificial, and virtuosic of genres.

The reading of romances, about which there was least evidence, seemed to suggest the one common trait of allowing for episodic reading, either in selected fragments or nightly installments.

The histories create a much more formal environment around themselves. Often commissioned in this period by nobles eager to promote the knowledge of history and/or to control how it gets written, these texts were nonetheless not prelected (within our sample) by the author or translator. The prelectors were chosen for their skill in reading, and the sessions are universally regarded (by the writers of memoirs, chronicles, and biographies) as highly edifying and praiseworthy. What the contemporary historians may be discreetly eliding is the propagandistic value of such public readings before the court. Thus, while an author reading his love poetry before a lady or a court achieved a personal expression and aggrandizement, the public reading of histories served the far different goal of imparting information and influencing individuals towards a single approved understanding of history and the key social values it is presented as illustrating. Audiences, however, retained the right to interpret what they heard in ways meaningful to them. Louis de Male and his fellows walked away from Deschamps' reading of Machaut's love poem talking about its philosophy--about how Fortune distributes her goods. Two or three people in the *Hainault* frontispiece simply find their own conversation or concerns more compelling than the reading.

Evidence that extends from the 1360s to 1477, among the highest classes of France and Burgundy, thus shows that these extremely literate people spent considerable time hearing literature--and that no one at the time thought this anything but praiseworthy. Any distortion perpetrated by the artists recording these historical events would certainly err on the side of flattery. If public reading implied illiteracy, low caste, lack of education or sophistication, stupidity, poor taste, or even effeminacy, only an extraordinarily foolish writer or artist would think of attributing it to any of the

"tres haults, tres puissants et tres redoubtés" dukes and monarchs whose reading habits we have glimpsed above. Thus to the medieval hearers, readers, or viewers of the material presented above it cannot have seemed in any way uncouth to depict a literate nobleman or woman being read to.

That Jean d'Angoulême, one of the only two possible private readers in this sample, spent over half his life in captivity in England may not be irrelevant to his habits of manuscript-annotation. A lord actively ruling his territory might not have had sufficient time or training to make a serious study of the weighty books he collected. In fact, one comes away from contemplating the evidence about Gilles Malet, Philip the Good, Isabeau of Bavaria, and so on with an attitude oddly inverted from the norm. Instead of looking down on prelection as an inadequate form of reading forced on people by illiteracy or the scarcity of manuscripts, one begins to pity the people who hadn't the wealth or position to retain a skilled prelector-- someone with a good voice who could read the text to them, bringing out its meanings, "pointing" its key phrases, drawing on a trained and capacious memory to explicate any difficulties. Apart from professional scholars and writers, would most people have chosen to struggle with a text on their own, when the monarchs of France and the dukes of Burgundy were praised unstintingly for the willingness with which they listened to readings?

ENGLAND AND SCOTLAND

SECULAR TEXTS

New College, Oxford, 1379 (et al.)

Richard II, 1395

Henry Scogan, bet. 1400-1407

James I of Scotland, 1437

Henry VI, c. 1450

The Inns of Court (Sir John Fortescue), bet. 1468-71

Edward IV, 1471-72 (Edward III, mid-14th c.)

DEVOTIONAL TEXTS

"Instructions to a Devout and Literate Layman," 1st half 15th c.
Cecily Nevill, Duchess of York, 1485

Across the Channel from France and Flanders, we find fewer sources and less of a culture of reading, in the sense of an officially sponsored and systematically invoked value attached to the (usually public) reading of certain texts. There was no equivalent propaganda machine; no British king subsidized the formulation of monarchist political theory and historiography in the manner of Charles V, and no British nobles sought to legitimize their own dynastic claims by commissioning official histories in the manner of the dukes of Burgundy.⁹ Unlike the *Chroniques de Hainault* frontispiece, the famous frontispiece to the *Corpus Christi* manuscript (no. 61) of *Troilus and Criseyde*, its closest English counterpart, has no known official connections and therefore little or no value as a historical record per se.¹⁰ Although there were occasional commissioned works—such as the *Vita Henrici Quinti* that Tito Livio da Forli wrote at Duke Humphrey's

⁹Among the thirty-eight books that Janet Backhouse (1987: 39-41) lists as owned by or associated with Edward IV, for example, only five offer English history. Three of these are volumes of Froissart's *Chroniques de France et d'Angleterre* (Royal 14 D.ii-vi [complete], 18 E.i [v. 2], 18 E.ii [v. 4]); the other two are volumes of Jean de Wavrin's *Croniques dangleterre* (14 E.iv [v. 3], 15 E.iv [v. 1]). Like the other volumes of history in the collection (e.g., Jean de Vignay's translation of Vincent of Beauvais' *Mireor hystorial* [14 E.i], Jean Miélot's translation of Roberto della Porta's *Romuléon* [19 E.v], and the *Cronicques de Pise* [16 G.i]), the Froissart and Wavrin histories were products of the French or Burgundian patronage system.

J.W. McKenna (1965) has built a solid case for the Duke of Bedford's attempts to propagandize the dual monarchy of Henry VI, via specially struck coins and such pageantries as coronation custards molded in the shapes of leopards and fleurs-de-lys. The only literature generated in this effort, however, were the occasional poems of Lawrence Calot and Lydgate.

¹⁰For this reason, the *Troilus and Criseyde* frontispiece will be discussed in the next chapter, with the literary evidence of reading habits.

request—it seems that most of the English histories that survive arose from some personal interest or ambition of the author; one result was what Kingsford calls "the general poverty of contemporary Chronicles in the fifteenth century" (1913: 10).

Nor does there seem to have been the same competitive-display use of love poetry; there is no direct historical or semi-historical evidence of equivalent English poems being presented to ladies, courts, or other entities. French merchants had founded a puy in London for the presentation of such poetry, and Englishmen had certainly figured among its members. But this organization is not attested past 1320, the probable date at which its regulations were interpolated into the Guildhall's *Liber custumarum* (Fisher 1965: 78-79; see also *Liber custumarum* pt. 1, pp. xlviiii-liv).

But though the English and Scottish records give a sparser picture of reading behavior, enough survives to reveal that British reading differed from French and Burgundian in various definite and consistent ways. Diverse as the two traditions are, however, they agree in that the readers surveyed are all literate and upper-class, and that their reading is almost all prelected, from the late fourteenth to the late fifteenth century.

One important way in which the British patterns differ from the Franco-Burgundian is in the generic distributions. While the latter read love poetry as a medium of self-assertion or -display, read romances for relaxation, and read histories along with philosophical and devotional texts for their improving effect, the British pattern seems basically to divide reading material into the secular and the devotional. Chronicles, romances, poetry, and "miracles of the world" (see the New College report) tended to be read in a cheerfully relaxed atmosphere that might include some awareness of their improving effect, while even laypeople read the Scriptures, saints' lives, homiletic treatises, and so on in a much more hierarchical context and with sedulous earnestness. In two cases, however--both associated with Henry VI--Scripture and chronicles were read together, as improving texts

more on the French model. The stronger English association of chronicles with entertainment makes some sense, of course, since these texts tended to devote considerable space to the highly romanticized adventures of Arthur and his court.¹¹ The following survey will thus combine the evidence of the reading of secular material into one section (including the two mixed cases), with a few instances of lay devotional reading presented afterwards as an instructive contrast.

I exclude below several cases that are often invoked in discussions of medieval reading. One is the instruction in the "Ordinances for the Government of Prince Edward, Son of Edward IV" (1474) that at meals there should "be reade before him, such noble storyes as behoveth to a prynce to understande" (p. *28). The value of this passage as evidence of royal reading habits is undercut by the fact that in 1474 Edward was only four years old. I also omit any reference to the letter-writing Pastons, Celys, Stonors, and Plumptons, since, I regret to say, not one of them offers any report about time spent reading, either publicly or privately. Certainly, the Paston letters witness to a lively circulation of books among the sons, John II and III, their family, friends, patrons, and (potential) mistresses, including the commissioning of exemplars from a scribe, William Ebesham. Evidence of book-ownership is of little use for my purposes, however; although it is obviously a contributing factor to reading behavior, in and of itself it provides no information about how the readers actually read their books.¹²

¹¹This point did not escape Frenchmen such as Philippe de Mézières. While recommending that Charles VI read histories of the Christian emperors, especially Charlemagne, Philippe feels compelled to note: "La vaillance aussi mondayne du roy Artus fu moult grande, mais l'ystoire de lui et des siens est si remplie de bourdes que l'ystoire de lui en demeure suspecte" (2: 222) ("The equally well-known valor of King Arthur was full great, but the history of him and his followers is so full of fictions that his history must remain suspect").

¹²This lack of evidence did not deter Virginia Woolf (1925: 23-24) from painting a vivid word-picture of John Paston II sitting alone in the drafty

Finally, although my focus is on English behavior I include here one Scottish instance, James I's evening reading, because it is such a useful report (and James, of course, spent his youth in England). When my analyses are meant to include James, I will speak of "British" reading; when not, of "English."

Secular Texts

New College, Oxford, 1379; et al.

College statutes aimed to determine almost every aspect of the students' lives, and although these lives might in reality have diverged considerably from the founders' blueprints,¹³ the statutes nevertheless show us what upper-class benefactors considered ideal behavior for the equally upper-class and hyperliterate collegians who would populate their foundations. Along with their masters' public reading of the curricular and extra-curricular texts, and their own private or perhaps public study readings, the students in almost every college had ordained for them, by the founders' statutes, the reading of the Bible at meals. Beginning with William of Wykeham's statutes for New College, Oxford (1379), a form of recreational reading was also provided for:

Item, quia, post refectiorem corporum per ciborum et potus sump-tionem, homines ad scurrilitates, turpiloquia et, quod pejus est, detractiones et jurgia, necnon alia mala quam plurima et periculosa perpetranda, efficiuntur communiter promptiores, ... statuimus, ordinamus et volumus, ut singulis diebus post prandium et coenam, ... seniores singuli, cujuscunque status aut gradus fuerint, ad studia sua

rooms of Caister Castle, reading Lydgate and Chaucer "like a mirror in which figures move brightly, silently, and compactly." Needless to say, nothing in the Paston letters supports this romantic vision of John II's private reading.

¹³Rashdall and Rait comment: "Of life in a medieval College we can usually reproduce little except its regulations and the way in which they were broken" (1901: 57).

vel loca alia se conferant, nec juniores alios ibidem moram facere ulterius permittant; nisi in festis principalibus et festis majoribus duplicibus, et nisi quando consilia domus, disputationes, aut alia negotia ardua collegium tangentia, immediate post in aula debeant pertractari, aut nisi quando ob Die reverentiam, ac suae matris, vel alterius Sancti cujuscunque, tempore hyemali ignis in aula Sociis ministratur; tunc scholaribus et Sociis, post tempus prandii aut coenae, liceat gratia recreationis in aula in cantilenis et aliis solatiis honestis moram facere condecentem, et poemata, regnorum chronicas, et mundi hujus mirabilia, ac caetera quae statum clericalem condecorant, serius pertractare. (*Statutes*, v. 1, New College, pp. 40-42)

(Item, because, after the restoration of their bodies by the consumption of food and drink, men are commonly prompted to the perpetration of scurrilities, evil speaking and, what is worse, insults and squabbles, besides other evils as many and dangerous, ... we establish, order and will, that every day after dinner and supper, ... all the senior men, of whatever status or degree, should go to their studies or other places, nor should the other junior men be allowed to make any delay at the same time; except during the principal feasts and the greater double feasts, and except when house discussions, disputations, or other arduous negotiations touching the college are to be transacted in the hall immediately after, or except when in reverence to God and his mother or any other saint a fire is lit in winter in the hall for the Fellows; then the scholars and Fellows, after the time of dinner or supper, will be permitted to linger in the hall for the sake of recreation in singing and other honest solaces, and seriously to study ["serius pertractare"] poems, chronicles of kings, and wonders of this world, or other things which suit the clerical state.)

Given the setting, the poetry spoken of would presumably be religious or philosophical verses. The "wonders of this world" probably means informative texts such as Bartholomaeus Anglicus' *De proprietatibus rerum*, although Mandeville would fit the description as well.

The idea of this recreational hall-reading seems to have originated with Wykeham (see Rashdall and Rait 1901: 24-25; Cobban 1988: 187-88 for discussion of the influences behind Wykeham's statutes), and certain Oxford and Cambridge foundations for over a century after reproduced these instructions nearly verbatim. Almost the same words occur, for example, in Henry VI's 1443 statutes for King's College, Cambridge (in Myers 1969: 896-

97) and in Bishop Fox's 1517 statutes for Corpus Christi, Oxford (Ward 1843: 163-64).¹⁴ Presumably, the hall-readings survived not out of carelessness or antiquarianism--odd indulgences for someone about to make a costly and prestigious benefaction--but because the founders still felt it was a legitimate and useful pastime for scholars.

The framing concern in Wykeham's instructions seems to be a fear of loose talk or actual brawling--a fear that was well founded, given the youth and past performance of the typical Oxbridge undergraduate in the Middle Ages. Here public reading (of a wide variety of genres) functions as a form of social control that substitutes an approved, centralized, and supervised source of group interest for the potentially disruptive misbehaviors of individuals. Even if the evenings did not always pass this demurely, prelection clearly seemed a normal thing to do, or to imagine others doing, from the time of William of Wykeham's foundation in the reign of Richard II, through Richard Fox's in the reign of Henry VIII.

Richard II, 1395

Jean Froissart, who contributed so substantially to the discussion of French reading, also had one famous encounter with an English reader, Richard II (1367-1400; r. 1377-99). On a return trip to England in 1395, Froissart met the king in his palace at Eltham (Kent), where he presented Richard with a de luxe copy of his collected works. "Si le vey en sa chambre," the author relates,

car tout pourveu je l'avoie, et luy mis sur son lit. Il l'ouvry et regarda ens, et luy pleut très-grandement et bien plaire luy devoit, car il estoit enluminé, escript et historié. ... Adont me demanda le roy de quoy il traittoit. Je luy dis: 'D'Amours.' De ceste response fut-il

¹⁴Similar provisions are included in the statutes of All Souls College, Oxford, founded 1437 by Henry Chicheley, archbishop of Canterbury (Ward 1841: 47-49); and Magdalene College, Oxford, founded 1458 by William Waynflete, bishop of Winchester (Ward 1840: 81, 129-30).

tous resjouys, et regarda dedens le livre en plusieurs lieux et y lisy, car moult bien parloit et lisoit le franchois, et puis le fist prendre par ung sien chevalier qui se nommoit messire Richard Credon et porter en sa chambre de retraite. (ed. de Lettenhove 15: 167)

([in Berners' translation:] Than the kyng desyred to se my booke that I had brought for hym; so he sawe it in his chambre, for I had layde it there redy on his bedde. Whanne the kyng opened it, it pleased hym well, for it was fayre enlummyed and written. ... Than the kyng demaunded me wherof it treated, and I shewed hym how it treated maters of loue; wherof the kyng was gladde and loked in it, and reed yt in many places, for he coulde speke and rede French very well; and he tooke yt to a knyght of hys chambre, named syr Rycharde Creadon, to beare it into hys secrete chambre.) (2: 619)

Given Froissart's known output (barring the *Chroniques*, in which this account occurs), this volume of his collected works would probably contain mostly love poetry and romances.

Although this passage is often cited to show that kings had "chambres de retraite," and thus is often held to prove that the kings retired to these chambers in order to read privately, Froissart's description in fact says nothing about how Richard might have or did read Froissart's book in his "secrete chambre." In his bed-chamber, in the author's presence, the king evidently read (or skimmed) it aloud. Why else would Froissart note that Richard "coulde speke and rede French very well"? Nothing in the text indicates that the king kept completely private in his private chamber; obviously, Richard Credon knew where it was, and wouldn't "maters of loue" be a topic best enjoyed in company? That, at least, is how Gaston de Foix enjoyed it, when the same author, Froissart, read *Meliador* to him in *his* private chamber.

Henry Scogan, bet. 1400-1407

Apart from the "poemata" included in the college readings in hall, the British evidence supplies only one possible historical report of the reception

of short verse. This is the "Moral Balade," a mini-speculum principis written by Henry Scogan (?1361-1407) sometime between 1400 and 1407 (i.e., between the time of Chaucer's death and his own) for his tutees, the four sons of Henry IV.¹⁵ When John Shirley copied this poem out in Ashmole 59, he introduced it with a short note of its original performance:

Here foloweth next a Moral Balade, to my lord the Prince, to my lord of Clarence, to my lord of Bedford, and to my lord of Gloucestre, by Henry Scogan; at a souper of feorthe merchande in the Vyntre in London, at the hous of Lowys Johan. (Skeat 1897: 237)

Skeat glosses "feorthe merchande" to mean "'fourth meeting of merchants,' or the fourth of the four quarterly meetings of a guild" (p. xlii), while the DNB, in its entry for Scogan, interprets the phrase to mean "worthy merchants." In any case, a group of wealthy merchants were clearly holding a feast at Lewis John's house, attended by the four princes.¹⁶ And at this feast, if Shirley is to be believed, someone read the poem aloud. Shirley's heading dates from forty or fifty years after the event (he wrote out Ashmole 59 between 1447 and 1456 [Watson 1984: 5]), but since he was born around 1366, he could certainly have heard about such a reading at the time it took place or from people who had direct knowledge of it.

¹⁵I.e., Henry, prince of Wales, later Henry V (1387-1422); Thomas, later duke of Clarence (1389-1421); John, later duke of Bedford (1390-1435); and Humphrey, later duke of Gloucester (1391-1447). In 1407, the latest possible date for the poem's composition and performance, the princes were, respectively, nineteen, eighteen, seventeen, and sixteen.

¹⁶According to Tyrwhitt, Lewis John was a Welshman "who was naturalised by Act of Parliament, 2 Hen. V., and who was concerned with Thomas Chaucer in the execution of the office of chief butler" (Skeat 1894: 84). The Vintry, by what may or may not be a coincidence, is the site identified by the *Liber custumarum's* editor as the most likely home of the London puy mentioned above (pt. 1, p. li). Since the puy's regulations mention love as the principal theme and music as a required component of the member's poems (p. 225), however, Scogan's ballade hardly fits its profile.

The opening lines of this "somewhat Polonian" poem (Lenaghan 1975: 46) support the idea that it is a public admonition addressed to Scogan's royal tutees:

My noble sones, and eek my lordes dere,
 I, your fader called, unworthily,
 Sende un-to you this litel tretys here
 Writen with myn owne hand full rudely;
 Although it be that I not reverently
 Have writen to your estats, yet I you praye,
 Myn unconning taketh benignely
 For goddes sake, and herken what I seye. (ll. 1-8)

On the rather flimsy grounds that Scogan speaks in line 3 of "sending" the poem to the princes, Skeat doubts that he was at the feast himself (1897: xlii). The poem is a very serious exhortation, over twenty-four stanzas, to virtuous living, and would presumably have fit into the earlier, more sober part of the evening.

This teasing scrap of evidence opens up a whole vista of informal public performances of poetry, perhaps by the poets themselves. The mind instantly leaps, of course, to Chaucer, and the possibility that his envoy to Scogan--like the one to Bukton and perhaps even "Truth," which addresses its envoy to (Sir Philip de la) Vache--may "have been first read in similarly convivial circumstances" (Gross 1988: 1086). But though the tone of the two envoy poems, at least, is openly bantering and obviously cuts close to the shared understandings of a group of friends or associates,¹⁷ there is no extra-literary evidence of their mode of reception.

Although the discussions of Scogan's poem tend to be dismissive, a closer analysis in light of the discussion of *specula principis* and the public

¹⁷See Strohm 1989: 72-75 and 82 for an excellent discussion of the sophistication and humor required of the addressees of Chaucer's envoy poems. Chaucer's surviving love poems give no strong sense of any real addressees or possible performance situation.

sphere offered in Chapter 2 suggests some surprising depths. The ballade begins with comfortably familiar moral reflections such as:

... tyme y-lost in youthe folily
 Greveth a wight goostly and bodily,
 I mene hem that to lust and vyce entende.
 Wherefore, I pray you, lordes, specially,
 Your youthe in vertue shapeth to dispende. (ll. 36-40)

Later in the poem, however, other things begin to happen. Scogan perhaps ventures a little beyond the commonplace or safe in his warnings—all put in Chaucer's mouth—that nobility is a quality of soul, not of birth. "My mayster Chaucer," he begins,

 god his soule have!
 That in his langage was so curious,
 He sayde, the fader whiche is deed and grave,
 Biquath nothing his vertue with his hous
 Unto his sone ... (ll. 65-69)

After quoting all three stanzas of Chaucer's "Gentilesse"—with its refrain claiming gentility comes not to the virtueless, "Al were he mytre, croune, or diademe" (ll. 111, 118, 125)—Scogan rises to a more impassioned tone, e.g.:

And if your youth no vertue have provyded,
 Al men wol saye, fy on your vassalage!
 Thus hath your slouth fro worship you devyded. (ll. 147-49)

By the end of his seemingly conventional and derivative poem, therefore, Scogan has raised some perhaps touchy issues to the sons of Henry IV, who had only recently usurped the crown of England. Smuggled in with the function of reassurance, thus, is the "impassioned direct address" and the "secular and civic piety" Anne Middleton considers characteristic of the "public poetry" of the Ricardian era (1978: 94-95). Scogan has transformed the conventionality of his opening remarks and the derivativeness of his quotations from Chaucer into a common voice defending a communal concern; in so doing he may well have expressed to the young princes the opinions of the upper-middle-class men who were hosting this banquet.

The publicness of the poem's delivery reflects the publicness of the issues and of the voice the poet assumes in raising them.

James I of Scotland, 1437

The chaste dividuality of Richard II's *chambre de retraite* is called into question by the very explicit record of the activities of another British monarch in his chamber some four decades later. In a sort of news bulletin entitled "The Dethe of the Kyng of Scotis," translated by John Shirley from a now-lost Latin original soon after the event, the night on which James I of Scotland (1394-1437; r. 1406-37) was assassinated is described in detail:

Withyn short tyme after this [a chess game], the kyng beyng yn his chambur, talkyng and playng with the lordes, knyghtis and squyers that were abowte hyme, spak of many dyvers maters. So both afore soper and long aftire ynto quarter of the nyght [9 pm], in the which the erle of Atheltes and Robert Stward [the conspirators] were aboute the kyng, wher thay wer occupied att the playing of the chesse, att the tables, yn redying of Romans, yn syngyng and pyp- yng, in harpyng, and in other honest solaces of grete pleasance and disport. (ed. Stevenson, pp. 53-54)

Presumably, these activities took place one after the other, although the board games could be played while the talking, reading, or music was going on. The party may have heard not a whole romance but an installment of one they were gradually reading together, like Gaston's court in Foix; or perhaps they asked for and heard favorite bits from one or more romances ("fragmented" in the way that Andrew Taylor [1992: 61] hypothesizes was standard in minstrel performance). Unfortunately, we get no information about who the prelector (or, possibly, reciter) was. It could have been one of the musicians, doubling as a prelector in the manner often attributed to later medieval minstrels. It was equally likely to have been one of the group itself, however; in fact, even the piping and harping could have been provided by the group, as the singing presumably was. It is also

not clear whether the queen and any of her women were present in the chamber at this time; they certainly were, later, when the assassins burst in.

This pleasant evening took place in Perth, Scotland, but James, of course, spent his formative years (ages 10-28) in captivity in England--which perhaps insulates him from any charge of parochialism in his choice of diversions.

Henry VI, c. 1450

Henry VI (1421-71; r. 1422-61, 1470-71) would probably have disapproved heartily of his fellow-monarch's choice of pastime. According to John Blacman, who acted as spiritual director or confessor to Henry and wrote a memoir of him after the king's death,¹⁸ Henry spent his days working "or in reading of the scriptures or of authors and chronicles," not in "sloth or vanities, not in banquetings or drunkenness, not in vain talk or in other mischievous speech or chatter" (trans. James, p. 37) ("aut in scripturarum lectionibus, vel in scriptis aut cronicis legendis ... non in ocio aut vanitatibus, non in commessationibus aut ebrietatibus, non in vaniloquiis aut ceteris nocuiis dictis aut loquelis"; p. 15). From such reading, Blacman notes, the king "drew not a few wise utterances to the spiritual comfort of himself and others" (p. 27) ("ex quibus non pauca eloquia hauserat, ad ipsius aliorum que consolationem spiritualem"; p. 5). A recent commentator

¹⁸Blacman called his memoir *Collectarium mansuetudinum et bonorum morum regis Henrici VI* ("A Compilation of the Meekness and Good Life of King Henry VI"). The standard account is that Blacman wrote his biography of Henry VI after the accession of Henry VII, perhaps as ammunition in that king's attempt to have Henry VI canonized (DNB 1909: 215; Kingsford 1913: 149). More recently, however, Roger Lovatt has advanced evidence that Blacman was dead by January 1485. Lovatt argues that Blacman wrote the text over a number of years, from some time after Henry VI's death in 1471 until about 1480, and not as part of any royal propaganda effort but from his own desire to memorialize his patron (1981: 431-33).

on Blacman, Roger Lovatt (1981: 422), dates these observations to around 1450, when Blacman was a fellow at Eton and often in the king's company.

The austere feeling of these descriptions suggests that Henry read his Bible and chronicles privately. Blacman tells one story, however, that at least leaves the issue in some doubt. He and the king were in the latter's chamber at Eltham, the same palace where Froissart had met Richard II:

quando solus cum eo ibidem essem in sanctis suis libris com eo laborans, ejus salubribus monitis & profundissimae devotionis suspiriis intendens: dato pro tunc interim sono super hostio regio a quondam potentissimo regni duce, rex ait: *sic inquietant me, ut vix raptim per dies et noctes valeam sine strepitu aliquorum sacrorum dogmatum lectione refici.* (ed. James, p. 15)

(I was alone there with him, employed together with him upon his holy books, and giving ear to his wholesome advice and the sighs of his most deep devotion. There came all at once a knock at the king's door from a certain mighty duke of the realm, and the king said, "They do so interrupt me that by day or night I can hardly snatch a moment to be refreshed by reading of any holy teaching without disturbance.") (trans. James, pp. 37-38)

The phrase "employed ["laborans"] together ... upon his holy books" seems to imply some sort of shared reading, mingled with commentary and meditation. Henry's resentment at being taken away from such reading reflects his often-remarked inability to reconcile his religious impulses with his worldly duties and power.

The Inns of Court (Sir John Fortescue), bet. 1468-71

The *De laudibus legum Anglie* ("In Praise of the Laws of England," bet. 1468-71) of Sir John Fortescue (?1394-?1476) purports to be addressed to, or to be a dialogue with, Edward, the teen-aged heir apparent of Henry VI. The prince is too interested in martial matters, and Fortescue wants him to spend some time studying the laws of the kingdom he will rule one day.

(Prince Edward rendered the issue moot by dying in 1471 at the battle of Tewkesbury, by which Edward IV regained the throne.)

In the course of this, the first treatise on constitutional law, Fortescue takes time to describe recreational reading at the Inns of Court--whose students, he emphasizes, are mostly from noble families and often "of mature age" ("infanciam evasi") (ed. Chrimes, pp. 119-21):

maius aliis consimilis status hominibus ipsi nobilitatem curant et conservacionem honoris et fame sue. In hiis vero hospiciis maioribus eciam et minoribus, ultra studium legum est quasi gignasium omnium morum qui nobiles docent. Ibi cantare ipsi addiscunt, similiter et se exercent in omni genere armonie. Ibi eciam tripudiare ac iocos singulos nobilibus convenientes exercere, qualiter in domo regia exercere solent enutriti. In ferialibus diebus eorum pars maior legalis discipline studio, et in festivalibus sacre scripture et cronicorum lectioni post divina obsequia se confert. Ibi quippe disciplina virtutum est et viciorum omnium relegacio. Ita ut propter virtutis acquisitionem, vicii eciam fugam, milites, barones, alii quoque magnates, et nobiles regni in hospiciis illis ponant filios suos, quamvis non optent eos legum imbui disciplina nec eius exercicio vivere, sed solum ex patrimoniis suis. (p. 118)

(In these greater inns, indeed, and also in the lesser, there is, beside a school of law, a kind of academy of all the manners that the nobles learn. There they learn to sing and to exercise themselves in every kind of harmonics. They are also taught there to practise dancing and all games proper for nobles, as those brought up in the king's household are accustomed to practise. In the vacations most of them apply themselves to the study of legal science, and at festivals to the reading, after the divine services, of Holy Scripture and of chronicles. This is indeed a cultivation of virtues and a banishment of all vice. So for the sake of the acquisition of virtue and the discouragement of vice, knights, barons, and also other magnates, and the nobles of the realm place their sons in these inns, although they do not desire them to be trained in the science of the laws, nor to live by its practice, but only by their patrimonies.) (trans. Chrimes, p. 119)

Fortescue obviously approves strongly of this "academy of manners," which includes public reading, and credits it with motivating the greatest men of the land to place their sons at these schools. The fact that he may, like the

college founders, have been idealizing events¹⁹ does not detract from the fact that he considered such a pattern, including such prelections, highly laudable, desirable, and credible in the third quarter of the fifteenth century.

Edward IV, c. 1471 (Edward III, mid-14th century)

Some controversy attends the next citation, a passage from the household ordinance book (the *Liber niger*) of Edward IV (1441-83; r. 1461-70, 1471-83). The *Liber* describes the duties and perquisites of every member of Edward IV's court, from the king himself down to the kitchen staff. It was written c. 1471, possibly (if A.R. Myers hypothesizes correctly) by Edward's cofferer, John Elrington. The text is partly based upon a lost ordinance book of Edward III (R.F. Green 1980: 84), and often refers back to practice under the earlier Edward (which helps as well to emphasize the continuity between his reign and Edward IV's and, thus, the latter's legitimacy).

In order to view the disputed passage in context, I will quote it here with the preceding passage included:

By the statutes of noble Edward the iij, in none office etc., hit hath byn often in dayis before comaunded by the countynghouse, that in feriall dayes after that the king and queen and theire chambres and the soueraynez of houshold in the hall be served that then suche honest yomen of houshold be called or assigned to serue from the dressour to the halle the remnaunt, specially such as bere wages, that if seruyse be withdrawen by them that then they to be corrected therefore. Thes esquiers of houshold of old be acustumed, wynter

¹⁹Chrimes, Fortescue's editor, comments that "there seems to be no evidence that actual instruction in dancing and games proper to the nobility was provided [at Lincoln's Inn], as Fortescue appears to imply. But the extremely elaborate Revels at Christmas and other festivals must have afforded ample opportunities for the display of proficiency in such arts" (p. 197). The extent to which Fortescue is willing to idealize may be measured by his po-faced statement: "Nor was it ever found that any of them [the justices of England] was corrupted with gifts or bribes" (p. 129) ("Nec unquam compertum est eorum aliquem donis aut muneribus fuisse corruptum" [p. 128]).

and somer, in after nonys and in euenynges, to drawe to lordez chambrez within courte, there to kepe honest company aftyr theyre cunyng, in talkyng of cronycles of kinges and of other polycyecz, or in pypyng, or harpyng, synging, other actez marciablez, to help occupy the court and acompany straungers, tyll the tym require of departing. (ed. Myers, pp. 128-29)

How we interpret this companionability of squires depends on how we interpret the attribution of their assemblies to "of old." Paul Strohm has no doubt that it means "not now"—and even, "not then." He cannot, he says, imagine Chaucer

as one of those esquires described in Edward IV's household book, called to 'occupie the Court,' 'in talking of Chronicles of Kinges, and of other Pollicies, or in pipeing or harpeing, songinges, or other actes marcealls.' Not only is this description, burnished with the mellow glow of old custom, anachronistic in the fifteenth century, but it would probably have been anachronistic in the court of Richard II. The emptying of the royal (or baronial) hall was a social fact of the later fourteenth century, however one might wish to imagine otherwise. (Strohm 1989: 22)

Strohm's description of the latter part of the *Liber* passage as "burnished with the mellow glow of old custom" seems justified. But does the custom's venerability make it anachronistic? And if so, for which king—Edward III, Richard II, Edward IV?

It seems clear that the "talkyng of chronycles" must at least apply to the time of Edward III. Following on an overt reference to the serving of the "remnaunt" under the earlier Edward, it is logical to suppose the "of old" in the next passage invokes that period as well (a hypothesis backed by R.F. Green 1980: 84). Strohm's inability to imagine Chaucer among these esquires at the time of Richard II is a bit confusing, because by 1377, when Richard took the throne, Chaucer was a "nonresident" esquire (as Strohm notes, p. 22), having moved into his job as controller of the customs. When Chaucer was a "resident" esquire, it was in Edward III's time and in the king's service (Pearsall 1992: 48), which means he might well have been

among the talkative aural readers in the lords' chambers (see H.S. Bennett 1947: 5).

If the practice was current in Edward III's time, however, had it become anachronistic by Richard II's, or Edward IV's? If it had, it seems doubtful that the *Liber* would have included it. The book is not a history but a practical, working guide to running a king's court. By and large, it cares more about who gets what for breakfast (and who gets the leftovers of feasts) than about mellow digressions into the past. Its editor notes:

The book is conservative enough to include terms and rules which had not been definitely abrogated; but it is not safe to suppose that it is so antiquarian as to repeat rules which have become plainly inoperative. (pp. 19-20)

The *Liber* cites old customs only if those customs are relevant--that is, still practiced in their original or in a modified form. And when the form has been modified it notes how--e.g., "By the statutes of noble Edward the iijd. both gromez and pages [got their clothes from the wardrobe], but now hit is turned into money and other wise" (p. 121); or "In the noble Edwardes houshold there were xij messagers, wich were minnished by the avoydance of priue seale from houshold" (p. 133). In the description of the companionable esquires, as of the preceding business about serving the remnants, no such modification is noted, indicating, by the protocol practiced throughout the text, that the descriptions represent a venerable and *ongoing* feature of court life. "Of old," in such a reading, would have the force of "since a long time ago."

Whether the kings intervening between Edwards III and IV promoted or allowed this custom, it seems certainly to have flourished in these two reigns. The odds are that it flourished over the century between them as well. Even when writing about the reign of the austere Henry VI, Fortescue mentions the students at the Inns of Court as "practis[ing] dancing and all games proper for nobles, as those brought up in the king's household are

accustomed to practise" (trans. Chrimes, p. 119). Fortescue does not explicitly link these "games" to the public reading of Scripture and chronicles that he mentions next, but in any case it is clear that the "king's household" was always a place of sociable activity. The "honest company" recorded in the *Liber* seems to have met gladly, whenever possible: "wynter and somer, in after nonys and in euenynges." If the custom was so enjoyable, why suspend it?

Strohm's characterization of such "talkyng" sessions as "anachronistic" for the time of Edward IV or even of Richard II seems itself anachronistic--premiered on the common evolutionist assumptions about literacy rendering "orality" obsolescent, and serving particularly, as such claims often do, to defend Chaucer's "literacy." Strohm backs up his claim with two footnotes of similarly misread evidence. The first supports the implication that Richard II's chamber was no place for talkative esquires with "the pertinent anecdote of Froissart: Richard II received and admired his presentation volume and then removed it to his inner chamber or 'chambre de retraite,' presumably for solitary enjoyment" (Strohm 1989: 196 n. 73). As we have already noted, however, the fact that Richard kept a book in his chamber doesn't necessarily mean he read it there alone. It just means he didn't read it with a lot of people in a hall, which, as evidenced by his next footnote, Strohm seems to feel is the only alternative.

This last piece of evidence supports the comment about the "emptying of the royal (or baronial) hall" with a reference to Dame Studie's complaint about lords and ladies withdrawing to eat "In a pryvee parlour" (*Piers Plowman* B 10: 99) (Strohm 1989: 196 n. 74). Setting aside the fact that Strohm is willing to disbelieve a practical household book while believing Langland implicitly (and not just Langland, but a statement, in Langland's fictional work, attributed to an allegorical character within another character's dream), we still have to conclude that there were at least two people in this "pryvee parlour"--i.e., the lord and the lady. There might

even be a few more, some select souls like the knight Richard Credon who carried Richard II's book into his "chambre de retraite." The point is that we are dealing with a relative "emptying out," not a wholesale abandonment of sociability. If there are a few people in a private chamber, and those people are "talkyng of cronycles of kinges and of other polycyез" or otherwise reading some book aloud, then the book is being read aloud. We haven't left the aural universe; it's just gotten a little cosier.

Strohm's evidence for the anachronicity of esquires (especially Chaucer) socializing and reading chronicles and "polycyез" aloud thus boils down to two texts indicating that by Richard II's time lords and kings had private chambers to which they withdrew. I concede that point. So does the *Liber niger*: in a passage not quoted by Strohm, it explicitly places these readings in "lordez chambrez within courte." Until he finds texts establishing that kings and lords were always alone when they read in their *chambres de retraite*, however, or that if they were in company and reading a book they were always reading the book only to themselves, I cannot really think Strohm has succeeded in excluding prelection from the reception channels characterizing later medieval reading.

Analysis

All these reports of secular British reading seem, in one way or another, to emphasize the communality and enjoyability of the experience. Unlike Franco-Burgundian reading, and the lay readings of devotional material analyzed below, they are not dominated by one clear social superior (with the minor exception of Richard's reading, which was only a moment's skim). The most powerful members of the Vintry audience, the four sons of Henry IV, are put in the position of docile listeners to Scogan's advice. The description of reading in James I's chamber fixes him merely as one of the happy participants, and the crowd in the lords' chambers, as per the *Liber*

niger, apparently mingle in easy disregard of relative status. There is no stipulation that a senior member of the group deliver or monitor the students' hall-readings. The general impulse is to assemble, to pool resources (and "cunyng") to entertain each other, and in such a context private reading would obviously be out of place. This *gemütlich* feeling is characteristic of British reports of reading, and will reappear when we look at literary texts in the next chapter.

The function of such reading is neither to indoctrinate courtiers with official propaganda nor to show off and compete with love poetry, but, mostly, to sit around fires, laugh, sing, and listen to interesting stories. Recreational prelection universally attracts glowingly positive descriptions; it is equated with "honest solaces of grete pleasance and disport" (James I), "honest company" (the Edwardian esquires), and "a cultivation of virtues and a banishment of all vice" (Inns of Court). Richard II was "tous resjouys" with Froissart's book on love. Even the leisure readings at New College are described as "honest solaces" ("solatiis honestis")—precisely the term used of James I's romances! Henry VI is the only British reader of secular material who follows anything like the French model.

Such nonhierarchical and congenial assemblies would have offered the ideal setting for public-sphere discussions (or gossip) about issues of current importance, brought into focus by shared readings of chronicles and *specula principis*. That the *Liber niger's* esquires and lords are said to be "talkyng of" rather than "reading" their chronicles and "polycyeyz" combines the idea of the spoken-aloud text with the idea of the conversation and commentary that probably attended the prelection. Even our one example of a prelected poem, Scogan's ballade, falls into the category of *speculum principis*. Like other "dull" fifteenth-century poets (see Chapter 2), the "Polonian" Scogan modulated the "common voice" through the apparent conventionalities of his banquet-table advice to the four sons of Henry IV.

In most of these reports, recreational prelection is associated, unsurprisingly, with hours or days of leisure: during or after the evening meal for the Vintry party, James I, and the Oxbridge colleges; afternoons and evenings for the squires, lords, and "straungers"; on festival days at the Inns of Court; and on a variety of feasts and special days for New and other colleges. Henry VI seems to have been the only one who tried to read during the "workday," with the predictable frustrations. The prelections usually took place in the king's or lords' chamber, as for Richard II, James I, Henry VI, and the squires of Edwards III and IV. The Vintry party and the collegians read in hall, as the law students may also have done.

Devotional Texts

Along with the Scripture reading of Henry VI and the students at the Inns of Court (see above), we can review two further reports of the lay reading of devotional texts.

"Instructions for a Devout and Literate Layman," 1st half 15th century

"Instructions for a Devout and Literate Layman" is the English title given by William Pantin to a Latin screed found among the Throckmorton Muni-ments. Pantin hypothesizes that the manuscript was "an *aide-memoire*, probably intended partly to sum up, partly to supplement some previous oral instructions" given by the recipient's confessor or spiritual director. The recipient was a married layman of some standing, a member of the professions or of the gentry, and probably resident in London (pp. 400-403).

"Above all," Pantin comments, "the most remarkable thing we know about the recipient is that he was well educated, and could read Latin" (p. 403).

Among its other advice, the screed recommends public reading at the family meals:

Cum prandendum fuerit (et eciam post prandium) dicatis gracias stando.

Eque cito deferatur liber ad mensam sicut panis.

Et ne lingua proferat vana seu nociva, legatur nunc ab uno, nunc ab alio, et a filiis statim cum sciant legere, et cogitetis de divite nebulone cruciato apud inferos in lingua magis quam in aliis membris.

Sileat familia in mensa et semper, quatenus est possibile.

Aliquando exponatis in vulgari quod edificet uxorem et alios. ...
... et fiat ut supra (in prandio). (pp. 421-22)

(When you dine, and also after dinner, say grace standing.

Let the book be brought to the table as readily as the bread.

And lest the tongue speak vain or hurtful things, let there be reading, now by one, now by another, and by your children as soon as they can read; and think of the wicked Dives, tormented in hell in his tongue more than in any other members.

Let the family be silent at table, and always, as far as is possible.

Expound something in the vernacular which may edify your wife and others. ...

... and let all be done as above at dinner.) (trans. Pantin, pp. 399-400)

Pantin supposes "the book" might be a collection of saints' lives or of homilies, like Mirk's *Festiall*; the diners read in turn, with the children contributing as soon as they learned to read. The father expounded the meaning, perhaps translating if he was reading in Latin (pp. 407-8).

Cecily, Duchess of York, c. 1485

Another and more famous devout lay patron of dinnertime prelection was Cecily Nevill, duchess of York (1415-95), the mother of Edward IV and Richard III. After an active life involved in Yorkist (and family) politics, Cecily retired to Berkhamsted Castle, "where she followed a strict daily routine of religious observance along Benedictine lines" (Dockray 1983: 305). The anonymous functionary who wrote out the "Orders and Rules" of her household around 1485 recorded her reading habits among other details.

After a morning full of prayer and worship, she goes from her chapel to dinner,

duringe the tyme whereof she hath a lecture of holy matter, ether Hilton of contemplative and active life, Bonaventure de infancia, Salvatoris legenda aurea, St. Maude, St. Katherine of Sonys, or the Revelacions of St. Bridgett. ... and in the tyme of supper she recyteth the lecture that was had at dynner to those that be in her presence. (Orders and Rules, p. *37)

C.A.J. Armstrong (1942: 82-87) identifies Cecily's reading list as: Walter Hilton's *Of Active and Contemplative Life*, *The Mirrour of the Blessed Lyf of Jesu Christ* (Nicholas Love's translation of a work attributed to St. Bonaventure), the apocryphal *De infancia salvatoris*, the *Legenda aurea*, lives of Sts. Maude and Katherine of Siena, and the *Revelations* of St. Brigit. Hilton's book gives practical advice on how to live religiously in the world; the *Mirrour* and the *De infancia* offer details about Jesus that invite the listener's affective reaction; the lives of Maude and Katherine offer models of female sanctity; and Brigit's *Revelations* provide a mystical Christianity as modulated, again, through a female sensibility. Cecily's reading thus seems well adapted to her own role in life, her gender, her spiritual ambitions, and, of course, her personal proclivities.

Analysis

Devotional material seems to have suited either private or public reading. Henry IV may have read privately; on the other hand, he certainly sometimes read his texts together with John Blacman, combining study, discussion, and meditation; and the students of the Inns of Court, along with the devout layman and Cecily, were all read to. In the last two cases, the public reading was mixed with or succeeded by more discussion and explication, with the chief listener in each case taking the role of teacher. Interpretation thus seems to go hand in hand with devotional reading, whether private or public.

Apart from the anticipated spiritual benefits, there seem to be two primary social functions of the reading of devotional material. First, it tended to place one individual in an exalted role as mediator of a body of highly valued texts—a function that obviously depended on the reading being a public one. This is true of Henry VI, the devout layman, and Cecily. The person who dominated these devotional reading events was not the most learned but the most powerful individual in the room. Although John Blacman was a priest, a former fellow of Merton, and currently a fellow of Eton (ed. James, p. xv), he meekly let Henry explain the Bible to him. Similarly, although Cecily no doubt had one or more priests in her retinue, it was she who reviewed the previous meal's reading to her tablemates. The devout and literate layman expounded in English to his more ignorant dependents, and enforced silence on the children with the terrifying image of Dives tortured in his tongue. In this way the hierarchy embedded in the religious worldview seems to have transferred some of its authority to the lay sponsor of the reading event.

The second, and corollary, social function of devotional reading was to control the audience. This function naturally depended on the reading being public. The reader dominates Cecily's table at supper, and she dominates at dinner with a repetition of what she'd heard at supper. The devout layman's family was to be "silent at table, ... as far as is possible"; the prelection is intended explicitly to prevent any tongues speaking "vain or hurtful things." In the reading of the Bible at meals to the scholars of New College (who were, of course, not a lay audience), they are similarly expected to listen meekly, without "any sort of talking, tale-telling, clamor, laughing, whispering, or tumult" (*Statutes*, v. 1, New College, p. 41). All other forms of interaction or conversation are suppressed, in favor of the one heavily valorized flow of formulated text. This may have been an especially useful means of controlling the potential disruptions of the devout layman's children or the colleges' adolescent scholars.

CONCLUSION: MAPPING AURALITIES

The British evidence surveyed above derives from a grab-bag of odd sources. Apart from two histories (Froissart's chronicle and Blacman's memoir) and Fortescue's legal treatise, we have drawn on a bit of gossip relayed by a copyist of Chauceriana (Scogan's poem at the "souper"); a short Latin "news-bulletin" translated by a London stationer (James I reading on the night of his death); two sets of household ordinances (Edward IV's and Cecily of York's; three sets, if we include Edward III's, encapsulated in Edward IV's; four, if we include the boy Prince Edward's); college statutes (New, King's, etc.); and a Latin screed (the devout layman).

If any characteristic could be said to dominate among these texts, it would be the idea of a "rulebook" outlining in detail the conduct of various forms of group life, whether courtly (the two kings and the prince), collegiate (the Oxbridge colleges, plus Fortescue's account of the Inns of Court), or domestic (the devout layman's "instructions" and Cecily). The college statutes and the layman's instructions could be called prescriptive, while the household ordinances are descriptive, with Fortescue somewhere in the middle. They are alike, however, in generating a more or less idealized vision of the physically and spiritually prosperous society, structured along a spine of rigid social hierarchy.

The ways in which that hierarchy is replicated, or not, in British reading patterns, as well as many other aspects of those patterns, make an instructive contrast with the French and Burgundian reading we reviewed in the previous section. We have noted already that the two cultural areas distributed genres in two distinct patterns: the Franco-Burgundians ascribing three significantly different (though sometimes overlapping) reading environments to love poetry, romance, and, as one category, histories with philosophical and devotional texts; and the British distinguishing more

roughly (with occasional overlap) between secular and lay devotional reading. Almost all the examples in all these cases involved public reading, so that we could be justified in describing these five different reading patterns as distinct "auralities." At the same time, as the analysis below will demonstrate, the overall reading patterns of the two cultural areas also differ in consistent ways, constituting two higher-order auralities.

Franco-Burgundian versus British Aurality: Genres

The British "reading map" is, above all, far less organized and centralized than the one found across the Channel. Without an official patronage system subsidizing the production of chronicles and histories, for example, there were fewer such texts, and their authors had less motivation to include exemplary scenes of kings or lords listening (and exposing their courts) to improving (and propagandistic) texts. Although British chronicles and histories certainly were written, their authors rarely invoke the ideas that explicitly or implicitly inform French historiography: that history provides its readers with patterns of nobility and chivalry; that these models, as well as the dynastic propaganda encoded within them, can be effectively publicized by reading the texts aloud; or that they as authors can augment their genre's importance by emphasizing its appeal to and consumption by high-status readers. In general, British historians seem to have paid little attention to reading behavior, and consequently such works make only a small showing among those cited in this section.

Of the three British texts included above that could fit into the category of history, one, Froissart's chronicle, is obviously a French text²⁰ that

²⁰Froissart wrote under the protection of a variety of patrons. The first was a compatriot, Philippa of Hainault, whom he joined in England when she married Edward III. At her death in 1369 he returned to the Continent, where his patrons included Robert de Namur, lord of Beaufort; Wenceslas of Brabant; and Guy, count of Blois. He had collected materials for the chronicle while in

includes an English episode. Both of the others are associated with Henry VI: one is Blacman's memoir, which he apparently wrote without official encouragement; the other is Fortescue's treatise on English law, which he wrote while with the king's family in exile in France (ed. Chrimes, p. lxxiv). Both these texts do service as a form of propaganda, promulgating a theory and practice of monarchy, and both include exemplary forms or acts of reading. Neither Blacman nor Fortescue carries the idea further, however, for instance with a dedication suggesting their own books as suitable for public reading. This may partly be because, owing to the timing of their composition, both texts exist at an oblique angle to official culture and its conventions: Blacman, writing during the reign of Edward IV, mutes all references to the ruling faction; while Fortescue wrote his idealized account of English law for a prince in exile whose succession was far from certain.

In most of the British reading events surveyed above it is not even clear what language the text was in. Except when the text itself is the evidence, as with Froissart's book and Scogan's ballade, we are left to guess whether our readers read in English (or Scots), French, or Latin. This linguistic uncertainty contrasts with the systematic French/Burgundian program of commissions and translations designed to provide a full selection of worthwhile reading material in the vernacular. Such material found its way into English in a much more haphazard way, reflecting both the relative inefficiency of the patronage system and the relatively lower status of the language.

Franco-Burgundian versus British Aurality: Functions

Where French (and Burgundian) reading was, in a word, official, British reading, in a second word, was communal. This difference may explain the

England 1361-69, but only began writing it on his return to Hainault (Reid 1976: 245-46).

dominance of histories among the French and Burgundian sources drawn on here, and of "rulebooks" among the English sources. French reading, as reported in the histories, was isolated as an event and carried on with a certain self-consciousness and intensity. It featured the ruler in his official capacity as patron, supporter, and exemplar of officially approved values, and channeled attention towards texts designed specifically to augment the prestige of the political establishment. As such, aural readings deserved and received notice in official histories. This was true even for the romance-reading of Gaston de Foix, who left no one in doubt that he was the principal personage in the room while Froissart was reading.

British public reading takes its place in rulebooks describing forms of social interaction because, like meals and issues of precedence, it formed an important part of communal life and deserved to be provided for. Two of the fullest descriptions of such communal gatherings echo each other remarkably. Edward IV/III's courtiers "talkyng of cronycles" (c. 1471 and the mid-fourteenth century) and James I's last night (1437) both feature a similar set of personnel (lords, knights, and esquires), a similar location (the king's or lord's chamber), a similar program of entertainment (chess, backgammon, reading of secular literature, singing, and piping), and a similarly positive assessment of the whole event (they constitute "honest company" or "honest solaces"). This congruence between two wholly independent historical records suggests that the phenomenon is being accurately reported.

Unlike his French and Burgundian counterparts, the British king or other magnate as reader was not an official person; his reading was not a public, official act--nor had he thought of commissioning histories that would enshrine his official self, including his reading. In this way the most "French-style" English reader, Henry VI, was entirely un-French; his reading--though combining genres on the French model--was completely anti-"public," in the sense that it took him away from his public duties, with ultimately catastrophic effect. The records that preserve the secular reading

behavior of James I and Richard II attribute no great moral or political virtue to their activity, beyond the simple pleasure it brought them. Although, no doubt, due respect was observed, the king or lord as reader is generally subsumed into the background, part of the happy group.

Unlike France and the Burgundian court, therefore, where the social superior clearly dominated the reading situation, British reading almost invokes a sense of festival, of ritual inversion and status relaxation. While Gilles Malet went about his reading duties on the day his son died because Charles V's routine was not to be interrupted, it is harder to imagine a favored and recently bereaved prelector of James I or Edward IV feeling duty-bound to show up for an evening's merriment. Nonetheless, these carefree British assemblies tended to turn shared reading into occasions of public-sphere debate as naturally as the starchy Franco-Burgundian system tended to turn literature into propaganda. While differing in character, both political functions depended equally on the publicness of aural reading.

In contrast to the status-suspension characteristic of British secular reading, the few cases of lay devotional reading included above seem to replicate and reinforce the social hierarchy. As noted in the analysis of those texts, the social superior clearly dominates the reading, to the extent of interpreting devotional texts to their priestly subordinates. In this way these readings seem more to resemble the Franco-Burgundian reading of historical, philosophical, and devotional material. But the equation is not total, because in the reading of the devout layman and of Cecily we still see a more communal event. The prelection tends to bond the listeners as a social unit--a family or a household--within an atmosphere of reassuring spiritual and social authority. By comparison, while Boucicaut, for instance, no doubt listened to his saints' lives in the company of various family members or retainers, his biography focuses on him alone.

Apart from its overt role of promoting mutual enjoyment or spiritual welfare, lay devotional reading in Britain--and perhaps to some extent

secular public reading as well--also functioned as a means of basic social control, a way to suppress any possible "scurrilities, evil speaking and ... insults and squabbles." This is a role never suggested among the texts of the better-behaved French and Burgundians--although the prelections at Louis of Bourbon's dinners were possibly intended to stifle disloyal gossip. James I's story, alas, is evidence enough that in Britain even a full diet of group activities, including group reading, was not enough to suppress the most violent sort of particularism.

One characteristic of British lay devotional reading that may be an artifact of the limited sample is the curious fact that the two cases reviewed here present the only reports definitely establishing the presence of women among British aural readers. This finding no doubt reflects the scarcity of reports concerning the reading of love poetry or romance in Britain. The French material gives us Froissart's demoiselle as reading both genres in several formats, while Deschamps assumes ladies to be the natural audience of love poetry. One French report connects a woman with more serious texts: Christine de Pizan's dedication of *Epistres du débat sus le "Roman de la rose"* to Isabeau of Bavaria. If the famous miniature of Christine presenting her collected works to Isabeau (Harley 4431, f. 1r) is any guide, the queen may have heard this text in the company of her women alone. No doubt further research in the writings of Christine would uncover more information on this score.

None of the reports of British secular reading, however, clearly involve women--not even James I's chamber prelections of romance, where his wife and her ladies are mentioned as present only after the general company has been dismissed. The puy regulations, although of a date earlier than my period, are suggestive in that they explicitly exclude "ladies or other women" from their feast, for what the *Liber custumarum* editor calls "the unsatisfactory, and indeed paradoxical, reason" (pt. 1, p. liii) "ke om doit de ceo ensaumple prendre, e droit aveyement, de honurer, cheir [cherir], et

loer trestotes dames, totes heures en touz lieus, au taunt en lour absence come en lour presence. E ceo voet noeture e tote bone afferaunce" (pt. 1, p. 225) ("that the [members] ought hereby to take example, and rightful warning, to honour, cherish, and commend all ladies, at all times in all places, as much in their absence as in their presence. And this breeding requires and all good propriety"; trans. Riley, pt. 2, p. 590).

If this does reflect some native British prejudice, it makes sense that breeding and propriety were more willing to allow British females to hear lay devotional texts in mixed company: the devout layman's wife and daughters (if any) with the layman himself and sons (if any); and Cecily and her female attendants with, no doubt, at least a priest (perhaps as prelector). The sample of historical reading events presented here thus suggests that British women were excluded from readings of secular material (or conducted their own, separate from the men's), while being more readily admitted into readings of devotional texts. Of course, the sample is too uninformative in some respects, and too limited in others, to make this a reliable conclusion without further research to back it up. The literary material reviewed in the next two chapters may add some fuel to the suggestion offered here, however.

The communalism of British reading may also explain why the material we have examined above never singles out one person as a particularly skilled prelector, along the lines of Gilles Malet or the lord of Humbercourt. Except for Froissart's remark that Richard II spoke and read French very well, we get no insight into the artistry of British prelectors. Nor do we get any idea whether British kings and lords in this period regularly employed household functionaries as prelectors. One thing that does emerge from all these reports, however, is the distinct lack of minstrel prelectors. It is possible that one or two lurks, unidentified, in James I's chamber or among Edward IV's "honest company." But from what we know or can surmise about the prelectors in the material surveyed above, minstrels were no

more evident as aural readers in and after Chaucer's time than they were before (see Chapter 2). The people we have seen sharing in public readings include kings, princes, lords and ladies, esquires, merchants, priests, the upper- and upper-middle-class students of New and other colleges and the Inns of Court, and authors, from at least the 1370s (the end of Edward III's reign) to the 1470s (Fortescue's treatise and the *Liber niger*). The literacy of none of these listeners could be in doubt.

The evidence presented here may serve to set another favorite myth to rest, the one about private chambers evolving as the natural setting for private reading. The data we have reviewed suggest strongly that the increasing tendency of the high-born to seek the privacy of their own chambers did not affect the publicness of the reading undertaken there. James I's romance-reading took place in his chamber, and Edward IV/III's squires are specifically mentioned as assembling in "lordez chambrez." As private as Henry VI longed to be in his chamber, he included in that privacy John Blacman, with whom he read and discussed his favorite books. Along with Froissart's account of his more formal prelection in Gaston's chamber in Orthez, these sources thus support each other in drawing a picture of the king's or lord's private chamber as a place where, from the late fourteenth to the late fifteenth century, shared reading was a commonplace and socially valued pastime.

Post-Medieval Public Reading

This survey of historical records of medieval reading behavior has shown that aurality, or a plurality of auralities, flourished both in Britain and in the two Continental regions with which it had closest contact. On either side of the Channel, we have encountered upper-middle- and upper-class literates for whom public reading of a variety of genres served a variety of sophisticated functions. By contrast, we have encountered remarkably few

cases of possible private reading: among the Franco-Burgundians only Jean d'Angoulême and monseigneur de Créquy, and among the British only Henry VI. I have not suppressed historical reports of dividual reading of secular texts among the lay (non-clerical, non-scholarly) population: I simply did not find any more than I've presented here. The next two chapters, surveying Chaucer and the writers of his time and after, will present a substantially similar modality profile--with the evidence tapering off, as the historical evidence does, in the late fifteenth century.

The century-long time-spread of the reports reviewed here supports the "modality plateau" hypothesis suggested in the previous chapter. Aurality, that is, remained a popular reading format on both sides of the Channel long after it should have, by evolutionist logic, been rendered obsolete. Neither literacy, the increased availability of books, nor the advent of private chambers were enough to persuade people to abandon the "honest solaces" of public reading.

The Renaissance, moreover, did not simply replace the old medieval aurality with a brilliant new literacy. Rather, humanism, as it took root in Britain and other countries, tended to replace the old exophoric (socially bonding, communalizing) aurality of the Middle Ages with a relatively more endophoric (individualizing, self-asserting) aurality. I will not consider here the forms that dividuality took under these influences, but it will be of use to survey briefly some of the forms of Renaissance, and post-Renaissance, aurality.

In its country of origin, Italy, the humanistic spirit incorporated aurality in its effort to aggrandize the role of the poet. An interesting medial figure is Petrarch, whose famous Latin translation of Boccaccio's story of Griselda is "medieval" in that it allegorized the tale along standard religious lines. Having got that far, however, Petrarch then revealed his self-consciousness as a poet by trying his version out on two friends in succession. When the first man's voice became too choked with sobs for him to carry on, Petrarch

wrote to Boccaccio in 1373, he "handed the story to one of his companions, a man of education, to finish." The second friend, "having heard of the effect produced by the story in the first instance, wished to read it for himself." Even reading for himself, apparently, was an aural procedure; as this man read, "[n]either his face nor his voice betrayed the least emotion" (trans. in Robinson and Rolfe 1898: 195-96). Here the aural reading of recreational texts, noted in this and the following chapters as standard medieval practice, takes on some aspects of literary-professional literacy; Petrarch's text is read in a more evaluative, critical way, especially by the second reader.

While literary-professional literacy had a gradual and never complete transforming effect on recreational auralty, a crossover of scholarly auralty was investing the sort of formal, good-for-you readings practiced by Charles V, for example, with a new and more rigorous intensity, generally related to rediscovered or re-edited versions of classic texts. In Italy we find eminent men such as Cosimo de' Medici (1389-1464) first subsidizing a new collection of Aristotle's *Ethics*, "and when these came to Cosimo, Messer Bartolomeo [da Colle] read them to him, after emendation by Donato, and this emended text of the *Ethics* is the one now in use" (Vespasiano da Bisticci, p. 234). Federico da Montefeltro, duke of Urbino (1422-82), "maintained five men to read the classics aloud at meals" (Grudin 1991: 670).

This model seems to have arrived in France by at least the reign of François I (1494-1547; r. 1515-47), the founder of the Bibliothèque Nationale, who employed two men in succession in the position of *lecteur du roi*. Jacques Colin (*lecteur* c. 1529-36) is described as "[s]ans cesse aux côtés de François Ier, lisant et causant durant les repas" (Bourrilly 1905: 39) ("constantly at the side of François I, reading and conversing during meals"). Colin's successor, Pierre du Chastel (*lecteur* 1536-47), read to the king at meals and in the evenings, as François prepared for bed. Along with

Latin and Greek classics in the original language, these texts included the works of Rabelais. Du Chastel accompanied his readings with "commentaire ingénieux," to which the king listened "avidement, ne le perdant pas des yeux et recueillant toutes ses paroles comme autant d'oracles" (Doucet 1920: 231-32) ("avidly, not taking his eyes off him and receiving all his words as so many oracles").

This model makes its appearance in England in the reign of Elizabeth (1533-1603; r. 1558-1603), if not earlier. William Nelson notes that Elizabeth may have had an official reader-in-ordinary like François, or in any case frequently called on her intimates to read to her (1976/77: 115). Her former tutor Roger Ascham records that after a dinner party in 1563 the queen invited him into her privy chamber: "We read then together in the Greek tongue, as I well understand, that noble oration of Demosthenes against Aeschines" (*Scholemaster*, p. 7). Elizabeth's physician Dr. James and Sir John Stanhope both later acted as court prelectors, the latter mentioning in a letter to a friend that "my eyes be worn with reading." Stanhope proposed Sir John Harrington to be "reader to her majesty" in 1601 (Nelson 1976/77: 114-15).

Other Elizabethans emulated the queen; Ascham also reports reading to the English ambassador in Augsburg, in 1551, "whole Herodotus, five tragedies, three orations of Isocrates and seventeen orations of Demosthenes" (quoted in Nelson 1976/77: 114). A scholar in the employ of the earl of Leicester, Gabriel Harvey, read and discussed Livy with men such as Sir Philip Sidney and Thomas Smith, son of the royal secretary. One annotation in Harvey's Livy, for example, records: "The courtier Philip Sidney and I had privately discussed these three books of Livy, scrutinizing them so far as we could from all points of view, applying a political analysis, just before his embassy to the emperor Rudolf II" (quoted in Jardine and Grafton 1990: 36).

The sort of public-sphere responses generated in medieval readings of *specula principis* or chronicles here merge with scholarly aurality to promote a more focused "political aurality" among the actual agents--or opponents--of government. Jardine and Grafton note the case of the "purytane skoller" Henry Cuffe, professor of Greek at Oxford and secretary to the earl of Essex. Cuffe was hanged in 1601 for his part in the Essex rising, which consisted of being "sente by my lo: of Essex to reade to my lo: of Southampton in Paris where hee redd Aristotles polyticks to hym with sutch exposytions as, I doubt, did hym but lyttle good" (quoted on p. 34). Jardine and Grafton hypothesize that noble Elizabethan households regularly employed scholars to read and provide "interpretations of textual material on pragmatic political themes, ... acting less as advisers in the modern sense than as facilitators easing the difficult negotiations between modern needs and ancient texts" (pp. 34-35). Among other features they note that such reading "was normally carried out in the company of a colleague or student; and was a public performance, rather than a private meditation, in its aims and character" (p. 31).

As a sort of trickle-down version of the scholar-princes' reading, ordinary citizens were also invited to hear readings of classical or otherwise improving texts. Such aural sessions may have been considered especially suitable for women, partly as a means of discipline and partly because they spent more time doing sedentary handwork. Thomas Salter, in his *Mirrhore Mete for All Mothers, Matrones, and Maidens, Intituled the Mirrhor of Modestie* (1579), opines that "our wise matrone shall reade, or cause her maidens to reade, the examples and liues of godly and vertuous ladies." Among the texts he suggests are the Bible, Plutarch, and Boccaccio's *De claris mulieribus* (quoted in Wright 1931: 674). The Puritan Lady Margaret Hoby mingled her private devotions with much aural religiosity; her diary entry for 21 January 1599, for example, notes: "after [dinner], I wroughte, hearinge Mr

Rhodes Read of a booke against some newe spronge vp herisies" (ed. Meads, p. 98).

All these forms of aurality are apart from the endophoric orality embodied in the new educational emphasis on the *ars disserendi* (see Kinney 1986: 11) and the upper-middle- and upper-class prelection of recreational literature, which persisted despite increased rates of literacy and book-availability. Sidney's *New Arcadia* (1581-84), for example, gives a romanticized scene of a husband reading to his wife: Argalus is found "sitting in a parlour with the fair Parthenia; he reading in a book the stories of Hercules, she by him, as to hear him read" but more absorbed in gazing at him (p. 371). The fair Parthenia later reads a letter to herself (p. 372), proving that her aurality was not dictated by illiteracy.

Of course, and finally, aurality did also emerge in the role to which it is generally supposed to have been confined after the time of Chaucer: as the modality of necessity for those masses now perceived, against an increasing emphasis on literacy, as illiterate (see Cressy 1980: 1-3). The spread of literacy drove aurality downmarket, in this subform, not because all the middle and upper classes had begun to read individually but because there were now more lower-class literates. This meant that there was someone to prelect to members of the lower classes and, accordingly, a literature intended to be read aloud to such audiences. As the word "read" was slowly drifting, over the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, towards the sense of "read privately," so aurality was beginning, through this one manifestation, to acquire the association with poverty and illiteracy that it usually carries today.

That it would be a long time before this association, and the practice of individuality, achieved dominance may be illustrated by a quick review of post-Renaissance reports of reading. Alexander Hume's denunciation of the goings-on among the upper-class youth of 1599 suggests that Presbyterian-

ism had not effaced every trace of James I's Scotland. Hume fulminates, in his *Hymnes, or Sacred Songs, Wherein the Right Vse of Poesie May Be Espied*:

In Princes courts, in the houses of greate men, and at the assemblies of yong gentlemen and yong damesels, the cheife pastime is, to sing prophane sonnets, and vaine ballats of loue, or to rehearse some fabulos faits of Palmerine, Amadis, or other such like raueries. (p. xiv)

In her diary, Lady Anne Clifford (1590-1676), Countess of Dorset, Pembroke, and Montgomery, records reading and hearing a wide variety of books, including literature, history, political science, and devotional texts. On 9 November 1616, for example, "I sat at my work and heard *Rivers* and *Marsh* read Montaigne's *Essays* which book they have read almost this fortnight" (p. 41). The breadth of Clifford's reading suggests the educational aspirations of Protestant England interacting with the easy availability of books to produce a sort of intellectual consumerism.²¹

As literacy moved down the social scale, scenes like those Clifford records were reproduced in such petty bourgeois households as that of Thomas Turner, an eighteenth-century Sussex shopkeeper. A typical entry from his diary reads:

Weds. 15 Oct. [1755]. At home all day. Paid for milk 1/2 d. Nothing more of moment; only posted part of my day book. My wife read part of *Clarissa Harlowe* to me in the even as I sat a-posting my book. (p. 16)

The popularity of public reading as a domestic amusement on into the Victorian age is well evidenced. A particularly impressive cast of aural readers appears in a letter of Mary James to her son Henry; writing in 1871, she notes that "[Oliver] Wendell Holmes ... has read Browning aloud to us most charmingly--and I hear him now in the next room reading to Will [William James]" (quoted in Strouse 1981: 143). It might fittingly wind up

²¹I am much indebted to Jennifer Richards for directing me to many of the sources cited in this discussion.

this section to quote another American source, Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Blithedale Romance* (1852). The narrator Coverdale finds himself wondering why public lectures had recently "come strongly into vogue, when the natural tendency of things would seem to be, to substitute lettered for oral methods of addressing the public" (p. 196). Although this comment concerns lectures rather than prelections, it seems to encapsulate both the ineradicable human affinity for the oral/aural and the progressivist's equally unquenchable impatience to pronounce its demise. Both tendencies, it would seem, have survived intact into the present day.

CHAPTER 4

AN "ETHNOGRAPHY OF READING" IN CHAUCER

The survey that follows assembles the internal evidence from Chaucer's work for my thesis that he expected his texts to be read aloud, perhaps by himself to his immediate, first audience but as well by other prelectors to later audiences. As noted in Chapter 1, Chaucer's address to his "litel bok" at the close of *Troilus and Criseyde* (5: 1786-98) suggests that he was consciously directing his work to posterity. Yet the only foundation for the almost universal assumption that he expected posterity to read his work privately is the dual fallacy incorporated in standard orality/literacy theory: first, the Great Divide polarization that portrays "orality" and "literacy" as mutually incompatible entities; and second, the technological determinism that assumes "orality" becomes superfluous upon the appearance of its evolutionary successor, "literacy." For most scholars, any flickering readiness to accept Chaucer's auralty is hampered by an equal readiness to define auralty away as a subform of "orality," or of "literacy," or of both.

The previous chapters may have helped to demonstrate, however, that "orality" and "literacy" have a large area of overlap, notably in the form of auralty; that auralty did not evaporate on contact with "literacy"; and that to artifact such obsolescence by peremptorily conflating auralty into either "orality" or "literacy" (or both) effaces the important uniqueness of auralty. Literature continued to be read aloud long after dividuality had become technically more feasible, because literate people continued to derive a variety of pleasures and profits from public reading that were not available in private.

To substantiate the contention that Chaucer anticipated a future audience of literate listeners, this chapter will look closely at his references to hearing and reading, with minimal attention to the secondary literature. Rather than select a few examples that seem to support my case—as is the general practice in discussions of Chaucer's auralty or "literacy"—I will adopt the "ethnographic" methodology described in Chapter 2. The first phase of that effort was to collect all the references to or instances of public and private reading in Chaucer; the next phase was to look for the patterns these data seemed to make. Two generalizations that emerged from this analysis were presented in Chapter 2, because they seemed to suggest viable frameworks in which to read other medieval authors as well. I will refer here to these ideas—namely, the typology of late medieval literacies and the aural-narrative constellation—without repeating the detailed exposition.

There is still much to say in the present chapter, however, about Chaucer's particular viewpoint on modalities. This material will be discussed in ascending order of realization: first, Chaucer's references to the reception of his own work; then his explicit references to the reception of other people's work; and finally his dramatized depictions of reception. I have grouped the data according to the schemas that seemed to organize and make sense of them best; but as the data are presented in full, my readers are free to find other patterns or to dispute the ones I have found.

This analysis will assume that Chaucer's references to reception channel can be taken at face value. I am setting aside for the time any arguments about "oral" traits as survivals of minstrel practice or as Chaucer's nostalgic evocation of a superseded reception format. As the discussion of "fictive orality" in Chapter 1 suggests, these theories derive their force from the same polarizing and evolutionist fallacies discussed above. The history reviewed in the previous chapter suggests that Chaucer's "hear's" address a pertinent, contemporary reality; at the very least, they deserve a hearing.

Finally, I will not be considering here the stylistic traits cited by Ruth Crosby (1938) and by Bertrand Bronson (1940) as proof of Chaucer's aural-ity. More note needs to be taken of the varieties of orality, aural-ity, and dividuality before firm equations should be made between modality and style. One might say, however, that I am extending the sort of survey Crosby conducted of Chaucer's style to his invocations of reception channels. Surprisingly, no one to date has systematically surveyed these descriptions in an effort to discover how Chaucer presents private and public reading and what sorts of material he associates with each. Yet, as will appear below, such a survey produces some interesting results.

REFERENCES TO THE RECEPTION OF CHAUCER'S OWN WORK

Chapter Appendices A and B present all of Chaucer's references to, respectively, the hearing and the reading of his own texts (excluding prose works except the two prose Canterbury tales). Appendix A lists 44 passages in which Chaucer, speaking directly to his audience, assumes they will "hear," "herken," or, in one case, "listen."¹ Of these 44, 19 are versions of "as ye shall hear" and 10 of "as ye have heard," basic formulas useful in moving a story along or tying it together. The first often introduces a pilgrim's tale or otherwise signals a transition in the narrative; e.g.,

And to Criseyde, his owen lady deere,
He wrot right thus, and seyde as ye may here: (T&C 5: 1315-16)

The second formula does duty as a mini-*occupatio*, saving Chaucer the trouble of recapping things the audience should remember while giving

¹The "listen" is not universally accepted, however. J.A. Burrow (1968) argues that, in Chaucer's summons to "every maner man / That Englissh understonde kan / And listeth of my drem to lere" (HF: 509-11), "listeth" means not "listen" but "desires." The editor of the Riverside Chaucer *House of Fame* notes Burrow's objection but opts to construe the word "as the imperative plural of 'listen'" (Fyler 1988: 982, n. to l. 511)—which is my justification for doing the same.

their memory a quick boost; e.g., in the prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*:

Me mette how I was in the medewe tho,
 And that I romede in that same gyse,
 To sen that flour, as ye han herd devyse. (LGW, G: 104-6)

In addition, Chaucer has 8 "herkens," 6 "hears," and the one "listen": e.g., the *House of Fame's* "Now herkeneth, as I have yow seyde, / What that I mette or I abreyde" (HF: 109-10) and, summarizing his way through Troilus and Criseyde's courtship, "I trowe it were a long thyng for to here" (T&C 3: 495).

As Ruth Crosby noted in 1938, the Canterbury pilgrims use these same narrative formulas and verbs of hearing many times in their story-telling (p. 415). The very workadayness of these formulas, their unobtrusiveness and usefulness, seem to offset the assumption that they figure in some elaborate Chaucerian strategy to recreate a departed performance situation for his nostalgic private readers (Mehl 1974). Nor need we suppose they represent residue from the time of minstrel performance (Burrow 1971) or, more vaguely, of the "oral mind" (S. McKenna 1988). "As ye shall hear" is a perfectly sensible way to address either a fictional listener to a Canterbury tale or a real person listening to a book being read aloud. In either case, such phrases are contemporary and functional.

Appendix A also helps to refute another popular misconception, that Chaucer evolved away from aurality over the course of his writing career (see, e.g., Strohm 1989: 56). Of Chaucer's 44 references to the hearing of his own work, 8 occur in the early poems (*House of Fame*, *Parliament of Fowls*, and *Anelida and Arcite*), 17 in *Troilus and Criseyde*, 10 in the *Legend of Good Women*, and 8 in the *Canterbury Tales* (with 1 in a short poem whose date is uncertain, and which thus will not be considered below). As a percentage of lineage (counting only the General Prologue and the links in the *Canterbury Tales*, and leaving out the Wife of Bath's Prologue), these figures show a

rise-and-fall pattern that nonetheless clearly has Chaucer using proportionately more hearing references in his later works than in his earlier:

Early poems	8 refs	3,214 lines (total)	0.249%
<i>Troilus</i>	17 refs	8,239 lines	0.206%
<i>Legend</i>	10 refs	2,723 lines	0.367%
<i>Canterbury Tales</i>	8 refs	2,251 lines (GP & links)	0.355%

While Chaucer assumes hearing as the reception channel of his work 44 times, he makes only 6 references to people reading his work (see Appendix B).² One case--"As ye han in this covenant herd me rede" (LGW: 2139)--clearly preserves an "aural read." Two are variations on the "hear and/or read" phrase: "herkne ... or rede" and "red ... or elles songe." As noted in Chapter 2, these may preserve either a hard or a soft contrast--"read or hear" meaning either "read privately or listen to a public reading"; or "read publicly or listen to a public reading." Given this uncertainty, these "read's" might be classified as format-neutral.

The address to "Thow, redere" in *Troilus and Criseyde* (5: 270) is often noted as a clear reference to private reading (e.g., Fichte 1988: 122); and the use of the second person singular seems to support this idea. Finally, the last two examples of "read"--"The Wyf of Bathe I pray yow that ye rede" ("Lenvoy a Bukton," l. 29) and "Shewe by word, that ye wolde ones rede / The compleynte of me" ("Complaynt D'Amours," ll. 67-68)--seem to incline

²The bottom of Appendix B notes an anomalous seventh case, that of the Second Nun's reference to "yow that reden that I write" (CT 8: 78). One of five instances in which a pilgrim narrator speaks of him or herself as "writing" (see Chapter 2), this is the only one in which the audience is also spoken of as "reading." If the passage is to be understood as in the Second Nun's voice, then "write" must mean "narrate," and "read" must mean "hear." If it is to be understood as a comment in Chaucer's narrative voice, left unrevised when the tale was adapted for the Second Nun, then "write" and "read" are straightforward in themselves but problematic as being present only by mistake. Given these difficulties, I have left the passage out of consideration here.

toward private reading, since each is urging a particular reading task on a personal acquaintance.

Thus, of the 6 times that Chaucer anticipates readers for his text as opposed to hearers, 1 refers in fact to hearers, 2 are ambiguous, or format-neutral, and 3 probably refer to private readers. This results in an overall tally of 45 clear references to hearers, 2 format-neutral references to readers, and 3 probable references to private readers (2 in short poems addressed to Chaucer's intimates).

REFERENCES TO THE RECEPTION OF SOURCES

Appendices A and B have shown that Chaucer overwhelmingly addresses his own audience as hearers. Appendices C and D reveal, by contrast, that "read's" predominate over "hear's" when Chaucer or one of his fictional narrators speaks of other written works. There are so many "read's," in fact, that I had considerable initial difficulty analyzing them. I had originally titled Appendices B and C "Chaucer's References to the Reading of"--respectively--"His Own Books" and "Other People's Books." Gradually, however, I realized that the symmetry of these titles concealed a key distinction, one that explained why B had so few and C so many "read's": B's "read's" refer to audience reception; C's, to authorial source-consultation. The books "read" in the citations given in Appendix C are the material from which the narrators have mined the stories or maxims they rework into their new tales, or with which they seek to bolster their authority.

These citational "read's," therefore, invoke the specialized form of reading characteristic of authors or of scholars, typologized in Chapter 2 as literary- and scholarly-professional reading. The presence (and borrowing of prestige from) the scholarly model may even explain some of the citational "hear's" in Appendix D. The Squire's reference to "they that han ... herd" philosophical treatises on mirrors (CT 5: 235), for example, recalls that

medieval university statutes typically describe the curriculum in terms of books that students should hear (*audire*). Much more prevalent, however, is the model of the literary author processing "olde bokes" into "newe science" (PF: 24-25). The reason that there are so many "read's" in Appendix C and so few in B, thus, is that authors, usually, read while audiences, usually, hear--the two modalities existing not in rigid opposition or in an uncomfortable state of transition, but as natural complements.

This impression is further confirmed by Appendix E, which presents eight cases that stood out as anomalous in Appendices C and D once I realized they properly concerned source-reading. The most accurate rubric under which to assemble these passages seemed to be "transmission" and, not coincidentally, hearing plays a large role in them. The sounds that arrive at the House of Fame, for instance, derive in part from the reading of books, while fallen women such as Dido and Criseyde lament that the writing of stories about them will lead to their names being rolled on many a tongue.

It is true that many of Appendix C's "read's" take the form of syllabus suggestions to the audience; e.g., "The same wordes writeth Ptholomee; / Rede in his Almageste, and take it there" (CT 3: 182-83). Such suggestions, however, are surely intended more to impress than to educate the audience. Yet the situation is even more complicated, because there are two sorts of narrators in these tales. One, Chaucer, was a genuine literary-professional private reader, and his "read's" can be supposed to reflect, more or less reliably, his recreative efforts. In the mouths of his fictional narrators, on the other hand, these "read's" pose a variety of problems. Even if the Wife of Bath didn't "really" expect the Pardoner to go off and read the *Almagest*, had she "really" read it herself? If so, how? The vast majority of texts invoked by the pilgrim narrators were in Latin, French, and Italian. Even if they could have obtained the books, and could have read them, how many of them knew these languages?

Such speculations, of course, soon dissolve into absurdity. The person who really could and did read the sources cited by his fictional characters was Chaucer; and in accepting this we accept the citations as instances of literary-professional private reading. Inasmuch as they can be read in character for the fictional narrators, they represent attempts to borrow the prestige of author or scholar--whom these oral performers seem far more eager to imitate than they are to play at minstrels, as many scholars assume. Their pretensions, of course, become part of the comedy: it is hard to credit source-citations delivered from astride a horse somewhere in the middle of Kent. If we are to suppose these narrators "really" knew their texts, we would probably have to suppose that knowledge, in most cases, to have been obtained aurally. Any acquaintance that laypeople would have with the most often cited text, the Bible, would probably come from aural readings and explications by clerics; and Alison of Bath, of course, could only have picked up her erudition second-hand, via Jankyn's aural readings or explications.

A detailed look at Appendix C gives some idea of the complexities of Chaucer's citational "read's." Seven out of Chaucer's 8 references to identified sources employ the same formula, "whoso [wants to know]/[can], read ..."; e.g., "Which whoso willeth for to knowe, / He moste rede many a rowe ..." (HF: 447-48). His fictional narrators, in their references to identified sources, are much more aggressive. Half the 22 passages use the simple, peremptory formula, "Read ..."; e.g., the Nun's Priest's "Redeth Ecclesiaste of flaterye" (CT 7: 3329). Along with the implicit second-person voice of the imperative, 5 further quotes use the pronoun "ye"; e.g., the Clerk's "As seith Seint Jame, if ye his pistol rede" (CT 4: 1154).

Thus Chaucer, in his own narrative voice, adopts a stance at once more self-effacing and more self-assured; should someone want to catch up with his reading, he suggests with a politely indirect third-person "whoso" and "he," that person might have some work to do. The second-person formulas

of the fictional oral narrators, on the other hand, seem to mix ostentation with insecurity: if you think I'm wrong, they might be saying, go and read the book yourself--if you can. Chaunticleer, not surprisingly, is the most self-advertising reader, with the Wife of Bath and the Manciple not far behind.

In citing unidentified or proverbial sources, Chaucer's and the fictional narrators' usages seem very close; both are fond of the generalized formulas "(As) men (may) (in books) read" and "Men read (that ...)." Chaucer's professionalism seeps through, however, when these passages are read in context. Although most of his statements seem as unspecific as most of the fictional narrators', they tend more often to reference an actual source. The impatient tone of the two quotes from *Legend of Good Women* ("Ye may as wel it sen as ye may rede" and "Ye gete namore of me, but ye wole rede / Th'origynal"; ll. 1263, 1557-58), interestingly, goes with Chaucer's sole excursions into the second-person. The effect, perhaps, is to emphasize the unlikelihood of his female audience being able to read the Latin original--a rare ungracious gesture from an author eager to move on to more important projects.

Finally, the formula "as I read" shows us the author/narrator in the very moment of recreative composition. It is the natural complement, as noted in Chapter 2, to the reception phrase "as ye shall hear," coordinating the professional reading of source-texts with the recreational listening to the new texts that reading produces.

While their use in different contexts carry different shades of meaning, Chaucer's citational "read's" also serve the trans-narrative strategy of constituting a sort of "fictive literacy." These professional and pseudo-professional "read's" proliferate in order (as hypothesized in Chapter 2) to bolster the sense of all aggregated written tradition standing behind the vernacular storytelling event. The effect is reinforced by the background buzz of "as men read's" and "rede auctours" referring to unidentified or

proverbial sources, and by the replication in the fictional narrations of the phrases Chaucer uses when speaking *in propria persona*.

For all the forms of authorial literacy flourished in his texts, however, Chaucer gives no hint that he wishes his audience would read him in a similarly dividual fashion. He provides no passage along the lines of Boccaccio's famous exhortation to "those who would appreciate poetry": "You must read, you must persevere, you must sit up nights ..." (in Hardison et al. 1974: 208). The only person in Chaucer who sits up "A-nyght ful ofte thyn hed to ake" (HF: 632) is Chaucer himself, working away among his books in his study to provide texts destined to arrive, translated into sound waves, at the House of Fame.

RECEPTION DRAMATIZED

Having surveyed Chaucer's reception-phrases, I will next take the "ethnography of reading" approach deeper into the texts, to examine the "reading events" that Chaucer depicts within the frame of his fictions. This inquiry attempts to answer the questions: Who does Chaucer show reading what, and how (where "reading" includes both private and public formats)? And does the form of reading have any detectable social effect? My chief concern is to extract from this information whatever can be learned about the reading of recreational, or secular vernacular, literature—the category, of course, that includes Chaucer's own writings.

This analysis will be structured around the typology of medieval reading offered in Chapter 2. Along with the categories of pragmatic, scholarly-professional, literary-professional, religious, and recreational reading developed there, two further subcategories will be added. The first takes account of the many instances in which texts are read not only privately but "privily," that is, secretly. The second includes those "hypothetical" cases where a reading event is invoked not as a "real" occurrence but as some-

thing imagined by or for a character. The instances of "hypothetical (religious) private readers" are striking enough to merit a separate discussion.

The list below diagrams the varieties of Chaucerian reception, as dramatized in his texts. The guideline for selecting a text as an instance of "dramatized reception" was that the character is actually shown reading or talks directly about how he or she read something, or that at a minimum there is strong circumstantial evidence about the character's reading style. Thus the Man of Law's impressive knowledge of the works of Chaucer and Gower doesn't qualify--any more than does Chauncleer's reading of Macrobius or the Nun's Priest's nonstop citation of authorities--because these readers give no clue as to how they read their texts (if they did read them). Similarly, although we might assume that the Man of Law or the Merchant read their business papers privately, Chaucer never shows them doing so or has them describe such events, so that their presumptive habits do not count as evidence for a particular mode of reading in Chaucer. And while many of his characters write and read letters, Chaucer less often specifies whether the recipients read their letters to themselves or (as was a not uncommon habit) had someone else read them aloud.³ Finally, for now I will list the four cases in which Chaucer shows himself reading within his fiction simply as "Chaucer reading"; their possible interpretations will be discussed at some length below.

PRAGMATIC READING

Pragmatic secret (private) readers:

- o Criseyde and Troilus reading love letters
- o The merchant in the Shipman's Tale reading accounts
- o May and Damian in the Merchant's Tale reading love letters

Pragmatic private readers: none

³If Alla, the Emperor of Rome, and other Chaucerian characters had their letters read aloud to them, they would have ample precedent in such real-life figures as Edward the Black Prince; Chandos Herald, in his *Vie du Prince Noir*, records several instances of the prince hearing and dictating letters (e.g., ll. 2914-15, 2951-52, 3693-94).

Pragmatic public readers:

- o Helen and Deiphebus reading a business letter (*Troilus and Criseyde*)

SCHOLARLY-PROFESSIONAL READING

Scholarly-professional secret (private) readers:

- o Nicholas in the Miller's Tale reading Ptolemy's *Almagest* and other astrology books
- o The magician(s) in the Franklin's Tale reading books of magic
- o The (would-be) alchemist(s) in the Canon's Yeoman's Tale reading books of alchemy (hypothetical)

Scholarly-professional private readers:

- o The Clerk reading Aristotle, etc.

Scholarly-professional public readers:

- o The Clerk teaching Aristotle, etc.
- o The summoner in the Friar's Tale lecturing on the shapes of devils (hypothetical)

RELIGIOUS READING

Clerical-religious private readers:

- o The Parson studying the Bible

Clerical-religious public readers:

- o The Pardoner as preacher
- o The Parson as preacher

Lay-religious readers: none

HYPOTHETICAL (RELIGIOUS) PRIVATE READING

- o The Eagle in the *House of Fame* likening Chaucer's private reading to the reading of a hermit
- o Criseyde associating widowhood with reading saints' lives alone in a cave
- o The Monk *not* reading religious texts alone in a cloister

RECREATIONAL READING

Recreational public readers:

- o Trojan maiden and Criseyde with two other maidens reading the *Siege of Thebes*
- o Jankyn and Alison reading a misogynistic florilegium (*Wife of Bath's Prologue*)
- o Possibly, Petrarch and the Clerk reading Petrarch's *De obedientia ac fide uxoria mythologia* (*Clerk's Prologue*)
- o Possibly, ancient Bretons reading lays (*Franklin's Prologue*)

Recreational private readers:

- o Possibly, Pandarus reading an old romance (*Troilus and Criseyde*)
- o Possibly, Chaucer (see "Chaucer reading," below)

LITERARY-PROFESSIONAL READING

Literary-professional private readers:

- o Possibly, Chaucer (see "Chaucer reading," below)

Literary-professional public readers: none

CHAUCER READING

- o In the *Book of the Duchess* reading Ovid's *Metamorphoses*
- o In the *House of Fame* reading generally (although the description is ambiguous; see below)
- o In the *Parliament of Fowls* reading Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis* and generally
- o In the *Legend of Good Women* reading generally

The next step is to look in more detail at the instances of reading listed above, to examine how Chaucer shows his characters (including himself within his texts) experiencing literature. I will consider in turn each category of literacy outlined above; at the end will come the discussion of how Chaucer depicts his fictional self as a reader.

Of course, the overall sample is small and the distribution of the various examples cannot be held to represent any strict proportion of reading formats or to describe fully either contemporary reading practices or Chaucer's views of reading. As far as it goes, however, this evidence does show some clear outlines and does point in certain interesting, even unexpected directions.

Pragmatic Reading

Chaucer, his texts, and his age are often associated with--and explicated in terms of--the rise of an English middle class and the literacy its members acquired as they went about their increasingly complex business. In view of the importance of this phenomenon and its clear impact on Chaucer--as reflected, for example, in the social composition of the Canterbury pilgrims--it seems odd that the only example of classic (i.e., commercial) pragmatic reading in Chaucer is that of the merchant in the Shipman's Tale. Chaucer presents other middle-class characters, of course, including the Merchant

who tells the tale of January and May. While that Merchant is surely literate, however, we do not "see" him reading at any point; the only Chaucerian character who depicts for us the reading practices of the burgeoning fourteenth-century middle class is the Shipman's merchant.

In this, the only example in Chaucer of pragmatic private reading, the reading is not only pragmatic and private, however; it is secret. Chaucer particularly notes the care the merchant takes, when he goes to read over his books and count his money, to shut himself in:

His bookes and his bagges many oon
 He leith biforn hym on his countyng-bord.
 Ful riche was his tresor and his hord,
 For which ful faste his countour-dore he shette;
 And eek he nolde that no man sholde hym lette
 Of his acountes, for the meene tyme;
 And thus he sit til it was passed pryme. (CT 7: 82-88)

But in shutting himself in, the merchant is also shutting himself out: while he is putting his commercial affairs in order, his withdrawal from social life leaves the way clear for Don John to seduce his wife. As clear an advance as pragmatic reading may seem to the social historian, thus, in fabliau terms it functions merely as an adjunct to cuckoldom.

Of non-secret pragmatic private reading in Chaucer there is none. There are other instances of secret-pragmatic reading, however, all focused on the one genre one would suppose most suited for such reading: namely, love letters. As with the Shipman's merchant, Chaucer emphasizes the "privy"-ness of this correspondence, suggesting the asocial nature of such undertakings. The classic illustration of the secret love letter involves an unavoidable pun: May's "privy" reading of Damian's first epistle:

She feyned hire as that she moste gon
 Ther as ye woot that every wight moot neede;
 And whan she of this bille hath taken heede,
 She rente it al to cloutes atte laste,
 And in the pryvee softly it caste. (CT 4: 1950-54)

May writes a letter back to Damian and takes an opportunity to stick it under his pillow (4: 1995-2008), "rede it if hym leste" (l. 2004). Damian is thus another pragmatic secret reader. The two lovers carry on their courtship "by writyng to and fro / And privee signes" (ll. 2104-5).

When Criseyde receives Troilus' first love letter, she takes to her chamber to read it "pryvely":

And streght into hire chambre gan she gon;
 But of hire besynesses this was on--
 Amonges othere thynges, out of drede--
 Ful pryvely this lettre for to rede. (T&C 2: 1173-76)

An illumination from a copy of one of Chaucer's sources, the *Roman de Troilus* (Bodl. Douce 331, 3d quarter 15th c.; see Fig. 2), expresses this privacy very well. The crowd pressing against the left-hand wall of the right panel seems to emphasize the isolation of Criseyde in the left panel, as she holds her letter up to the light to read. The illumination, like the text of *Troilus and Criseyde*, seems to express the oddness, and peril, of allowing oneself to be cut off from the mainstream of society.

Once the correspondence is under way, it seems to proceed in the same conditions of privacy--even though Pandarus is present with Troilus in his bedchamber when he receives his first letter from Criseyde (T&C 2: 1318-30). Other letters follow (3: 488, 501-3); and after Criseyde leaves Troy, Troilus finds solace in more private reading:

The lettres ek that she of olde tyme
 Hadde hym ysent, he wolde allone rede
 An hondred sithe atwixen noon and prime,
 Refiguryng hire shap, hire wommanhede,
 Withinne his herte, and every word or dede
 That passed was ... (T&C 5: 470-75)

This description is a tribute to the ability of the written word to preserve and imaginatively recreate a departed time or person. The final set of letters Troilus and Criseyde exchange relay his requests that she return and her increasingly futile promises to do so.

Although Paul Christianson has cited these private letter-readings as proof of the importance of literariness in Chaucer's work (1976/77: 113), they are clearly framed as functional. Indeed, how else would one read love letters? They also, in Criseyde's case, illustrate that individuals mix reading modalities as occasion requires; the Criseyde who chooses to read her love letters privately is also the Criseyde who chooses to have one of her maidens read the *Siege of Thebes* aloud to her. As Chaucer imagines these scenes, Criseyde's public reading reflects neither illiteracy nor the triumph of "literacy," but a situation-sensitive preference in reading styles.

Chaucer also gives one instance of a letter whose recipients read it publicly. Helen and Deiphebus seem to read their "business" letter from Hector together—"this ilke thing they redden hem bitwene" (T&C 2: 1706)—as they ponder the correct response. Here one imagines a scene such as one might see today: two people poring over the same piece of paper, reading aloud whichever bit strikes them as most pertinent to their discussion.

Numerous other letters are sent and read in Chaucer—Eneas writes to Dido (LGW: 1275); Custance's father receives letters about the massacre in Syria (CT 2: 955) and the Constable and King Alla exchange letters; Arveragus writes to Dorigen (CT 5: 838); and Walter writes to the Earl of Panyk (CT 4: 761-63). In none of these cases, however, is there any indication of how the recipient read the letter, so that these cases can only be classified as "format-unspecific."

The other cluster of letters in Chaucer's work occurs in the *Legend of Good Women*, where Dido, Hypsipyle, Medea, and Phyllis each writes a letter to her seducer. There is no mention of the man receiving and reading the complaint, however. In fact, the letters seem intended more to make the man's iniquity known to the world at large. Such is the implication, at least, when Phyllis finishes her letter to Demophon:

And whan this letter was forth sent anon,
And knew how brotel and how fals he was, ... (LGW: 2555-56)

One might classify such a text as an open letter--a genre that R.F. Green notes "was in fact often employed for propaganda purposes" (1980: 185).

Scholarly-Professional and Religious Reading

Most of the scholarly-professional readers presented by Chaucer belong to the sensationalistic category of secret-private readers; they are educated men dipping into proprietary texts with the aim of gaining arcane powers. The "yonge clerkes" known to Aurelius' brother in the Franklin's Tale, for example, strayed off the standard curriculum in pursuit of heterodox, magical skills:

... hym fil in remembraunce,
 That whiles he was at Orliens in Fraunce--
 As yonge clerkes that been lykerous
 To reden artes that been curious
 Seken in every halke and every herne [every nook and cranny]
 Particuler sciences for to lerne--
 He hym remembred that, upon a day,
 At Orliens in studie [in a study hall] a book he say
 Of magyk natureel, which his felawe,
 That was that tyme a bachelere of lawe,
 Al were he ther to lerne another craft,
 Hadde prively upon his desk ylaft ... (CT 5: 1117-28)

The word "prively" clues us to the asocial implications of such reading, which is confirmed when the magic of the "subtil clerk" (CT 5: 1261) whom Aurelius recruits almost forces the faithful Dorigen into adultery.

The would-be alchemists envisaged by the Canon's Yeoman study as eagerly as the clerks of Orléans, but to less purpose:

"Ascaunce [Do you think] that craft is so light to leere?
 Nay, nay, God woot, al be he monk or frere,
 Preest or chanoun, or any oother wyght,
 Though he sitte at his book bothe day and nyght
 In lernyng of this elvysshe nyce loore,
 Al is in veyn, and parde, muchel moore." (CT 8: 838-43)

We do not see Nicholas reading in the Miller's Tale, but the Miller does describe the clerk's books as part of his astrological gear:

His Almageste, and bookes grete and smale,
 His astrelabie, longynge for his art,
 His augrym stones layen faire apart,
 On shelves couched at his beddes heed (CT 1: 3208-11)

The Miller has earlier noted that Nicholas "hadde lerned art [the university arts curriculum], but al his fantasye / Was turned for to lerne astrologye" (1: 3191-92). Since Nicholas lives in his chamber "allone, withouten any compaignye" (l. 3204), he presumably reads his books alone as well. Nicholas' solitary, extracurricular study of astrology, plus his locking himself in his room for supposed astrological study into "Goddess pryvetee" (l. 3558), seem to place his form of reading within the category of secret-professional.

While secret-pragmatic reading seems to lead in a roundabout way to socially harmful results--cuckoldom for the Shipman's merchant and for January, and a doomed love affair for Criseyde and Troilus--the secret reading of professional scholars equips them to afflict others quite directly. Their arcane learning enables the magician to deceive and, almost, destroy Dorigen, the alchemist-canon to bilk the ignorant, and Nicholas to cuckold his host. In each case the individual benefits at the expense of the greater community. Despite the phenomenon's importance in the social history of fourteenth-century England, Chaucer thus tends to associate the privatizing of both pragmatic and scholarly-professional reading with a secrecy harmful to social relationships.

This point is underlined by an examination of the non-secret scholarly-professional and religious readers, of whom there are two well-known examples: respectively, the Clerk and the Parson. It makes sense to combine these two cases here, because they seem almost to be constructed as deliberate parallels. The Clerk is a professional scholar (not that he earns much

by his profession), who shares his maker's passion for books. His reading consists of specialized texts "of Aristotle and his philosophie" (CT 1: 295). Like most university students, he would presumably have both heard these books read in lectures and read them privately on his own; he is thus a scholarly-professional public auditor and private reader. The Clerk's reading has fostered in him such unworldly virtues as generosity, sincerity, and wisdom, but left him underprovided in more material ways--as reflected in the Ellesmere illustration, which depicts a threadbare Clerk earnestly brandishing a book (see Fig. 23).

The Parson is the only other disinterested reader in Chaucer's fiction, a similarly idealized figure whose learning is acquired for the religious goal of preaching, presumably through a similar mix of hearing and private reading:

He was also a lerned man, a clerk,
That Cristes gospel trewely wolde preche;
His parissshens devoutly wolde he teche. (CT 1: 480-82)

Non-secret scholarly and clerical reading clearly has beneficial effects. It has made both the Clerk and the Parson into men of integrity and humility who, as Chaucer seems to emphasize, return benefit to society by willingly teaching what they have learned. As well as juxtaposing the Parson's scholarship with his preaching and teaching, Chaucer caps his description of the Clerk in the General Prologue with the famous line: "And gladly wolde he lerne and gladly teche" (CT 1: 308). Thus pragmatic or professional secret readers, who hoard their knowledge to themselves, disrupt society; while scholarly-professional and clerical readers who gladly pass their knowledge on to others benefit society, communicating not only information but also the integrity and humility their studies encourage. Their reading exists in a dialectic with their society and their audience, serving the common profit and creating benefit for themselves and others.

That such reading also had the potential of creating harm, however, is illustrated by another clerical reader and preacher, the Pardoner. Chaucer emphasizes his public reading and singing abilities when introducing the character in the General Prologue; "rede" in this context obviously means "read aloud":

Wel koude he rede a lessoun or a storie,
 But alderbest he song an offertorie;
 For wel he wiste, whan that song was songe,
 He moste preche and wel affile his tonge
 To wynne silver, as he ful wel koude;
 Therefore he song the murierly and loude. (CT 1: 709-14)

In his prologue, the Pardoner expands on his preaching methods, in which through displays of papal bulls and bits of Latin (6: 336-46)--particularly "Radix malorum est Cupiditas" (l. 426)--he apes the learnedness and authority of a true preacher such as the Parson. He uses exempla not to teach but to amuse and engage his public, so that they will pay him the more enthusiastically (ll. 435-41). He "stonde lyk a clerk in my pulpet" to bilk the "lewed peple" with his "false japes" (ll. 391-94): "For my entente is nat but for to wynne, / And nothyng for correccioun of synne" (ll. 403-40).

The Pardoner does not seem to be much of a scholar; beyond a superficial acquaintance with a few exempla and the odd Latin tag, his reading seems to have been as shallow as his preaching and teaching. Thus he has escaped, or been deprived of, the Parson's exalted poverty. The Pardoner's "half-made" condition underscores the lesson that for Chaucer, scholarly/ clerical learning properly transforms the individual; the reader does not merely acquire knowledge or rhetorical skill but becomes a different and better person.

Chaucer gives one other, brief glimpse of the specialized world of university teaching, or scholarly-professional public reading. In the "Friar's Tale" the summoner asks his devil-companion, "Make ye yow newe bodies

thus alway / Of elementz?" (CT 3: 1505-6). His scholarly tone inspires the devil to place him in a hypothetical university chair:

"Thou shalt herafterward, my brother deere,
Come there thee nedeth nat of me to leere,
For thou shalt, by thyn owene experience,
Konne in a chayer rede of [lecture on] this sentence
Bet than Virgile, while he was on lyve,
Or Dant also." (CT 3: 1515-20)

Hypothetical (Religious) Private Reading

Among the cases of hypothesized reading, three widely scattered instances stand out for their surprising congruence as forms of what could be called "hypothetical (religious) private reading." Criseyde resorts figuratively to such reading when Pandarus teases her:

"Do wey youre barbe, and shew youre face bare;
Do wey youre book, rys up, and lat us daunce,
And lat us don to May som observaunce."
I! God forbede!" quod she. "Be ye mad?
Is that a widewes lif, so God yow save?
By God, ye maken me ryght soore adrad!
Ye ben so wylde, it semeth as ye rave.
It satte me wel bet ay in a cave
To bidde and rede on holy seyntes lyves;
Lat maydens gon to daunce, and yonge wyves." (T&C 2: 110-19)

Criseyde's vision of private reading conjures up not the enfranchised literate so often imagined by scholars today but a mute anchoress—a female version of the "dazed hermit" that in the *House of Fame* the Eagle is afraid Geoffrey will turn into if he continues his eccentric habits:

"For when thy labour doon al ys,
And hast mad alle thy rekenynges,
In stede of reste and newe thynges
Thou goost hom to thy hous anoon,
And, also domb as any stoon,
Thou sittest at another book
Tyl fully daswed ys thy look;
And lyvest thus as an heremyte,
Although thyn abstynence ys lyte." (HF: 652-60)

Few of the scholars who gleefully cite this passage as evidence of private reading have noted the humorously negative associations with which Chaucer surrounds it. (Equally few have noted that the description does not straightforwardly concern reading; see the "Chaucer Reading" section, below.)

Finally, Chaucer offers one interesting negative case, of a character who might or should read privately but who prefers to hunt. "What sholde he studie and make hymselfen wood," Chaucer says of the Monk of the *Canterbury Tales*,

Upon a book in cloystre alwey to poure,
Or swynken with his handes, and laboure,
As Austyn bit? How shal the world be served?
Lat Austyn have his swynk to hym reserved! (CT 1: 184-88)

Against this picture of the Monk as a hypothetical private reader we should balance his claim to have "an hundred [tragedies] in my celle" (CT 7: 1972).

Chaucer thus humorously suggests the potential hazards of private reading three times, in three widely separate contexts that echo each other remarkably. Each associates private reading with the contemplative religious life: Chaucer (as hypothesized by the Eagle) lives like a hermit, the Monk could be *behaving* like a monk, Criseyde would become an anchoress. Each emphasizes the reader's isolation: Chaucer alone in his study, the Monk in the cloister, Criseyde in a cave. The reading matter is implicitly unappetizing: Chaucer sitting at another book (the Eagle's tone is surely disparaging), the Monk poring over tracts, and Criseyde piously plowing through saints' lives. Each case is strongly associated with poor health and even madness: Chaucer refuses "reste and newe thynges," sits "domb as any stoon," and reads until he looks "fully daswed"; and the Monk is spared by his love of hunting from making himself "wood" with study. Although Criseyde does not picture herself becoming ill or crazy from her cave-reading, the context seems to attract such associations. Because Pandarus has

suggested she go dancing with him she calls him "mad" and tells him, "Ye ben so wylde, it semeth as ye rave" (T&C 2: 116). (In a cognate instance in the "Miller's Tale," Nicholas locks himself in his room and pretends to read the stars, until John concludes he must have fallen, "with his astromye, / In some woodnesse or in som agonye" [CT 1: 3451-52].)

Finally, in each case private reading is opposed not to public reading but to a public, social activity--although the opposition emerges within a different context for each. Chaucer really does read (and write; see discussion below), and suffers the deficits involved, instead of getting out and talking to his neighbors; the Monk could and perhaps should read but prefers to hunt; and Criseyde retreats to her imagined cave in comic horror at being invited to go dancing. Implicit in Criseyde's picture of reading is yet another social activity: her exaggerated description of the proper widow's life is a flirtatious sally directed at Pandarus.

In eschewing communal leisure activities, these hypothetical private readers are making a renunciation; they are turning their back on the world. Hence those who would make such a choice are appropriately likened to religious recluses. Unlike the Clerk and the Parson, ascetics neither teach nor preach. As Chaucer depicts them, they return nothing to society; their learning is arid, their reading becomes merely a form of self-denial. Society loses the individual, and the individual, in painful isolation, risks losing both health and sanity.

Recreational Reading

Two Chaucerian "set pieces" of recreational public reading are very well known: Criseyde and her maidens being read to in the "paved parlour" (T&C 2: 78-84) and Jankyn reading to Alison of Bath by their hearthside (CT 3: 669-793). It's worth quoting the Criseyde scene at greater length than it is usually allowed:

Whan he [Pandarus] was come unto his neces place,
 "Wher is my lady?" to hire folk quod he;
 And they hym tolde, and he forth in gan pace,
 And fond two othere ladys sete and she,
 Withinne a paved parlour, and they thre
 Herden a mayden reden hem the geste
 Of the siege of Thebes, while hem leste.

.....
 [Pandarus:] "But I am sory that I have yow let
 To herken of youre book ye preysen thus.
 For Goddes love, what seith it? telle it us!
 Is it of love? O, som good ye me leere!"
 "Uncle," quod she, "youre maistresse is nat here."
 With that thei gonnen laughe, and tho she seyde,
 "This romaunce is of Thebes that we rede;
 And we han herd how that kyng Layus deyde
 Thorough Edippus his sone, and al that dede;
 And here we stynten at thise lettres rede—
 How the bisshop, as the book kan telle,
 Amphiorax, fil through the ground to helle."

(T&C 2: 78-84, 94-105)

We know that Criseyde is literate, because she can read Troilus' love letters privately, and here she points out the rubric to Pandarus and reads it to him. The reference to the rubric further emphasizes the *bookness* (as Donald Howard [1976: 63] calls it) of this scene. It recalls the famous line, "turne over the leef and chese another tale" (CT 1: 3177; see Chapter 1), in depicting the literate person's ability to select their reading matter or, in this case, to competently interpret scribal conventions to designate a breaking-off point for a reading. Yet Criseyde's bookcraft does not earn her citations in the scholarly discussions of the "leef" passage, no doubt because it is so clearly embedded in an aural context. It is relatively easy to forget that the leaf-turning is suggested for those who "list it [the tale] nat yheere" (CT 1: 3176), but impossible to pretend that when Criseyde says she and her maidens "han herd" the story of Oedipus, they have done anything but hear it.

The passage shows no trace of the supposedly innate contradiction between a hearing audience and a written book that allows modern schol-

ars to interpret the mention of a book with turnable pages as marking a key transition point into private reading. Nor do any of the standard "deficiency" motives seem to be present. The listeners (at least the chief one) are literate; nor is there any sense that they are having to make the best of things by maximizing everyone's access to a unique copy of a desirable text. For one thing, Criseyde at least seems to know the story very well; one gets the feeling that she (and thus probably her maidens) has heard it before. For another thing, if everyone wanted to read the *Siege of Thebes* they could take turns, just as members of a family will today with an interesting book someone has bought or borrowed.

Rather than reflecting any contradictions or deficiencies, the entire scene breathes elegance and refinement; this is a court (a small one) *being* a court--sharing a pleasurable activity in a way that unites the members while it entertains them. Even though Criseyde is obviously the dominant member of this group, their camaraderie comes through clearly in her three uses of the pronoun "we" to describe their joint activity: "This romaunce is of Thebes that we rede"; "we han herd how that kyng Layus deyde"; and "we stynten at thise lettres rede" (T&C 2: 100, 101, 103). In this literary example of courtly recreational reading, as in the historical British examples reviewed in the previous chapter, shared public reading tends to suppress status distinctions.

One might argue that the "paved parlour" scene represents only Chaucer's idealized vision of reading in the long-gone past of Troy. The scene is certainly idealized; it fits within a French romance tradition of heroes entering courtyards or gardens to find beautiful young women reading to their families or household (cf. *Chevalier a deus espees*, ll. 4268-73, 8952-53; *Chevalier au lion*, ll. 5356-63). Nonetheless, Chaucer did not find this scene in the *Filostrato*; he added it to his source and developed it at much greater length than any of its French thirteenth-century cognates. His most prominent contributions to this tradition are the easy, flirtatious chat of

niece and uncle and a positive interest in the interaction of the reader-hearers with their book. Finally, although Chaucer remarks upon the differences between Trojan and English language and love-making (T&C 2: 22-42), he makes no such comment about reading then versus now, and in general clearly bases his presentation of ancient Trojan mores and manners on those he knew within his own society. Thus, although caution is advisable, it seems on the whole valid to find in Criseyde's shared reading of the *Siege of Thebes* a reflection of upper-class prelection in Chaucer's time.

Criseyde's joint reading of the *Siege of Thebes* at first glance seems to do no more than make a pretty picture in a paved parlor. Yet it stands in a crucial position for Criseyde. It is the scene Pandarus and we see as he enters to begin his and Troilus' campaign for her favors; it is her last "love-free" moment before she is to be manipulated and maneuvered into a series of events that lead her to her final betrayals of Troilus.⁴ For a woman who declares so emphatically, "I am myn owene womman, wel at ese" (T&C 2: 750), the impending loss of control is an issue of importance. In fact, the three forms of reading she associates herself with seem to define the options she faces. Reading with her women, Criseyde is engaged in a communal yet chaste activity, over which she has control and in which she is free and safe (this issue may be emphasized by Chaucer's departure from French tradition in making the reading group all-female). As a hypothetical troglodyte reader of saints' lives, Criseyde has everything but society--she is safe, chaste, in control--but alone and, by implication, miserable. Later, as a

⁴One can even imagine in this scene a grotesque reflection of the Annunciation: Pandarus entering the enclosed space full of chaste women finds Criseyde at a book, as Gabriel in hundreds of books of hours finds Mary at her book. With more preliminaries than Gabriel indulged in, he praises her "goode grace" (T&C 2: 266) and announces, finally, "Good aventure, O beele nece, have ye / Ful lightly founden" (ll. 288-89): i.e., she has won the love of a king's son (l. 316). The similarity, slight but interesting as it is, stops there, however: for Criseyde greets this news with wariness and a lament for "this false world" (l. 420).

private reader of Troilus' love letters, she is in a way coming too much under the author's power, moving towards erotic merger and a consequent loss of chastity and control. Ultimately, because she has been Troilus' lover, her acceptance of Diomedes destroys her reputation to posterity--a posterity that will experience her infamy through "bokes" whose texts will be "rolled ... on many a tonge" (T&C 5: 1060-61).

Chaucer matches his depiction of courtly leisure reading with another famous set-piece of domestic reading among the petty bourgeois: Jankyn's prelection of his book of wicked wives to his wife, Alison of Bath:

Upon a nyght Jankyn, that was oure sire,
 Redde on his book, as he sat by the fire,
 Of Eva first, that for hir wikkednesse
 Was al mankynde broght to wretchednesse,
 For which that Jhesu Crist hymself was slayn,
 That boghte us with his herte blood agayn.
 Lo, heere expres of womman may ye fynde
 That womman was the los of al mankynde.
 Tho redde he me how Sampson loste his heres;
 Slepynge, his lemman kitte it with hir sheres ... (CT 3: 713-22)

In his former capacity as "a clerk of Oxenford" (CT 3: 527), Jankyn had been a scholarly-professional public auditor and private reader (public as audience to lectures, private as student). As noted in Chapter 1's discussion of the "leef" passage, in reading aloud to his wife Jankyn seems to be trying to adopt the same privileged stance towards her as an academic lecturer enjoyed towards his students. Rather than the relatively non-hierarchical reading, the "we rede's" and "we han herd's" of Criseyde and her maidens, we have the Wife's reiterated "Tho redde he me," "Tho redde he me," "He tolde me," "Of Lyvia tolde he me," "Thanne tolde he me" (CT 3: 721, 724, 740, 747, 757). Each unidirectional phrase introduces another instance of female perfidy. But Jankyn's attempt to impose these stories on his wife transgressed the rules of British recreational reading, in which the hearers expected to participate in the choice of text and the manner of its reading.

There can be no bonding as a group when the text being shared persists in grossly insulting half the prospective group. Thus, as the students at a lecture could never do, Alison asserted her right not to hear a book she didn't like--the result being a rather messily conducted but nonetheless successful reorganization of the couple's relationship. Like Criseyde's reading with her maidens, *mutatis mutandis*, public reading seems to impel Jankyn and Alison toward social consensus and security.

After these famous and perhaps archetypal illustrations of upper- and middle-class prelection, there are two other possible examples to cite. The first is the Franklin's short introductory reference to "thise olde gentil Britouns" who

Of diverse aventures maden layes,
Rymeyed in hir firste Briton tonge,
Whiche layes with hir instrumentz they songe
Or elles redden hem for hir plesaunce. (CT 5: 709-13)

This reading was presumably aloud; the description invokes a pleasant scene of public amusement.

The second instance is an implied case of prelection. That devoted scholarly private reader, the Clerk, seems to suggest that he heard Petrarch's *De obedientia ac fide uxoria mythologia*--his source for the tale of Griselda--from Petrarch's own mouth. "I wol yow telle a tale," he says,

which that I
Lerned at Padowe of a worthy clerk,
As preved by his wordes and his werk. (CT 4: 26-28)

Later he adds:

But forth to tellen of this worthy man
That taughte me this tale, as I bigan,
I seye that first with heigh stile he enditeth,
Er he the body of his tale writeth,
A prohemye, ... (CT 4: 39-43)

The Clerk fully acknowledges that Petrarch's text exists in writing, and one might even accept as metaphorical his imagery of learning the tale as

taught him by Petrarch. By claiming this lesson took place at Padua, however, where Petrarch actually lived and where he himself might well have studied (Ginsberg 1988: 879, note to l. 27), the Clerk conceivably expects his audience to understand that he learned this written text from hearing its author recite it or read it aloud. As noted at the end of Chapter 3, Petrarch himself related in a letter that he had memorized Boccaccio's Italian version of *Griselda* and would recite it to friends. On two occasions, moreover, mutual friends had read Petrarch's translation by prelecting it to the author and other listeners (see Robinson and Rolfe 1898: 192-96). It thus seems quite possible that the fictional Clerk (or, as some editors like to speculate [e.g., Johnson 1923: 261], the real Chaucer) could have been audience to some such Petrarchan performance of the story he is about to retell. If so, his foray into international literary fellowship would earn him, like *Criseyde* and the Wife of Bath's Jankyn, the label of "mixed-mode" reader.

Finally, under the rubric of dramatized episodes of reading aloud one might also cite two portraits of Chaucer. In the first, the famous *Troilus and Criseyde* frontispiece (Corpus Christi MS. 61, fol. 1v; see Fig. 20), Chaucer is not reading but, apparently, reciting; he stands at a pulpit without a book, while below him sits an elegant group that is probably meant to represent the court of Richard II. The picture has attracted a wide variety of interpretations, some of them highly eccentric. Derek Pearsall (1977) and Elizabeth Salter (1978) have made an excellent argument that the illumination's iconography draws on preaching pictures, but it is hard to know how to interpret that fact. Whatever subtleties the illustrator meant to suggest, however, the picture does offer support for the sense that Chaucer's poetry existed in a matrix involving face-to-face interaction with the audience.

A similar impression might be derived from the altogether less elaborate and less famous Lansdowne portrait of Chaucer (see Fig. 21). Although M.H. Spielmann dismissed it as "hardly worth serious consideration" and endorsed Furnivall's allusion to it as a "stupid peasant thing" (Spielmann

1900: 11), there is a poignancy and expressivity in the picture. It shows Chaucer standing with a pence around his neck and an open book held somewhat tipped forward in his hands; both the book and his eyes (which have a strikingly sad expression) are directed at an angle of about 45 degrees from the page. If Salter and Pearsall fit the *Troilus* frontispiece into the iconography of preaching, the Lansdowne portrait seems to recall a certain tradition of depicting religious figures holding an open book (presumably a Bible) at a similar angle (see Fig. 22). This stance may combine the suggestion of an offer to communicate the book's contents--perhaps by reading it aloud--with the authority conveyed by possession of the book itself. The peasant-grade Lansdowne portrait, therefore, shares with the top-drawer *Troilus* frontispiece not only an idiosyncratic reliance on religious iconography in the depiction of a secular author but also a concept of Chaucer as an author who seeks urgently to reach his audience. Like other illustrations that show authors presenting or prelecting books, these pictures invite us into an at least imaginative community of readers and hearers.

The scattered instances of recreational public reading in the work of Chaucer, along with the two incipit illustrations analyzed here, approach a coherent statement about the social uses or benefits of prelection. Very broadly, they seem to show public reading serving an integrative function, promoting in various ways the successful co-existence of the readers with their society.

If courtly widows, misogynistic clerks, ancient Bretons, and international literary figures read their recreational texts aloud, who reads such texts privately? Chaucer presents only two such individual readers, one somewhat equivocal and the other extremely equivocal: namely, Pandarus and Chaucer. In neither case is it entirely clear what the reader is doing, or what we

are expected to understand about what he is doing. I will discuss Pandarus in this section and Chaucer in the following one.

Pandarus may be the only completely fictional recreational private reader in Chaucer. Or he may not. The issue arises when, after bringing Troilus to Criseyde's bedside, he makes a discreet withdrawal:

Quod Pandarus, "Now wol ye wel bigynne.
 Now doth hym sitte, goode nece deere,
 Upon youre beddes syde al ther withinne,
 That ech of yow the bet may other heere."
 And with that word he drow hym to the feere,
 And took a light, and fond his contenance
 As for to looke upon an old romaunce. (T&C 3: 974-80)

There is no telling if in "looking upon" an old romance Pandarus is supposedly reading it or just looking at the pictures. In any case he is evidently only pretending to do whatever it is he seems to be doing--a point emphasized in the three *Troilus* exemplars that, as Margaret Jennings notes, give "feigning his contenance" for "and fond his contenance" (1986: 126).

This scene makes one recall Paul Strohm's comment that "like characters in postmodern fictions, the protagonists of *Troilus and Criseyde* seem constantly on the brink of discovery that they are characters in a book" (1989: 61). Here Pandarus, who has "authored" the entire relationship of the two lovers, pretends to scan a written romance while behind him, in "real life," his puppets speak the classic lines of romance lovers. Is Chaucer critiquing the genre by having Troilus swoon uselessly, so that the alert Pandarus, the author-surrogate, must leap up and physically toss him into Criseyde's bed (Marks 1990)? It seems that no written book, no collection of flat, voiceless pages, could compete in interest with romance thus come alive, enacted here by its protagonists. Yet in fairness one has to take the slippery Pandarus enough at face value to admit that his fireside perusal of the old book offers some evidence for the private reading of romances.

CHAUCER READING

Typologizing Chaucer's Fictionalized Reading

The fictionalized Chaucer, reading alone and silently in his bed or study, may seem a lonely figure after all the happy public readers we have met to date. Modern scholars, however, have greeted his solitary habit with unanimous applause, hailing it (from their own studies) as, e.g., "a landmark in the development of the internalization of literary communication" (Brewer 1982: 21). As I have suggested above, however, the distinctness of that landmark somewhat depends on how we classify the fictional Chaucer's status as a reader. The system constituted by the aural-narrative constellation accepts without problem that authors read privately while audiences read publicly. So, is the fictional Chaucer an author or an audience? Is he searching for copy, or reading for fun? Before attempting to answer that question, I will review the four texts in which Chaucer does his reading.

In the *Book of the Duchess* Chaucer puts himself to sleep reading Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. In the *House of Fame* the Eagle accuses him of reading (and writing; see below) all day instead of talking with his neighbors (HF: 652-60). In the *Parliament of Fowls* Chaucer confides that "Of usage--what for lust and what for lore-- / On bokes rede I ofte" (PF: 15-16). "A certeyn thing to lerne," he passes "the longe day ful faste" reading Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis* (PF: 20-21). After his vision of the avian parliament

I wok, and othere bokes tok me to,
 To reede upon, and yit I rede alwey.
 I hope, ywis, to rede so som day
 That I shal mete some thyng for to fare
 The bet, and thus to rede I nyl nat spare. (PF: 695-99)

In the *Legend of Good Women* his bibliomania is equally apparent:

And as for me, though that I konne but lyte,
 On bokes for to rede I me delyte,
 And to hem yive I feyth and ful credence,
 And in myn herte have hem in reverence

So hertely, that ther is game noon
 That fro my bokes maketh me to goon,
 But yt be seldom on the holyday ... (LGW, F: 29-35)

These passages clearly establish Chaucer-the-character, in all four of his appearances, as a private reader. And certainly the first impression one might get of this reader, in all but the *House of Fame*, is of a friendly, naive bibliophile, nattering on enthusiastically about books and literature. He could pass as an ordinary citizen, for whom reading is one of the great pleasures and resources of life. In this sense he seems to offer a paradigm of what private reading could bring to the lives of others; one can imagine that the more truly ordinary fourteenth-century people who formed the audience of these works might be inspired by them to emulate this style of reading. One who did was Robert Henryson, who describes how on a night of wild wintry weather he

mend the fyre and beikit me about,
 Than tuik ane drink, my spreitis to comfort,
 And armit me weill fra the cauld thairout.
 To cut the winter nicht and mak it schort
 I tuik ane quair--and left all vther sport--
 Writtin be worthie Chaucer glorious
 Of fair Creisseid and worthie Troylus. (TC: 36-42)

There is something very attractive in these authors' depictions of themselves, in their fictions, relaxing into a good book. We may find ourselves, too, relaxing into an identification with this fictional reader; we, who have just opened his book to read it, find him inside the text drawing us in by imitating our action, offering us his eyes to read the story he is now going to derive from the text he has before him. In this hall-of-mirrors effect, we perceive him as a surrogate of ourselves, a recreational reader sitting down to another book; we somehow accept his experience of his text as passive. He merely reads it, as we merely read his. One of the most recent and eloquent scholarly exponents of this view, Jill Mann, states unequivocally that

"when Chaucer gives us a self-portrait, he represents himself as a 'fanatic bibliophile'—that is not as a writer but as a *reader*. ... Chaucer's role as reader of others' work is a covert surrogate for our own role as readers of his own" (1991: 1-2).

I think that this particular illusion, however charming, represents that ultimate in unlikelihood, the impossible improbable. It is impossible because even within the fictional framework the author/reader is not a passive but a very active reader, the maker of fictions, including the fiction in which he pretends (we think) to be passive. In presenting Chaucer's surrogate experience as that of "books mingling with each other and forming networks of allusion in the reader's head" (1991: 5), Mann also accepts him as an active reader--within the terms of reception theory. Yet it is disingenuous to equate a recreative reading that results in a new, written text with a receptive one that involves only some fairly transient mental activity--i.e., to equate the reading of sources with the reading of books.

As I will show, in each of the works in which he shows himself reading, Chaucer ultimately connects that process of reading to the process of writing that follows--as does Henryson; he thus retroactively identifies himself as a literary-professional reader. As A.C. Spearing comments in his book on medieval dream-poetry, "The treatment of the dreamer as a real person, based on the poet himself, inevitably implies that the dreamer shares the poet's profession as a writer of poems" (1976: 45-46). And, as noted in Chapter 2's description of literary-professional reading, literary authors cannot *not* read professionally; whatever they read is a potential source for or influence on their own work. Thus such reading cannot be described as reading unrelated to the reader's vocation, which is the definition of recreational reading.

It is furthermore improbable that a fourteenth-century person would accept the privately reading dreamer/poet as a simulacrum of him or herself because most audiences of that time would have perceived this devo-

tion to reading as a clear indication of the reader's professional status. It would stand out because it was *unlike* their experience, not delude them because it was so like it.⁵ This latter argument could be considered circular, since it relies on my general argument that most late fourteenth-century audiences consisted of hearers. But the point is worth at least considering, and it gains weight from a closer reading of Chaucer's texts themselves.

To say that the fictional Chaucer is really a professional reader seems almost to substitute one trick mirror for another. This time the mirror alternates two reflections with each slight movement of the viewer's head; Chaucer, that is, seems to present himself, almost simultaneously, as two different things. Yet the problem, again, may lie more with our eyes than with the image we're looking at. We may be confused by the isomorphism of two different reading modes. In the *Book of the Duchess*, the *Parliament of Fowls*, and the *Legend of Good Women* Chaucer's reading material (a classical romance, a classical dream vision, and histories) and the one reading site he mentions (bed, in the *Book of the Duchess*) fit the profile of both recreational and literary-professional reading. As noted in Chapter 2, the professional author would read the same things as a recreational reader, but with a more intense and informed involvement, as an active contributor to the tradition.

The pleasure Chaucer associates so persistently with his reading conceivably reflects not a book-lover's happy obsession but the appreciative delight of the knowledgeable fellow-practitioner. It recalls the Clerk's passion for Aristotle, or Petrarch, more than the genteel amusement of Criseyde and her maidens, or the "plesaunce" of the Franklin's ancient Bretons. If this

⁵Sylvia Thrupp points out: "Even in the fifteenth century, when appreciation of Chaucer was growing, an immoderate literary enthusiasm stood out as a little peculiar, as in the figure of William of Worcester, Sir John Fastolf's secretary, of whom a friend wrote that he was 'as glad and as feyn of a good boke of Frensh or of poetre as my Mastr Fastolf wold be to purchase a faire manoir'" (1948: 248-49).

seems unlike the often waspish assessments we are used to more recent authors bestowing on their colleagues' writing, we should note that even when he speaks directly as his "real" self, Chaucer's comments on other authors are always positive. Any doubts he felt about the authority of tradition were expressed obliquely, through the juggling of variant sources or in-jokes at an unnamed Gower. Commentators on Chaucer himself, from Deschamps through to Henryson, competed to pile up his praises. The critical mentality considered synonymous with "literacy" waited until long past Chaucer's time to replace the exophoric valorization of a communalized tradition.

But is the fictional Chaucer a poet? The answer develops differently in each of the texts in which he makes an appearance, but the answer is always, ultimately, yes. To begin with, all four works under consideration are dream visions, in which well-established genre, as Spearing indicates, the dreamer is always the poet and the poem is always his dream. Moreover, in Chaucer the dream is always related in some way to the reading of books. And, for Chaucer, the reading of books is always related to the writing of more books.

This relationship is perhaps clearest in the prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*. (I will draw on whichever version, F or G, offers the most interesting text; I think this is justifiable for my purposes.) The poem's opening lines reflect--along with the narrator's "delyte" in books (F: 30)--a clear, if tongue-in-cheek, preoccupation with such literary-professional issues as the nature and reliability of authority. And long before he encounters the angry God of Love, Chaucer's persona reveals himself to be a poet. "Allas, that I ne had Englyssh, ryme or prose, / Suffisant this flour to preyse aryght!" (F: 66-67) he exclaims, contemplating his daisy. He continues with an appeal to other poets, whether followers of the Leaf or the Flower. "For wel I wot," he says,

that ye han her-biforn
 Of making ropen, and lad away the corn,
 And I come after, glenyng here and there,
 And am ful glad yf I may fynde an ere
 Of any goodly word that ye han left. (LGW, F: 73-77)

Another six lines of literary modesty give way finally to praise of the daisy; but her chief attribute, as it happens, is her power over what and how the poet writes (LGW, F: 89-96).

Once into the dream, of course, Chaucer encounters the angry Cupid and the benign Alceste spouting his own bibliography back at him, eliminating any uncertainty about his professional status. It is at this point that the relationship of these two hitherto separate functions, reading and writing, comes into focus, through the medium (in the G version) of Love's reproach:

"Was there no good matere in thy mynde,
 Ne in alle thy bokes ne coudest thou nat fynde
 Som story of wemen that were goode and trewe?
 Yis, God wot, sixty bokes olde and new
 Hast thou thyself, alle ful of storyes grete" (LGW, G: 270-74)

Here books--the writer's reading--form the quarry from which he is expected to select the matter for his own narration. Love later orders Chaucer to write about the ladies in his entourage, noting, "And in thy bookes alle thou shalt hem fynde" (LGW, F: 556). Alceste takes up Chaucer's defense by first emphasizing his role as a translator, who "rekketh nought of what matere he take" (F: 365) or who haplessly follows the orders of a superior. Chaucer-the-character tries a similar argument when he protests that, "what so myn auctour mente" (F: 470), he intended in his *Criseyde* and his *Romance of the Rose* to "forthren trouthe in love" (F: 472). Finally, the prologue ends, in the F version, with the couplet:

And with that word my bokes gan I take,
 And ryght thus on my Legende gan I make. (LGW, F: 578-79)

Thus, what initially looked like the recreation of a book-loving but nonprofessional reader--for whom "ther is game noon / That fro my bokes maketh me to goon" (LGW, F: 33-34)--seems slowly to have involved itself in a very professional set of problems. Reading as the exposing of oneself to potential sources involves the question of choosing stories to retell, of telling them well, of relaying the original *sentence* or another one of your own devising. These issues, though surely faced by Chaucer-the-poet, are articulated as the ones confronting Chaucer-the-character, who has emerged unambiguously as himself a poet. By the end of the prologue he is diving eagerly into the heart of this relationship--taking (someone else's books) in order to make (his own books).

The reading/writing pattern that emerges so clearly in the *Legend of Good Women* is also not far to seek in the other three poems containing a reading Chaucer. The *Book of the Duchess* and the *Parliament of Fowls*, in particular, combine the same initial coyness or indirectness about his poetic persona with eventual, sometimes almost incidental, references to the character's identity as a poet. The Chaucer of the *Book of the Duchess* may seem at first too innocuous to be a poet. He is obsessed with his insomnia, and with the love-sickness that may underlie it. His reading seems a palliative, a fit occupation for someone too physically or emotionally weak to do anything less passive. Yet well into retelling the story of Ceyx and Alcyone, Chaucer comments:

Such sorowe this lady to her tok
That trewly I, that made this book,
Had such pittee and such rowthe
To rede hir sorwe that, by my trowthe,
I ferde the worse ... (BD: 95-99)

With the passing reference to himself as the one "that made this book," Chaucer-the-character identifies himself as a poet. The book he has described himself reading, moreover, has obviously now become a source for

a retelling, which the character implicitly admits was his. Thus he is not just any reader but a poet who draws on his reading to write another poem.

In fact, since a writer of dream visions cannot write until he has a dream, and cannot dream until he sleeps, the character's initial insomnia becomes almost a metaphor for writer's block (Marks 1990). Thus in his *Ovid* the character finds relief at several levels: a story (Ceyx and Alycone) to retell, a god (Morpheus) to pray to, and a sleep-inducer that brings him the dream he needs. He falls asleep with his head in his book; he wakes to be a poet:

Thoghte I, "Thys ys so queynt a sweven
That I wol, be processe of tyme,
Fonde to put this sweven in ryme
As I can best, and that anoon." (BD: 1330-33)

The poet in the character is equally implicit and discoverable in the *Parliament of Fowls*. He reads for lust and for lore both (PF: 15)--and by now we know that the acquisition of lore, for Chaucer, is a step towards the creation of rhyme. It is the new corn coming from the old fields, the new science from old books (ll. 22-25). Pausing before beginning to narrate his dream, he invokes Cytherea's help "my sweven for to write, / So yif me myght to ryme, and endyte!" (ll. 118-19). Later, Scipio leads him through Venus' gate, encouraging him:

"And if thow haddest connyng for t'endite,
I shal the shewe mater of to wryte." (PF: 167-68)

Here Scipio recalls the God of Love, in the *Legend of Good Women*, who takes an even more aggressive interest in Chaucer-the-character's search for or choice of material to write about.

In both the *Book of the Duchess* and the *Parliament of Fowls*, then, Chaucer-the-character ultimately gets around to identifying himself as a poet, whose reading feeds into his writing. There is no sense of deliberate plotting about this, no revelation like the "She ys ded!" of the *Book of the Duchess* (l. 1309)

(no "I'm a poet!"). Rather, it feels as if Chaucer expected people to know he was a poet, that beyond the jokes about his dullness as a lover he fully acknowledged his persona as a fictionalized doer of what he himself did-- forever tracing a Moebius curve on which reading turns into writing which turns into more reading.

There is a quirk in Chaucer's depiction of himself reading in the *House of Fame*, which is that he doesn't depict himself reading. His persona does not omit to identify himself as a poet, with now-familiar casualness, well before the Eagle takes up the issue. "Nere it to long to endyte," he says of Dido's death, "Be God, I wolde hyt here write" (HF: 381-82). In the proem to Book II he asks that the Muses "me to endite and ryme / Helpeth" (ll. 520-21). Thus it is no surprise when the Eagle starts listing the "bookys, songes, dytees, / In ryme or elles in cadence" (ll. 622-23) that Chaucer-the-character has made "in reverence / Of Love and of hys servantes eke" (ll. 624-25). He describes how Chaucer

"wold make
A-nyght ful ofte thyn hed to ake
In thy studye, so thou writest,
And ever mo of love enditest." (HF: 631-34)

Moreover, the Eagle continues, Chaucer gets no tidings from either far or near, because

"when thy labour doon al ys,
And hast mad alle thy rekenynges,
In stede of reste and newe thynges
Thou goost hom to thy hous anoon,
And, also domb as any stoon,
Thou sittest at another book
Tyl fully daswed ys thy look;
And lyvest thus as an heremyte,
Although thyn abstynence ys lyte." (HF: 652-60)

The Eagle's phrase "Thou sittest at another book" is almost always taken to describe Chaucer--and Chaucer-the-poet at that--reading privately. Yet the word "read" occurs nowhere in the entire extended passage (HF: 620-60).

When, in lines 655-58, Chaucer is sitting dumbly and dazedly at another book in his house, is it not likely that we are returning to the scene already described in lines 631-34, in which Chaucer makes his head ache with late-night enditing in his study? The Eagle seems to be making one sustained argument: Jupiter has taken pity on Chaucer, who serves Cupid and Venus by incessantly writing songs and books in their praise; yet Chaucer has no direct tidings of the process of Love in the world precisely because of this habit--because he is always in his study sitting at--i.e., writing--another book. This would seem to be the most likely, text-based interpretation.

Not that there need be any doubt that this process of writing included reading; if that point hasn't been driven home by the phenomenology of writing noted in Chaucer's other texts, it seems to be the very heart of the *House of Fame* itself. The fact that modern scholars have picked up on the reading only may reflect their delight in finding a text that, they think, describes Chaucer as a silent reader, echoing Augustine's description of Ambrose and heralding simultaneously the much-anticipated Age of Literacy.

Thus it seems that, within the frame of his fictions, Chaucer always depicts himself as a literary-professional reader. As much as he enjoys dissimulating this identity at first, he never relinquishes it. It is his version, perhaps, of the "supreme commonplace" stance assumed by writers addressing the "public sphere" (Lawton 1987: 771; see Chapter 2). A modern analogue might be the "On the Town" section of *New Yorker* magazine. In these short pieces, a thinly veiled but elusive authorial self relates, with Chaucerian modesty, various adventures whose point usually comes around to some issue of public responsibility. One enjoys the author's genial pose of average man-about-town at the same time as one realizes, and he subtly communicates, that he is in fact a professional writer, being published in a highly prestigious magazine.

Chaucer-the-character's book-dazedness makes an odd sort of paradigm for potential private recreational readers: relatively few members of his audience would be likely to cast themselves as copycat Chaucers, if that meant turning their private reading into new books full of cleverly written verse. Henryson tried it, but Henryson was a professional author, using as his Chaucerian "seed-book" a volume of Chaucer himself. To understand the true nature of Chaucer's reading, modern readers have to strain against both the seductiveness of Chaucer's fictional persona and the historical developments that have left his specialist behavior seeming normative.

The kind of reading with which Chaucer-the-character's should properly be aligned is not recreational but scholarly-professional and religious. As the Clerk's reading turns into teaching and the Parson's into preaching, so does Chaucer's turn into that less obvious but still valuable good, writing. In each case, the love of books reaches fruition in some form of validating social communication. The privacy into which these readers must withdraw is not noxious because it is not solipsistic; they leave society not to impoverish but to enrich it upon their return.

Chaucer as Paradigmatic Reader

This sense of social responsibility emerges in the paradigmatic nature of the reading Chaucer's persona undertakes in the *Book of the Duchess*, the *Parliament of Fowls*, and the prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*. In each of these works, Chaucer's statements about reading invoke a different standard medieval doctrine about the usefulness of books. The congruities of the literary function cited in each case with the poem that follows are striking.

Chaucer-the-insomniac reads in the *Book of the Duchess* in order to "drive the night away" (l. 49), a hygienic use of literature related by Glending

Olson to the *Tacuinum sanitatis* discussion of the dangers and cures of sleeplessness (1982: 85-89). "For thus moche dar I saye wel," he says:

I had be dolven everydel
 And ded, ryght thurgh defaute of slep,
 Yif I ne had red and take kep
 Of this tale next before. (BD: 221-25)

This reference stressing the hygienic uses of literature prefaces a text intended to help cure the Black Knight's grief for the death of his wife. In fact, the text is full of cure: Chaucer is cured of insomnia, Ceyx of intolerable anxiety, and the Knight of despair.

In the *Parliament of Fowls* Chaucer emphasizes the didactic usefulness of literature. He reads "for lust" but also "for lore" (PF: 15); he resorts to the *Somnium Scipionis* "a certeyn thing to lerne" (l. 20). After awaking from his vision, he decides to "rede alwey" in hopes of meeting "some thyng for to fare / The bet" (ll. 696, 698-99). These references establishing the teaching function of literature introduce a debate whose format mingles not only those of a parliament and a court of love but also, with its emphasis on "resoun" and "replicacioun" (ll. 534, 436), an academic disputation. Finally, in the prologue to the *Legend of Good Women* Chaucer prefaces his expressions of delight in reading with another medieval commonplace about books, that they offer "of remembraunce the keye" (LGW, F: 26). This reference, extolling literature for preserving the past, prepares the way for nine capsule history lessons.

In all of these references, Chaucer grounds his love of reading in typical medieval views on the uses of literature. Not only that: he prefaces each narrative with a paradigmatic piece of reading that illustrates the specific benefits the audience can derive from the poem to follow. In this subtle way, Chaucer-the-character's private lust for reading is transmuted through dream and imagination into material of broad social benefit--hygienic, educational, and historical. Like the private professional readers whose

reading is fruitful because ultimately shared, Chaucer-the-character's reading metamorphoses his private habit into public good--into the "com-mune profyt" (PF: 47, 75) that Scipio praised to his grandson in the *Parliament of Fowls*.

CONCLUSION

It is surely the vividness with which Chaucer-the-poet presents his persona's bibliophilia that leaves most modern critics convinced of the proto-modernity of the reading environment within which the poet supposedly wrote. Chaucer certainly evinces a passion for and a breadth of reading that justify his reputation as a private reader committed to the inscribed word. But, as we have seen over the course of this chapter, the concept of "private reader" is not as transparent as is generally assumed. Whereas nowadays almost all reading, of any kind by any sort of person for any purpose, is private and silent, in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries people read in different ways, privately or publicly, depending on context and role.

By distinguishing among pragmatic, professional, and recreational readers, it becomes possible to see clearly that Chaucer, inside and outside his fictions, read as a literary-professional reader, and would have been perceived as so doing. His contemporary audience would have had no illusions about the specialist nature of his reading because they would have recognized his passion for reading as an attribute proper to that professional status, just as illuminators considered a table full of books the fitting pictorial attribute of a writer. To one of his contemporaries, I believe, the most conclusive evidence of the fictional Chaucer's professionalism would have been precisely his taste for reading in that most poignant of Chaucerian conditions, "allone, withouten any compaignye" (e.g., CT 1: 2779).

The complement of that resonant solitude, however, was the ultimate aurality of the resulting text. Throughout his writings, Chaucer accepts

without concern their probable oral delivery; he invokes such events in his reception-phrases and he depicts them in his fictions. To return into and in some ways to constitute, and even teach, such a community is the rationale, at a deep level, for the entire enterprise of fiction. In this light, it may be interesting to consider a variation of the paradigmatic character of reading in the *Book of the Duchess*, the *Parliament of Fowls*, and the prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*. In the *House of Fame* the fictional Chaucer reads in order to write--seeking a good, literary creation, that is not as clearly utilitarian as health, education, or remembrance. It is important enough to Jupiter, however, that he arranges a voyage for Chaucer which, among other things, brings him among embodied sources: the great poet-pillars in the House of Fame, the babbling crowd of gossipers in the House of Rumor. Yet the poem does not present us with an instantiation of the function invoked by Chaucer's initial reading, as in the other three dream-visions. That is, reading in order to write does not result, in the text, in a new, perhaps improved literary creation--unless the unfinished *House of Fame* itself is that creation. Perhaps, even, that poem is as incomplete, chaotic, brilliant, and elusive as it is because Chaucer could not achieve coherence when talking about a kind of reading and thinking that is so self-directed, conceived in reference to himself and his internal creative processes only, without a clear link to the standard channels of general social benefit.

For all Chaucer's proto-modernity, or proto-post-modernity, then, a close reading or "ethnography" of his views on reading sends us firmly back to the medieval sense of literature's embeddedness within a community, and a community of hearers. If it's not true that the "lettre sleeth, so as we clerkes seyn" (CT: 3: 1794), the letter encountered in solitude clearly has the potential to disrupt or harm that community; just as the poet who becomes too involved with his own involvement with letters ends up with a text too open-ended to be comprehensible.

APPENDIX A

CHAUCER'S REFERENCES TO THE HEARING OF HIS OWN WORK

(Starred entries are also listed in Appendix B)

AS YE SHALL (MAY) (AFTER) HEAR

o *House of Fame*

Now herkeneth every maner man
That Englissh understonde kan
And listeth of my drem to lere,
For now at erste **shul ye here**
So sely an avisyon (HF: 509-13)

o Last 2 lines of *Anelida and Arcite*:

Withinne the temple, with a sorowful chere,
That shapen was **as ye shal after here.** (A&A: 356-57)

o *Parliament of Fowls*:

And seyde hem thus **as ye shul after here.** (PF: 658)

oo *Troilus and Criseyde*

o And preieth for hem that ben in the cas

Of Troilus, **as ye may after here** (T&C 1: 29-30)

o Com Pandare in, and seyde **as ye may here:** (T&C 4: 1085)

o With softe vois he of his lady deere,

That absent was, gan syng **as ye may heere:** (T&C 5: 636-37)

o And forth they speke of this and that yfeere,

As frendes don, of which som **shal ye heere.** (T&C 5: 853-54)

o And thus to hym she seyde, **as ye may here** (T&C 5: 952)

o He wrot right thus, and seyde **as ye may here:** (T&C 5: 1316)

o [Criseyde] Wrot hym ayeyn, and seyde **as ye may here:**

(T&C 5: 1589)

oo *Legend of Good Women*

- o I hadde ben ded, withouten any defence,
For drede of Loves wordes and his chere,
As, when tyme is, hereafter **ye shal here**
(LGW, F: 279-81; G: 182-84 is essentially the same)
- o She to hym spak, and seyde **as ye may here:** (LGW: 1085)
- o they mote hym yiven
From yer to yer hire owene children dere
For to be slayne right as **ye shal here.** (LGW: 1925-27)
- o And to hire spak, **as ye shal after here:** (LGW: 2627)

oo *Canterbury Tales*

- o Last 2 lines of General Prologue:
And he bigan with right a myrie cheere
His tale anon, and seyde **as ye may heere.** (CT 1: 857-58)
- o Last 2 lines of Cook's Prologue:
And therwithal he lough and made cheere,
And seyde his tale, **as ye shul after heere.** (CT 1: 4363-64)
- o Last 2 lines of Introduction to Man of Law's Tale:
And with that word he, with a sobre cheere,
Bigan his tale, **as ye shal after heere.** (CT 2: 97-98)
- o Last 2 lines of Shipman's Tale:
"Now wol ye vouche sauf, my lady deere?"
"Gladly," quod she, and seyde **as ye shal heere.** (CT 7: 451-52)
- o Epilogue to Nun's Priest's Tale (doubtful passage):
And after that he, with ful merie chere,
Seide unto another, **as ye shuln heere.** (CT 7: 3461-62)

AS YE HAVE HEARD (ME SAY) (DEVISE) (BEFORE)oo *Troilus and Criseyde*

- o **As ye han herd byfore,** al he hym tolde. (T&C 2: 966)

- o But al for nought; he held forth ay the wyse
That **ye han herd** Pandare er this devyse. (T&C 2: 1546-47)
- o He streght o morwe unto his nece wente--
Ye han wel herd the fyn of his entente. (T&C 3: 552-53)
- o Pandare, which that sent from Troilus
Was to Criseyde--as **ye han herd devyse** (T&C 4: 806-7)
- o And thus he drof a day yet forth or tweye,
As ye have herd; (T&C 5: 628-29)

oo *Legend of Good Women*

- o Me mette how I was in the medewe tho,
And that I romede in that same gyse,
To sen that flour, as **ye han herd devyse** (LGW, G: 104-6)
- *o And every poynt was performed in dede
As ye han in this covaunant **herd me rede.** (LGW: 2138-39)
- o **Ye han wel herd** of Theseus devyse
In the betraysynge of fayre Adryane (LGW: 2459-60)

o *Canterbury Tales*; General Prologue:

And telle he moste his tale, as was resoun,
By foreward and by composicioun,
As ye han herd; (CT 1: 847-49)

o "Complaint unto Pity":

Then leve I al these vertues, sauf Pite,
Kepyng the corps as **ye have herd me seyn** (ll. 50-51)

(NOW) HERKNETH/HARK/LISTETH

oo *House of Fame*

- o Now **herkeneth**, as I have yow seyde,
What that I mette or I abreyde. (HF: 109-10)
- o Now **herkeneth** every maner man
That Englissh understonde kan (HF: 509-10)

- o Now herkeneth every maner man
That Englissh understonde kan
And listeth of my drem to lere (HF: 509-11)
- o Now **herke** how she gan to paye
That gonne her of her grace praye (HF: 1549-50)
- oo *Troilus and Criseyde*
- o Now **herkneth** with a good entencioun,
For now wil I gon streght to my matere (T&C 1: 52-53)
- o And forthi if it happe in any wyse,
That there be any love in this place
That **herkneth**, (T&C 2: 29-31)
- oo *Legend of Good Women*
- o But **herkeneth**, ye that speken of kyndenesse (LGW: 665)
- o Now **herkneth** how he shal his lady serve! (LGW: 1276)
- *o *Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer's Retraction, opening line:
Now preye I to hem alle that **herkne** this litel tretys or rede
(CT 10: 1081)

HEAR

- o *House of Fame*, Invocation:
And he that mover ys of al,
That is and was and ever shal,
So yive hem joye that hyt [his sweven] **here** (HF: 81-83)
- oo *Troilus and Criseyde*
- o For now wil I gon streght to my matere,
In which ye may the double sorwes **here**
Of Troilus in lovyng of Criseyde (T&C 1: 53-55)
- o Introducing the "Canticus Troili":
and whoso list it **here**,
Loo, next this vers he may it fynden here. (T&C 1: 398-99)
- o I trowe it were a long thyng for to **here** (T&C 3: 495)

- o *Legend of Good Women*, Legend of Phyllis:
"God, for his grace, fro swich oon kepe us!"
Thus may these women preyen that it **here** (LGW: 2401-2)
- o *Canterbury Tales*, prologue to Miller's Tale:
And therefore, whoso list it nat **yeere**,
Turne over the leef and chese another tale (CT 1: 3176-77)

APPENDIX B

CHAUCER'S REFERENCES TO THE READING OF HIS OWN WORK

(Starred entries are also listed in Appendix A)

oo *Troilus and Criseyde*

- o And **red** wherso thow be, or elles songe,
That thow be understonde, God I biseche! (5: 1797-98)
- o Thow, **redere**, maist thiself ful wel devyne
That swich a wo my wit kan nat diffyne (5: 270-71)

*o *Legend of Good Women*:

And every poynt was performed in dede
As ye han in this covenant herd me **rede**. (LGW: 2138-39)

*o *Canterbury Tales*, retraction:

Now preye I to hem alle that herkne this litel tretys or **rede**
(CT 10: 1081)

o "Lenvoy a Bukton":

The Wyf of Bathe I pray yow that ye **rede** (l. 29)

o "Complaynt D'Amours":

Shewe by word, that ye wolde ones **rede**
The compleynte of me (ll. 67-68)

Anomalous case:

o *Canterbury Tales*, Second Nun's Tale:

"Yet preye I yow that **reden** that I write
Foryeve me that I do no diligence
This ilke storie subtilly to endite" (CT 8: 78-80)

APPENDIX C

CHAUCER'S REFERENCES TO THE READING OF SOURCE-TEXTS*

(Starred entries are also listed in Appendix D)

Citational Formulas

1. "Whoso [wants to know]/[can], read ..."
2. "(As) men (may) (in books) read"
3. "Read ..." [imperative verb]
4. "(As) ye may read"
5. "Men read (that ...)"

IDENTIFIED SOURCES

Chaucer as Narrator

oo *House of Fame*

- o **Whoso to knowe hit hath purpos,**
Rede Virgile in Eneydos (HF: 377-78) (formula 1)
- o Which **whoso willeth for to knowe,**
He moste **rede** many a rowe
On Virgile or on Claudian,
Or Daunte, that hit telle kan. (HF: 447-50)
- o Ful of the fynest stones faire
That **men rede** in the Lapidaire (HF: 1351-52) (formula 2)

oo *Troilus and Criseyde*

- o In Omer, or in Dares, or in Dite,
Whoso that kan may **rede** hem as they write.
(T&C 1: 146-47) (formula 1)
- *o His worthi dedes, **whoso list hem heere,**
Rede Dares, he kan telle hem alle ifeere
(T&C 5: 1770-71) (formula 1)

oo *Legend of Good Women*

- o But **who** wol al this letter have in mynde,
Rede Ovyde, and in hym he shal it fynde.
(LGW: 1366-67) (formula 1)
- o But **whoso** axeth who is with hym gon,
Lat hym go **rede** Argonautycon (LGW: 1456-57) (formula 1)
- o *Canterbury Tales*, General Prologue:
Eek Plato seith, **whoso kan hym rede** (1: 741) (formula 1)

Fictional Narratorsoo *Canterbury Tales*

- o Man of Law:
"Or ellis of [Gower's] Tyro Appollonius, ...
That is so horrible a tale for to **rede**" (CT 2: 81, 84)
- o Wife of Bath:
"The same wordes writeth Ptholomee;
Rede in his Almageste, and take it there." (CT 3: 182-83) (formula 3)
- *o Wife of Bath:
"The remenant of the tale if ye wol heere,
Redeth Ovyde, and ther ye may it leere." (CT 3: 981-82) (formula 3)
- o Wife of Bath's tale, loathly lady to Gawain:
"Redeth Senek, ..." (CT 3: 1168) (formula 3)
- o Wife's tale, loathly lady to Gawain:
"... and **redeth** eek Boece" (CT 3: 1168) (formula 3)
- o Clerk: "As seith Seint Jame, if ye his pistel **rede**" (CT 4: 1154)
- o Merchant: "Lo, how that Jacob, as **thise clerkes rede**"
(CT 4: 1362) (formula 2)
- o Merchant: "In Claudyan ye may the stories **rede**" (CT 4: 2232) (formula 4)
- o Pardoner: "**Redeth** the Bible, and fynde it expresly"
(CT 6: 586) (formula 3)

- o Pardoner's Tale, the Old Man:
"In Hooly Writ ye may yourself wel **rede**" (CT 6: 742) (formula 4)
- o Monk:
"Hir batailles, **whoso list hem for to rede** ...
Lat hym unto my maister Petrak go" (CT 7: 2319, 2326) (formula 1)
- *o Monk:
"**Whoso wol here it in a lenger wise,**
Redeth the grete poete of Ytaille" (CT 7: 2459-60) (formula 1)
- o Monk: "**Rede** which that he was in Machabee" (CT 7: 2579) (formula 3)
- o Monk:
"And **rede** [in "Machabee"] the proude wordes that he seyde"
(CT 7: 2580) (formula 3)
- o Nun's Priest's Tale, Chaunticleer:
"By God! I hadde levere than my sherte
That ye hadde **rad** his [Kenelm's] legende, as have I."
(CT 7: 3120-21)
- o Nun's Priest's Tale, Chaunticleer:
"**Reed** eek of Joseph, and ther shul ye see" (CT 7: 3130) (formula 3)
- o Nun's Priest's Tale, Chaunticleer:
"I have wel **rad** in 'Daun Burnel the Asse' ..." (CT 7: 3312)
- o Nun's Priest: "**Redeth** Ecclesiaste of flaterye" (CT 7: 3329) (formula 3)
- o Manciple: "The wise Plato seith, **as ye may rede**" (CT 9: 207) (formula 4)
- o Manciple: "**Reed** Salomon, so wys and honourable" (CT 9: 344) (formula 3)
- o Manciple: "**Reed** David in his psalmes; ..." (CT 9: 345) (formula 3)
- o Manciple: "... **reed** Senekke." (CT 9: 345) (formula 3)

UNIDENTIFIED AND/OR PROVERBIAL SOURCES

Chaucer as Narrator

- o *Book of the Duchess*:
 And in this bok were written fables
 That clerkes had in olde tyme,
 And other poetes, put in rime
 To rede and for to be in minde (BD: 52-55)
- oo *House of Fame*
 - o But wel-away, the harm, the routhe,
 That hath betyd for such untrouthe,
As men may ofte in bokes rede (HF: 383-85) (formula 2)
 - o ...ne Ganymede,
 That was ybore up, **as men rede** (HF: 589-90) (formula 2)
- oo *Troilus and Criseyde*
 - o **Men reden nat that folk han gretter wit**
 Than they that han be most with love ynome
 (T&C 1: 241-42) (formula 5)
 - o **Men sen alday, and reden ek in stories,**
That after sharpe shoures ben victories. (T&C 3: 1063-64) (formula 5)
 - o And trewely, **as men in bokes rede,**
 Men wiste nevere womman han the care (T&C 5: 19-20) (formula 2)
 - o **As men may in thise olde bokes rede,**
 Was seen his knyghthod and his grete myght
 (T&C 5: 1753-54) (formula 2)
- oo *Legend of Good Women*
 - o Ye may as wel it [men's unfaithfulness] **sen as ye may rede.**
 (LGW: 1263) (formula 4)
 - o Ye gete namore of me, but ye wole **rede**
 Th'origynal, that telleth al the cas. (LGW: 1557-58)

Fictional Narrators

oo *Troilus and Criseyde*

o Pandarus:

"And thynk what wo ther hath bitid er this,
For makyng of avantes, **as men rede**" (T&C 3: 288-89) (formula 2)

o Criseyde: "O blake nyght, as **folk in bokes rede**"

(T&C 3: 1429) (formula 2)

o Troilus: "We han no fre chois, **as these clerkes rede.**"

(T&C 4: 980) (formula 2)

o Criseyde:

"For I am evere agast, forwhy **men rede**
That love is thyng ay ful of bisy drede."

(T&C 4: 1644-45) (formula 5)

o *Legend of Good Women*, God of Love:

"That it is pite for to **rede**, and routhe,
The wo that they endure for here trouthe." (LGW G: 286-87)

oo *Canterbury Tales*

o Man of Law:

Alla "His mooder slow--**that may men pleyedly rede**"

(CT 2: 894) (formula 5)

o Squire:

"the Grekes hors Synon,
That broghte Troie to destruccion,
As men in these olde geestes rede." (CT 5: 209-11) (formula 2)

o Franklin's Tale, Dorigen:

"O Cedasus, it is ful greet pitee
To **reden** how thy doghtren deyde, allas" (CT 5: 1428-29)

o Nun's Priest's Tale, Chauncleer:

"By God, **men may in olde bookes rede**
Of many a man moore of auctorite
Than evere Caton was" (CT 7: 2974-76) (formula 2)

- o Nun's Priest's Tale, Chaunticleer:
"Oon of the gretteste auctour that **men rede**"
(CT 7: 2984) (formula 5)
- o Nun's Priest's Tale, Chaunticleer:
"**Whoso wol seken actes of sondry remes**
May **rede** of dremes many a wonder thyng."
(CT 7: 3136-37) (formula 1)
- *o Nun's Priest:
"**Rede** auctours, where they trete of swich mateere
And what they seyn of wommen ye may heere."
(CT 7: 3263-64) (formula 3)
- o Second Nun: "**As men may after reden in hire storie.**"
(CT 8: 35) (formula 2)
- o Manciple:
"And many another noble worthy dede
He with his bowe wroghte, **as men may rede.**"
(CT 9: 111-12) (formula 2)

NARRATIVE FORMULAS: "(AS) I READ"

Chaucer as Narrator

- o *Parliament of Fowls*: "There **rede** I wel he wol be lord and syre"
(PF: 12)
- oo *Troilus and Criseyde*
 - o But whether that she children hadde or noon,
I **rede** it naught, therefore I late it goon. (T&C 1: 132-33)
 - o In sondry wises shewed, **as I rede**,
The folk of Troie hire observaunces olde (T&C 1: 159-60)
 - o But wel I **rede** that, by no manere weye (T&C 1: 495)
- oo *Legend of Good Women*
 - o But now to purpos; in the story I **rede** (LGW: 1825)

- o That, whan that I his foule storrye **rede** (LGW: 2239)
- o "Complaint of Mars":
Sojourned hath this Mars of which I **rede** (l. 78)

Fictional Narrators

oo *Canterbury Tales*

- o Man of Law: "And wel **rede** I he looked bisily" (CT 2: 1095)
- o Wife of Bath: "This was the olde opinion, **as I rede**" (CT 3: 862)
- o Pardoner:
"For whil that Adam fasted, **as I rede**,
He was in Paradys" (CT 6: 508-9)
- o Nun's Priest's Tale, Chaunticleer:
"And certes in the same book I **rede**" (CT 7: 3064)
- o Nun's Priest's Tale, Chaunticleer:
"Lo, in the lyf of Seint Kenelm I **rede**" (CT 7: 3110)
- o Parson: "ne **we ne rede** nat that evere he rood on other beest."
(CT 10: 434)

*This list does not include: "read's" that describe a character reading; "read" used in the sense of "speak, tell about, give account of"; and readings of inscriptions, dreams, stars, paintings, expressions, etc.

APPENDIX D

CHAUCER'S REFERENCES TO THE HEARING OF SOURCE-TEXTS

(Starred entries are also listed in Appendix C)

Chaucer as Narrator

oo *Troilus and Criseyde*

- o For sothe, I have naught **herd** it don er this
In story on, ne no man here, I wene (T&C 3: 498-99)
- *o His worthi dedes, whoso list hem **heere**,
Rede Dares, he kan telle hem alle ifeere (T&C 5: 1770-71)

Fictional Narrators

o *Legend of Good Women*, God of Love:

"Ek al the world of autours maystow **here**
Cristene and hethene, trete of swich matere" (LGW, G: 308-9)

oo *Canterbury Tales*

*o Wife of Bath:

"The remenant of the tale if ye wol **heere**,
Redeth Ovyde, and ther ye may it leere." (CT 3: 981-82)

o Squire:

"They speken of Alocen, and Vitulon,
And Aristotle, that writen in hir lyves
Of queynte mirours and of perspectives,
As knowen they that **han hir bookes herd**." (CT 5: 232-35)

*o Monk:

"Whoso wol **here** it in a lenger wise,
Redeth the grete poete of Ytaille" (CT 7: 2459-60)

*o Nun's Priest:

"Rede auctours, where they trete of swich matere
And what they seyn of wommen ye may **heere**." (CT 7: 3263-64)

APPENDIX E

CHAUCER'S REFERENCES TO THE TRANSMISSION OF STORIES

Chaucer as Narrator

o *House of Fame*:

The halle was al ful, ywys,
Of hem that writen olde gestes
As ben on trees rokes nestes;
But hit a ful confus matere
Were alle the gestes for to **here**
That they of **write**, or how they highte. (HF: 1514-19)

o *Troilus and Criseyde*:

How myghte it evere **yred** ben or **ysonge**,
The pleynte that she made in hire destresse? (T&C 4: 799-800)

Fictional Narrators

oo *House of Fame*

o Dido's lament:

"thorgh yow is my name lorn,
And alle myn actes **red and songe**
Over al thys lond, on **every tonge**." (HF: 346-48)

o Eagle explains:

"And [the palace of Fame] stant eke in so juste a place
That every soun mot to hyt pace;
Or **what so cometh from any tonge**,
Be hyt rouned, **red, or songe**,
Or spoke in suerte or in drede,
Certeyn, hyt moste thider nede." (HF: 719-24)

o *Troilus and Criseyde*, Criseyde's lament:

"Allas, of me, unto the worldes ende,
Shal neyther ben **ywriten nor ysonge**
No good word, for thise **bokes** wol me shende.
O, rolled shal I ben on many a **tonge**!" (T&C 5: 1058-61)

o *Legend of Good Women*, God of Love:

"I wot wel that thou maist nat al yt ryme
 That swiche lovers diden in hire tyme;
 It were to long to **reden and to here.**" (LGW F: 570-72)

oo *Canterbury Tales*

o End of "Sir Thopas":

"Therefore, lordynges alle, I yow biseche,
 If that yow thynke I varie as in my speche,
 As thus, though that I telle somewhat moore
 Of proverbes than **ye han herd bifoore**
 Comprehended in this litel tretys heere ["Melibee"],
 To enforce with th'effect of my mateere;
 And though I nat the same wordes seye
As ye han herd, yet to yow alle I preye
 Blameth me nat" (CT 7: 953-61)

o Monk's Tale, re Alexander:

"The storie of Alisaundre is so commune
 That every wight that hath discrecioun
 Hath **herd** somewhat or al of his fortune." (CT 7: 2631-33)

CHAPTER 5

AN "ETHNOGRAPHY OF READING" IN NON-CHAUCERIAN ENGLISH LITERATURE

The preceding two chapters have scoured the pages of both history and the Chaucer canon to see how late medieval people read. Chapter 3 found that in almost every case where evidence chanced to survive about reading behavior in France, the duchy of Burgundy, England, and Scotland, the readers were members of the upper classes, they were indisputably literate, and they were reading publicly, until at least late in the fifteenth century. This was so even though reading took place in very different contexts and served very different functions on either side of the Channel. Chapter 4's in-depth look at Chaucer's writings found that at many levels he embraced public reading as normative and beneficial. Private reading emerged as dangerous unless practiced by a reliable professional who would ultimately return his reading to a social context by preaching, teaching, or rewriting it.

The present chapter completes this three-pronged attack by turning to non-Chaucerian literary sources. It further weakens the "fictive orality" arguments of Mehl and Burrow (see Chapter 1) by showing that, like Chaucer, many fourteenth- and fifteenth-century court-oriented poets addressed listeners and referred regularly to the hearing of books. Of course, most of these poets had read Chaucer, and several eulogize him in their verses, so one could conceivably argue that they were all imitating his fictive orality. It might be multiplying entities beyond reason, however, to maintain that a consistent assumption of aurality (or bimodality) by a variety of writers in a

variety of genres over a hundred and fifty years before, during, and after Chaucer derives from the somehow universal desire to give private readers the thrill of pretending to be hearers. Similarly, it seems a long time for a "survival" to persist, with no reinforcement from reality. It would also seem rather strained special pleading to claim that the "new," private reader flashed into existence during the lifetime and career of that one genius Geoffrey Chaucer, then quick-dissolved into the nothingness of the "re-medievalized" poets who came limping along after him. Surely the most economical explanation of the persistent reference to the hearing of literature would simply be that people *were* hearing: that literacy added an option rather than imposing obsolescence; that "read," when applied to audiences, remained undifferentiated--neutral as to anticipated format--throughout the late fourteenth and much of the fifteenth century.

The present chapter will focus on the reading formats attributed to audiences by the authors of what can loosely be described as court literature, from the mid-fourteenth through the late fifteenth century, with a short coda extending into the early sixteenth. "Court literature" for these purposes will describe works written by people known to be associated with the court and/or dealing with issues of national interest. The genres are not always easy to define but would include dream visions, *specula principis*, and the more ambitious narrative poetry and romances. The emphasis on "high-end" literary production is meant to ensure that the authors of these works would be addressing upper-middle- to upper-class readers, whom these authors would almost certainly expect to be literate.

The survey of non-Chaucerian literature will be divided into three chronological sections: 1350-1400, 1400-1450, and 1450-91, with a brief concluding glance forward as far as 1525. These time-breaks are pegged to the convenient death-dates of three major figures: Chaucer's in 1400, Lydgate's in c. 1450, and Caxton's in 1491. Thus we have the "age of Chaucer," the age of his immediate followers, and the dawn of the age of

printing. As the texts examined show no abrupt discontinuities in envisioned reception format that would form a basis in themselves for periodization, these three mini-ages may serve as well as anything as a way of dividing the material into manageable portions. Since, as will appear below, the discussion reaches 1491 with an oddly mixed set of testimonies, I venture in the coda-section beyond my area of expertise, to see what some early Tudors said or implied about reception.

For the research presented below I reviewed all of the major and many of the more obscure surviving works of secular (non-religious and non-devotional) literature in English from the last half of the fourteenth century through the turn of the fifteenth century. There will also be some forays into Scots, Anglo-Norman, French, and Latin. I excluded the drama; most romances, histories, and scholarly works of science or philosophy; and many of the non-recreative translations. I read selectively among the Scots poets of this period; and finally, being only human, I restricted my reading of Lydgate to certain representative texts.

Each of the four sections below will begin with a list of the literature drawn on for the analysis that follows (other works may have been consulted but are not listed unless specifically cited in the analysis). After an introductory discussion, each section will examine the depictions of professional or recreational reading events in the literature of that period, and move on to a review of the references to reading formats and to the functioning or not of the aural-narrative constellation within those texts. Any other interesting issues raised by the material will also be discussed.

AUTHORS CONTEMPORARY WITH CHAUCER (1350-1400)

The Parlement of the Thre Ages, bet. 1353-70

Gawain-poet: Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, fourth quarter 14th c.

Patience, fourth quarter 14th c.

Cleanness, fourth quarter 14th c.

John Gower: *Speculum meditantis*, bet. 1376-79
Confessio Amantis, 1st rec., 1390
 "In Praise of Peace," after 1400
 William Langland: *Piers Plowman* B-text, 1379
 Thomas Usk: *The Testament of Love*, 1387
 Chandos Herald: *La Vie du Prince Noir*, late 14th c.

None of Chaucer's contemporaries mentions books and reading as often as he does. When they do address such topics, however, they show the same awareness of variant forms of professional and recreational reading, coupled with the same general assumption that audiences will be hearing their own or other people's books. This aurality co-existed even with Gower's efforts to surround his *Confessio Amantis* with a scholarly-professional Latin apparatus (see Chapter 2).

Reading Events

Professional Reading

Gower's *Confessio Amantis* (1st rec., 1390) provides two instances of scholarly-professional private reading. Socrates' wife, hauling in a bucket of water on a cold winter day, is provoked to see

how that hire seli spouse
 Was sett and loked on a bok
 Nyh to the fyr, as he which tok
 His ese for a man of age. (CA 3: 658-61)

When the aggrieved woman dumps the bucket of water over her spouse, he remarks mildly that she has but "mad me bothe wynd and rein / After the Sesoun of the yer" (3: 692-93).

Socrates' happily single colleague, Diogenes, chooses a modest dwelling where he can

studie in his Philosophie,
 As he which wolde so defie
 The worldes pompe on every syde. (7: 2245-47)

By contrast, his former fellow-student Aristippus "his bok aside / Hath leid, and to the court he wente" (7: 2248-49). But Diogenes, Gower repeats,

duelte stille
 At home and loked on his bok:
 He soghte noght the worldes crok
 For vein honour ne for richesse,
 Bot all his hertes besinesse
 He sette to be vertuouse;
 And thus withinne his oghne hous
 He liveth to the sufficance
 Of his havinge. (7: 2266-74)

Gower also presents one case that recalls Chaucer's pejorative view of secret-private professional reading. Nectanebus, an Egyptian clerk, uses his proprietary skill as a scholarly-professional reader of astrology and magic to persuade Queen Olimpias that the god Amos wants to sleep with her. After showing her his astrolabe he reads and expounds an astrological tome:

the hevenely figures
 Wroght in a bok ful of peintures
 He tok this ladi forto schewe,
 And tolde of ech of hem be rewe
 The cours and the condicion.
 And sche with gret affeccion
 Sat stille and herde what he wolde. (6: 1893-99)

Olimpias duly impressed and compliant, Nectanebus then shuts himself into his chamber and, like the necromancer in the Franklin's Tale or the canon in the Canon's Yeoman's Tale, proceeds to do his worst with his magic books:

His chambre he himselve tok,
 And overtorneth many a bok,
 And thurgh the craft of Artemage
 Of wex he forgeth an ymage.
 He loketh his equacions
 And ek the constellacions,
 He loketh the conjuncions,
 He loketh the recepcions,
 His signe, his houre, his ascendent,
 And drawth fortune of his assent:

The name of queene Olimpias
 In thilke ymage write was
 Amiddes in the front above.
 And thus to winne his lust of love
 Nectanabus this werk hath diht (6: 1955-69)

Nectanebus himself will later arrive in Amos' stead and with Olimpias conceive a son who will grow up to be Alexander the Great.

Gower's attitude to scholarly-professional reading differs significantly from Chaucer's. He agrees in finding secret reading (even, in a category he introduces, secret-public reading) of proprietary texts dangerous. But he doesn't seem to care if his private professional readers complete the feedback loop. He is interested in how Socrates' and Diogenes' reading shapes them as individuals, functioning in an untrustworthy world, but he shows no concern about whether they return their learning to that world in the form of teaching or writing. Rather, he seems to idealize their withdrawal from the world.

One other, pseudo-professional reading event is depicted in Langland's *Piers Plowman* (B rec., 1379, ed. Schmidt). After Mede has defiantly quoted Solomon to prove that gift-giving brings honor, Conscience responds:

"thow art lik a lady that radde a lesson ones,
 Was *omnia probate*, and that plesed hire herte--
 For that lyne was no lenger at the leves ende.
 Hadde she loked that other half and the leef torned,
 She sholde have founden fele wordes folwyng thetherafter:
quod bonum est tenete--Truthe that texte made.
 And so [mys]ferde ye, madame--ye kouthe na moore fynde
 Tho ye loked on Sapiencie, sittyng in youre studie.
 This text that ye han told were [tidy] {useful} for lordes,
 Ac yow failed a konnyng clerk that kouthe the leef han torned."
 (B 3: 338-47)

It's surprising that the scholars who flock around Chaucer's "leef" passage have failed to discover this one, which features two ladies being adjured to turn two different leaves, each of which ends with a half-completed sen-

tence. Conscience seems to present both ladies as reading privately; the first, hypothetical one is looking at the page; the second, allegorical one (Lady Mede) is sitting in her study. Of course Conscience is being heavily ironic; the reference to Mede in a study, and the invocation of these privately reading ladies, may be a piling-up of unlikelihoods meant to show his scorn for Mede's claim to a scholarly knowledge of Latin. The ladies are not shown simply as devotional readers, but as would-be scholarly readers, construing key texts in the language of clerks.

It is hard to know how to interpret this depiction, an improbability inside an allegory within a dream within a poem; but whether Langland thought women were tending to read the Scriptures in Latin or not, there is a clear implication of the dangers of scholarly or clerical-religious private reading in the wrong hands--in this case, hands not "konnyng" enough to turn the page.

Recreational Reading

The first example of recreational reading comes from the *Parlement of the Thre Ages*, a debate among Youth, Middle Age, and Age written between 1353 and 1370. Youth informs Middle Age that he likes to go falcon-hunting,

And than kayre to the courte that I come fro,
 With ladys full louely to lappyn in myn armes,
 And clyp thaym and kysse thaym and comforthe myn hert;
 And than with damesels dere to daunsen in thaire chambirs;
 Riche Romance to rede and rekken the sothe
 Of kempes [warriors] and of conquerours, of kynges full noble,
 How thay wirchipe and welthe wanne in thaire lyues;
 With renkes in ryotte [merry-making] to reuelle in haulle,
 With coundythes [conduts, part-songs] and carolles and compaynyes
 sere,
 And chese me to the chesse that chefe es of gamnes;
 And this es life for to lede while I schalle lyfe here (ll. 246-56)

The "riche Romance" passage stands syntactically isolated between Youth's dancing with damsels in chamber and his rioting with renkes in hall, so that it's not clear with whom or where he read; technically, it isn't even definite that he read with anyone else. Given the overwhelmingly social context of all his activities, however, we are surely justified in assuming that his reading was equally social; and given further his preference for tales of military conquest, we may assume he more probably shared the experience with his male friends.

Gower's *Confessio Amantis* provides a companion account to that of the *Parlement*. Amans explains eagerly to his Confessor that he is not guilty of Somnolence, because he is ready to wait on his lady at any time. He is there if she "list on nyhtes wake / In chambre as to carole and daunce" (4: 2778-79), as well as

whanne it falleth othergate,
So that hire like noght to daunce,
Bot on the Dees to caste chaunce
Or axe of love som demande,
Or elles that hir list comaunde
To rede and here of Troilus,
Riht as sche wole or so or thus,
I am al redi to consente. (4: 2790-97)

The authors of these two descriptions of audiences and romances have placed these remarkably similar contextualizations of prelected literature in surprisingly congruent literary contexts. Both are spoken by a character as a form of self-indicting *confessio*; both characters, and the lifestyles they pursue, are implicitly critiqued as senselessly frivolous. Both characters will learn better: Youth as he inevitably evolves into Middle Age, Amans when he is forced to confront his senescence. The pattern also fits Accidia's confession, in *Piers Plowman*, that he is ignorant of Scripture but "I kan

rymes of Robyn Hood and Randolf Erl of Chestre" (B 5: 396),¹ which he apparently has learned and performs memorially. All three confessions relate to the genre and ideology of the vices: Amans is seeking to defend himself against a charge of Somnolence (which is a subset of Sloth, or Accidia) while implicitly condemning himself for precisely that; Accidia, of course, is Sloth personified; and Youth's predilections mingle Sloth and Lechery as the sins appropriate to his age.²

Despite the atmosphere of authorial disapproval, however, the scenes invoked in Gower and the *Parlement* also strongly recall the real-life evenings in the courts of James I of Scotland and Edwards III and IV. As noted in Chapter 3, however, the historical records are silent on whether women were present for these recreations, perhaps to avoid any implication of indiscretion. When such entertainments are dramatized in literature, it

¹Langland portrays Accidia as a priest happily illiterate in Latin--"Yet kan I neyther solve ne syng ne seintes lyves rede" (B 5: 417), "Ac in Canoun nor in the Decretals I kan nocht rede a lyne" (5: 422). On the other hand, "I kan rymes of Robyn Hood and Randolf Erl of Chestre" (5: 396) and "I am ocupied eche day, halyday and oother, / With ydel tales at the ale and outhewhile in chirches" (5: 403-4).

It seems Accidia knows his ballads or romances by heart, although it is not clear how he learned them; perhaps they are among the "ydel tales" he hears or tells at the alehouse or in church. In this passage Langland seems to be making a perhaps artificially sharpened contrast between the priest unable to perform his proper function as a private and public professional reader of Latin texts, and the memorial performance of vernacular genres extolling two English outlaw-heroes.

For similar juxtapositions of Latin illiteracy to vernacular audiacy, see Bennett's edition of passus 1-7 (1972: 177, note to 5: 402).

²Another close memorial cognate to this pattern comes from Gower's *Speculum meditantis* (c. 1376-79), where the "Sompnolent" falls asleep in church and dreams that "il est au bout de la tonelle, / U qu'il oit chanter la geste / De Troylus et de la belle / Creseide" (ll. 5252-55) ("he's at the bottom of the keg, / Or that he's listening to someone sing the *geste* / Of Troilus and the fair / Criseyde"). Here vernacular literature is again connected to Sloth, by means of a third-person narration rather than a confession.

seems, women are a necessary addition--not so much as potential listeners, but as potential love-partners. Romance-reading in the *Parlement* is part of Youth's generally promiscuous behavior, while reading and hearing of *Troilus* accords with love-demands among the pastimes with which the lovelorn Amans is happy to amuse his lady. Here the author of the *Parlement* and Gower may be working a literary one-two: distorting the nature of recreational prelection to include an obligatory sex-interest, but placing the whole in a context of mature disapproval that fosters their self-image as princely advisers.

It may be their aspirations to that role that led Gower, Langland, and the author of the *Parlement*--all writing in English--to be so ready to condemn works of English literature as potential accessories to Lechery or Sloth. The condemnation is not crushing; Gower's possible reference to Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* must carry the respect either of wholehearted admiration or of the mock-rivalry that also informs Venus' reference to Chaucer's love-ditties (CA 8: 2945*) and Chaucer's reference to Gower's indecent subject-matter (CT 2: 77-89). Yet inasmuch as the implication of frivolity attaches to these items of recreational literature, it presumably reflects the desire of these more ambitious authors to establish themselves in the role of "public voice" addressing a "public sphere" (see Chapter 2).

These six dramatized incidents of reading behavior support the hypothesis that public reading during Chaucer's lifetime was associated with recreational contexts, and private reading with professional scholarly or religious ones. There is also a basis for deriving author-specific "reading-maps," in the suggestion that Gower patterned his reading events differently from Chaucer.

One further matter for speculation is the persistently disturbing relationship of women, in these texts, to the whole question of book-reading. Amans' lady and Youth's paramours are associated with recrea-

tional reading, as part of a seductive environment dangerous to men; Olimpias is doubly the dupe of a lecherous clerk's professional reading (beguiled, first, by his display of erudition and, second, by the shape-shifting his books teach him); Socrates' wife is condemned for her stupid indifference to books, and Mede and the hypothetical lady for their stupid attempt to read them. By contrast, Chaucer's two most realized scenes of public reading both feature women in a non-sexualized and sympathetic manner: Criseyde and her maidens reading a vernacular romance are the image of self-sufficient femininity; whereas the Wife of Bath, in her more explosive behavior as listener, nonetheless wins admiration for her defense of her sex against the misogyny of clerks. Chaucer's less stereotyped, more sympathetic attitude towards women as readers is further evidence of what Arlyn Diamond calls his "painfully honest effort, this unwillingness to be satisfied with the formulas of his age ... [which shows that he] means to be women's friend, insofar as he can be" (1977: 83).

Reading Channel

The aural-narrative constellation discernible in Chaucer's canon can also be found in the works of his contemporaries. I will take a close look at its operation in the work of the other chief storyteller of his period, Gower, before reviewing more cursorily the other texts in this section.

John Gower

The prologue to Gower's *Confessio Amantis* takes up the issue of transmission right away:

Incipit Prologus

Of hem that writen ous tofore
 The bokes duelle, and we therefore
 Ben tawht of that was write tho:
 Forthi good is that we also

5 In oure tyme among ous hier
 Do wryte of newe som matiere,
 Essampled of these olde wyse
 So that it myhte in such a wyse,
 Whan we ben dede and elleswhere,
 10 Beleve to the worldes eere
 In tyme comende after this.
 Bot for men sein, and soth it is,
 That who that al of wisdom writ
 It dulleth ofte a mannes wit
 15 To him that schal it aldai rede,
 For thilke cause, if that ye rede,
 I wolde go the middel weie
 And wryte a bok between the tweie,
 Somwhat of lust, somewhat of lore,
 20 That of the lasse or of the more
 Som man mai lyke of that I wryte:
 And for that fewe men endite
 In oure englissh, I thenke make
 A bok for Engelondes [alt.: king Richardes] sake (CA prol.: 1-24)

In this concise statement Gower covers most of the basic features of the aural-narrative constellation: written sources (ll. 1-3), a writing author (ll. 4-6) picking up the exempla (l. 7) of his sources and presenting them in new form, an audience conceived of as "the worldes eere" (l. 10)--a striking phrase that vividly asserts the perceived perpetuity of auralness. Nonetheless, line 15 brings in a "rede" that must be understood as format-neutral in this context. Finally, in lines 16-24 Gower again reminds us he is writing, this time discussing how he will relay his reworked sources to his audience. The famous line "a bok for Engelondes sake" (l. 24) caps the whole argument by effectively ascribing to Gower the status of national counselor (see Chapter 2). Thus his public voice addresses, through the prelector's mediation, the public sphere he envisages as "the worldes eere."

The elements condensed in this prologue recur throughout the text. The bulk of the *Confessio* consists of in-frame narrations by the Confessor, along with "confessions" from Amans, but in the prologue, the beginning of book 1, and the epilogue Gower speaks as author using standard aural phrases to

describe his audience's reception. In introducing his dream of Amans and the Confessor, Gower says he will write (prol.: 74) for hearers (l. 66) who will read him (l. 77). We note the familiar aural phrases "as ye shall hear" (prol.: 589; 8: 3055), "as ye have heard devise" (prol.: 822; 1: 96), and "Now herkne, who that wol it hierie" (1: 96).³

In invoking reception formats, Gower is rich in references to the basic equipment of aural performance: ears, mouths, and tongues. He (via the Confessor) notes that Troy's fame still lasts "And evere schal to mannes Ere" (3: 1887); that "whyl ther is a mouth, / For evere his [Ulysses'] name schal be couth" (6: 1395-96); and, speaking of Moses and other lawgivers, that

For evere, whil there is a tunge,
Here name schal be rad and sunge
And holde in the Cronique write
(7: 3047-49; see also 6: 1223-26; 2: 3030-32, 3038-40)

That chronicles are a holding-place until a tongue comes along to read them is also suggested in Gower's short poem "In Praise of Peace." Gower counsels Henry IV

if that the list to seche
The sothe essamples that the werre hath wrought,
Thow schalt wel hierie of wisemennes speche
That dedly werre turneth into noght.
For if these olde bokes be wel soght,
Ther myght thou se what thing the werre hath do,
Bothe of conquete and conquerour also.
(*"In Praise of Peace,"* ll. 92-98; ed. Macaulay 3: 484)

³Similar phrases occur throughout the *Speculum meditantis*, e.g.: "[Le diable] Lors engendra tieu fals encess, / Come vous orretz, si faites pes" (ll. 202-3) ("[The devil] engendered then full false offspring, / As you will hear, if you keep peace") or "Si les commence a resonner, / Comme vous orretz parler avant" (ll. 9753-54) ("Then they began to argue, / As you have heard spoken before"). See also ll. 203, 324, 838, 1044, 1334, 3678, 9688, 9756, 10031, 10033, 10063, 11430, 12024. Gower clearly considered that an audience fluent in Anglo-Norman, the language of the elite classes of English society, would still be hearing his text.

Of considerable interest is the closing Latin verse of the *Confessio*, which invokes, again, the reader's mouth:

Explicit iste liber, qui transeat, obsecro liber
Vt sine liuore vigeat lectoris in ore. (CA 8: following l. 3172)

(Here ends this book, let it pass on free, I beg,
That without envy it may flourish in the reader's mouth.)

The fact that the lines are in Latin adds weight to the reference to prelection, since Gower used his Latin commentary to imbue his vernacular love-stories with a more ambitious and didactic *sentence*. He would be unlikely to foster a trivializing fiction about his text in these glosses; rather, he used them to *reveal* devices, such as "fingens se auctor esse Amantem" ("the author feigning himself to be Amans") (gloss to CA prol.: 60).

Gower's characters, like Chaucer's, are sometimes aware of their lives turning into texts. Progne, for example, warns Tereus that

"of thi dede
The world schal evere singe and rede
In remembrance of thi defame" (5: 5923-25)

As Chaucer's pilgrims reproduced his narrative phrases, so does Gower's Confessor when relating his exemplary tales to Amans: e.g., "if thou wolt hierie" (2: 288), "as thou schalt hierie" (3: 277), and "as thou hast herd devise" (4: 3689). He often introduces or carries a tale with an "as I read": e.g., in telling of Ariadne, "And after this, so as I rede, / Fedra, the which hir Soster is ..." (5: 5480-81). He also falls into the same mistake as Chaucer's Second Nun, conflating writtenness and hearing when he reminds Amans that he has "heard" a story "above"—e.g.,

"That riht as it with tho men stod
Of infortune of worldes good,
As thou hast herd me telle above,
Riht so fulofte it stant be love."
(5: 2445-48; see also 4: 3274-75, 3642-44; 5: 2643-44)

It seems odd to speak of someone listening to an oral narration as "hearing it above," and it certainly would be odd to speak of someone reading a written narrative privately as doing so; but the description makes a kind of sense for someone hearing someone else read a narrative aloud from a written text.

Despite the Latinity and superliterate *ordinatio* (see Chapter 2) with which he surrounds his poem for England's sake, Gower seems to share with Chaucer the basic sense that writers transmit their rewritten sources to the ears of their audience. He refers many times and unambiguously to the hearing of his own and other texts. In moving beyond the standard phrases to such idiosyncratic ones as his address to "the worldes eere," he signifies that such invocations are not merely conventional but part of an ongoing reality.

William Langland

Chaucer's two greatest contemporaries are sparser sources for references to reading behavior. Langland in particular is far less forthcoming than Chaucer or Gower. One of his key themes, of course, is the religious man's conflict between reading, doing, and being; another is the literary man's conflict between creating and worshipping. His periodic gripping concern with the nature and role of minstrels seems to reflect these personal conflicts. Although his is clearly not the sort of text that a standard minstrel would perform in a standard hall, in using the imagery of minstrelsy Langland bypasses the issue of concern here, which focuses not on memorial performance but on public or private reading.⁴

⁴Despite the efforts of various scholars to derive one coherent Langlandian position on minstrels (see, e.g., Donaldson 1966: 136-55; Schmidt 1987: 5-14), I think that Langland's attitude toward minstrelsy, as a surrogate image of his own poetic activity, waffles with the context and with his guilty or other feelings about his writing. Sometimes the minstrel is portrayed as worldly and

Here the author seems to say he has heard stories of Arthur in general, and specifically has heard this story about Gawain "in toun" (meaning, according to Tolkien and Gordon, "among men, in company" [p. 72]), "with tonge." Further, he seems to say that he expects his audience to hear his version of it now, since he asks them to "lysten this laye bot on littel quile." Finally, he links the tradition's durability to the alliterative form it is presented in.

Since *Gawain and the Green Knight* is one of the great poems of the Middle Ages, there has been some tendency to depreciate these apparent declarations of aurality, drawing on the standard strategies and confusions discussed in Chapter 1. Larry D. Benson (1965), for example, gets lost within very hazily conceived ideas of "oral" and "written," persistently passing lines 31-32 off as a writing author's "debt" or even "compliment" to an older (therefore, presumably, superseded) oral tradition. He glimmeringly acknowledges a possible middle ground, noting that the poet's "insistence on oral transmission--'with tonge'--seems to reflect at least a transitional stage of the sort A.C. Baugh discovered in the metrical romances, the stage of literary composition and oral transmission." But he immediately temporizes: "That tradition must have been very weak by the Gawain-poet's time" (1965: 119-20). Benson is tripped up, for one thing, by his difficulty in relating oral performance to anything but minstrel delivery, as reflected in his final pronouncement: "for though there is no doubt that an oral tradition existed, it is equally obvious that there was a sudden literary revival and that the poets who participated in it had more sophisticated goals than merely reducing to paper what once existed in song" (p. 121).

Polarization, conflation, and evolutionism combine in Benson to efface recognition of the "transitional stage" of aural reading in favor of a maximally literate, writing, sophisticated poet. In the context of widespread contemporary acceptance of the hearing of books, and in the context of this entire thesis, however, we may find it easy enough to envisage a literate

Wyl ye tary a lyttel tyne and tent me a whyle,
I schal wysse yow therwyth as Holy Wryt telles. (*Patience*, ll. 59-60)

And ye wyl a whyle be styлле,
I schal telle yow how thay wrought. (*Gawain*, ll. 1996-97)

Chandos Herald

The same sense of immediacy comes through in the late fourteenth-century Anglo-Norman biography of the Black Prince, Chandos Herald's *La Vie du Prince Noir*. The author, an Hainaulter who served as herald to Sir John Chandos and later became English king of arms, was obviously well acquainted with English court culture. His account of Richard II's father attributes aurality to himself and his audience. One of his standard source references is "Si come je oy en mon recort" (l. 508) ("Thus as I have heard in my record")⁶ (see also ll. 1400, 1930, 3852, 4004). In a typical phrase, he tells his audience he will begin his tale

Ensi come vous oier purrez
Mais qe de bon coer l'escoutez. (ll. 53-54)

(Thus as you will be able to hear
If you but listen with a good heart.)

Thomas Usk

Perhaps the least notable, as well as the least likable, writer among those consulted for this period is Thomas Usk, who wrote his *Testament of Love*

⁶Greimas (1987: 541) defines "recort" as "1. Souvenir, mémoire. 2. Récit, rapport, témoignage. 3. Enquête" ("1. Recall, memory. 2. Account, report, witness. 3. Research"). It's hard to know which is the best translation for Chandos Herald's "recort," although the idea of hearing one's memory seems odd. In other places the author speaks of "hearing said" ("si come j'ay oi dire"; l. 2467) or "hearing related" ("Ensi come j'ay oi retraire"; l. 2798). Probably the best sense of "recort" would be "research," including the information gained by asking people directly and by reading relevant documents.

(1387) in a vain attempt to win pardon from the Merciless Parliament after being convicted of treason. Heavily indebted to, or borrowed from, Chaucer's translation of Boethius, the prose treatise is nothing if not serious, weighty, and ambitious. Still, Usk speaks freely of his audience as hearing his book. The principle advanced in Chapter 3--that authors would never describe kings and dukes as listening if that were considered a low-caste reception format--can only apply more strongly here, when Usk was literally writing for his life. He would hardly offer his work for the "profit of the reders, [and] amendement of maners of the herers" (p. 106) if such a phrase might offend the merciless M.P.'s with an implication of illiteracy or backwardness.

Surprisingly, Usk provides some of the most thoughtful and revealing descriptions of the reading/listening process. In his opening apologia, he contrasts cleverly "colored" *gestes* and rhymes with his own supposedly unadorned but more substantial prose treatise. In vividly pictorial terms that transcend the merely conventional, he makes it clear that both forms of writing would normally be heard:

Many men there ben that, with eeres openly sprad, so moche swallowen the deliciousnesse of jestes and of ryme, by queynt knitting coloures, that of the goodnesse or of the badnesse of the sentence take they litel hede or els non.

Soothly, dul wit and a thoughtful soule so sore have myned and graffed in my spirites, that suche craft of endyting wol not ben of myn acqueyntaunce. And, for rude wordes and boystous percen the herte of the herer to the in[ne]rest point, and planten there the sentence of thinges, so that with litel helpe it is able to springe; this book, that nothing hath of the greet flode of wit ne of semelich colours, is dolven with rude wordes and boystous, and so drawe togider, to maken the cacchers therof ben the more redy to hente sentence. (p. 1)

At a later point, Love instructs Usk that "bookes written neyther dreden ne shamen, ne stryve conne; but only shewen the entente of the wryter, and yeve remembraunce to the herer" (p. 14). In such a context, the occasional

reference to readers alone--as in "But now, thou reder, who is thilke that wil not in scorne laughe, to here a dwarfe, or els halfe a man, say he wil rende out the swerde of Hercules handes ..." (p. 3)--must probably be classified as "format-neutral." One wonders if his usage casts some light on the famous "Thow, redere" in *Troilus and Criseyde* (5: 270).

Usk goes beyond Chaucer in offering the beginnings of a phenomenology of aural reading. The "eeres openly sprad" that take in the *gestes* and rhymes but miss the *sentence* if any are contrasted to the hearer's heart pierced and implanted with the *sentence* of rude words, which in another striking image is to be "hente" by word-"cacchers." Further into his text, Usk asks for the prayers of "every inseer and herer of this leude fantasye" (p. 145). This word "inseeing" seems a very apt term for the process of absorbing the deep meaning of a work; it also seems, if not to be synonymous with hearing, at least not to be antagonistic to it. The sort of deeply internalized engagement with texts that is sometimes thought to rely on private reading seems here to be attributed to aural reception. Aurality also co-exists, in Usk as in Gower, with invocations of "scholastic literary theory"--specifically, an explication of the *titulus libri* and of final causality (Minnis 1988: 163-64).

This survey of Chaucer's contemporaries has focused almost exclusively on public reading--not because I wasn't looking for private reading but because (apart from professional reading by authors and by Gower's Socrates, Diogenes, and Nectanebus) I didn't find any. Any simple "read's" that occur in such a context have probably to be considered at least format-neutral. A less brilliant, and accordingly less argued-over, author, Gower organizes his narratives with the same hearing phrases that Chaucer does, assumes books are heard as often as Chaucer does, and evokes or depicts public recreational reading as regularly as Chaucer does. Few scholars have remarked on this parallelism; if they had, would they argue that Gower too was trying to

promote a fictive orality, or carrying over minstrel phrases? How would such an argument take in Usk's far from conventional aural phraseology, and Youth's reading habits? And is it far-fetched to think Chandos Herald really expected his audience to be hearing him, when the squires of Edward IV's (and, retroactively, Edward III's) court would be described, c. 1471, as "talking of" just his kind of knightly chronicle? The evidence from Chaucer's more obscure contemporaries, writing in a variety of languages and genres, thus seems to support the hypothesis that his references to public reading simply recorded a current reality.

AUTHORS IN THE FIFTY YEARS AFTER CHAUCER'S DEATH (1400-1450)

- "Sir John Mandeville": *Mandeville's Travels* (Bodley version), bet.
1390-1425
- Mum and the Sothsegger*, 1400-6
- The Tale of Beryn*, bet. 1400-50
- John Lydgate: "Complaint of the Black Knight," c. 1402 (Skeat 1897
no. 8)
- The Siege of Thebes*, c. 1420
- The Fall of Princes* 1431-38
- Thomas Hoccleve: *The Regement of Princes*, 1411
- The Series*, 1421-22
- "The Crowned King," 1415 (Robbins 1959 no. 95)
- John Shirley: "Prologe of the Knyghtes Tale," BL Harley 7333, mid-
15th c.
- Secretum Aristotelis: The Secrete of Secretes, and Tre-
sore Incomperable* (as copyist), bet. 1447-56
- The Governace of Kynges and of Prynces Cleped The
Secrete of Secretes* (as translator), c. 1450.
- James I of Scotland: *The Kingis Quair*, c. 1435
- The Buik of Alexander*, 1438
- Osbern Bokenham: *Legendys of Hooly Wummen*, 1443-47
- Mappula Angliae*, c. 1445
- John Metham: *Amoryus and Cleopes*, 1448-49

The first half of the fifteenth century continued and intensified themes present in the time of Chaucer, in particular the importation into vernacular

literature of scholarly procedures and language. Some writers follow the Gowerian model by making an ostentatious display of their academicism, while others follow Chaucer in focusing on their process in recreating their specialized sources as new works of literature. Whether with authorial input or not, scholarly organization and apparatus (especially glosses) are added to manuscripts of vernacular literary works.

The audience in this period was evolving as well. The fifteenth century is noted as a period of

slow and steady self-education for the middle classes in the art of reading and literary appreciation. Under its own roof-trees and by its own firesides, as a study of contemporary wills reveals to us along with the surviving literature itself, a fresh part of the nation went silently to school. (Owst 1961: 8-9)

Rising literacy, as well as "the annexation by English of roles formerly filled by French" (Pearsall 1976: 83), created a demand for more books that was met by what Edwards and Pearsall (1989: 257) call "a spectacular transformation" in manuscript production.⁷ Humanism was also filtering into England through such early exponents as Humphrey, duke of Gloucester. It is not surprising, then, that for the first time the texts we will survey occasionally conceive of the audience (sometimes as a general entity, and sometimes as a particular patron) reading in a studious, scholarly, and possibly private fashion.

Yet despite such incipient realignments, and although both Owst and Pearsall automatically associate the audience's growing literacy with silence

⁷"Even the most cursory comparison of the seventy-five year periods on either side of 1400," they note, "reveals a spectacular transformation: in broad figures, one is speaking of the difference between a rate of production that leaves extant about thirty manuscripts [of the major English poetic texts] and one that leaves extant about six hundred" (Edwards and Pearsall 1989: 257). See Christianson 1989 for a detail-rich discussion of the expansion of the commercial book trade in London that seems to refute Doyle and Parkes' (1978) frequently cited conclusion that hardly any centralized book-production occurred.

and (private) reading, texts from the first half of the fifteenth century continue to manifest the aural-narrative constellation of phrases and references. Authors continue to address their "readers and/or hearers," while the occasional unconventional reference makes it clear that these usages are not mere formalisms. Even when academic vocabulary and procedures abound (as in *Mum and the Sothsegger*), the nature of these references and the invocations of hearing that accompany them remind us that scholarly-professional reading was as strongly aural as individual.

Reading Events

This period provides two cases each of dramatized literary-professional and recreational reading.

Professional Reading

Thomas Hoccleve's *Series* (1421-22) is an odd assortment of autobiography, stories, and *memento mori* comprised of "The Complaint of Hoccleve," "Dialogue with a Friend," "Tale of Jereslaus' Wife," "Lerne to Dye," and "Tale of Jonathas," with connecting links. As J.A. Burrow (1984) has persuasively hypothesized, the compilation represents Hoccleve's attempt to demonstrate his return to normality and competence following on the mental breakdown recalled in the opening "Complaint." One way Hoccleve seeks to prove his competence as a poet is to give us many scenes of himself and a friend reading and discussing his source-texts.

This friend enters the poem knocking and hallooing at Hoccleve's door, demanding to know what he was doing. For reply, Hoccleve says, "right anon I redd hym my 'complaynt'" ("Dialogue," l. 17). The two then decide that Hoccleve's next project should be a translation of a tale from the *Gesta Romanorum*. In the epilogue to this tale, the friend turns up again to read it--to himself, it seems, since "he it nam / In-to his hand and it al ouersy"

(epilogue to "Jereslaus' Wife," ll. 6-7). Missing the moralization, he goes home to fetch his copy of the *Gesta*, then "cam ther-with and it vn-to me redde" (l. 22). After a translation of the *Ars moriendi* ("Lerne to Dye"), the friend advises Hoccleve to translate a tale he had "redde" ("Jonathas," l. 5) and Hoccleve "red haue on rowe" (l. 33). He brings Hoccleve the book, and the poet duly translates it.

In his urgency to prove himself a functioning poet, Hoccleve takes up the mantle of the dazed hermit with an eagerness utterly lacking in Chaucerian subtlety but compelling in its single-mindedness. The overseeing friend, whether or not he ever existed, allows Hoccleve to air his rationales and self-defenses, and, in their interdigitating readings, "redings" (in the sense of advice-giving), and lendings of books, creates a strong impression of the professionalism of Hoccleve's activities. This professionalism presupposes private reading but also moves easily into public reading. Hoccleve reads the friend his "Complaint"; next time, the friend reads "Jereslaus' Wife" to himself. The friend reads the missing moralization to Hoccleve, but he leaves Hoccleve to read the tale of Jonathas to himself.

The *Kingis Quair* (c. 1435) of James I of Scotland provides a more traditional, less manic example of Chaucerian literary-professional reading. Unable to sleep, the king takes up a copy of Boethius and reads the night away (stanzas 2-7), until

The long nyght beholding, as I saide,
Myn eyen gan to smert for studyng,
My buke I schet and at my hede it laide
And doune I lay but ony taryng (stanza 8, ll. 1-4)

James diverges from Chaucer only in that his reading is the prelude not to a dream but to a decision to write another book, which relates a dream-vision he had in the past. In sending this "litill tretisse" out once written,

James gives clear evidence that he, also like Chaucer, expected it to be read aloud. He asks

the reder to haue pacience
Of thy defaute, and to supporten it,
Of his gudnesse thy brukilnesse to knytt,
And his tong for to reule and to stere
That thy defaultis helit may bene here. (stanza 194)

Here "reder" must mean reader-aloud.

Recreational Reading

The first example of recreational reading from this period is also the first case of recreational private reading. The passage comes from a work now labeled *Mum and the Sothsegger*, which incorporates two fragments: the first called *Richard the Redeless* (before 1400), addressed to Richard II shortly before his deposition; and the second being *Mum and the Sothsegger* proper (1403-6), which continues the argument for the benefit of Henry IV. In the prologue to the first fragment the author anxiously asserts his loyalty and good intentions. Young men may pick holes in his logic, he says, but if

elde opyn it [his book] other-while amonge,
And poure on it preuily and preue it well after,
And constrewe ich clause with the culorum [conclusion],
It shulde not apeire [injure] hem a peere a prynce though he were
(R prol.: 70-73)

In a poem full of the imagery of construing or poring over texts, this is the clearest invocation of private reading, complete with the word "preuily."

The passage clearly reflects the impact of the crossover of scholarly into recreational literacy. A comparison with the literary-professional reading of Hoccleve and James I will help substantiate Chapter 2's suggestion that the "Gowerian" model developed the idea of audiences reading studiously, and therefore at least potentially privately, much more decisively than did the "Chaucerian" model. Neither Hoccleve nor James suggests that their audi-

ence might imitate their specialist reading procedures. The author of *Mum*, on the other hand, while generously attaching scholarly attributes to himself, is equally keen, as the passage above demonstrates, to induce his audience to study his work seriously. That this reading still potentially retained the aural connotations native both to academic lecturing and to public-sphere discussion will be demonstrated below, in the section on *specula principis*.

The second piece of dramatized reading comes from a poem that could also be loosely categorized as a *speculum principis*. Called by Robbins "The Crowned King: On the Art of Governing" (1415), the poem contains useful if unsolicited advice for Henry V, communicated to the author in a dream-vision. What sent the poet into such admonitory slumbers, however, was an all-night celebration that included the public reading of romances. "And ye like to leer & listen awhile" (l. 13), he notes, he will tell how the dream came to him:

Ones y me ordeyned, as y haue ofte doon,
 With frendes and felawes, frendemen and other,
 And caught me in a company on corpus cristi even
 Six other vij myle oute of Suthampton,
 To take melodye and mirthes among my makes,
 With redyng of romaunces, and reuelyng among.

The dym of the derknesse drowe into the west,
 And began for to spryng in the grey day;
 Than lift y vp my lyddes & loked in the sky
 And knewe by the kende cours hit clered in the est.
 Blyve y busked me down and to bed went,
 For to comfort my kynde and cacche a slepe.

(ll. 17-28; Robbins 1959 no. 95)

Whether a night like this really was involved in the poem's composition, the author clearly considers it a likely enough way for not just one but many nights to be spent (as per line 17). His detailed description lays heavy emphasis on the spirit of friendship that animated the evening, not just in line 18--where the spirit might be sustained more by a shortage of alliter-

ating nouns than by true camaraderie—but again in lines 19 and 21-22, which speak of "a company," "melodye and mirthes among my makes," and "reuelyng."

This group obviously contained literate members, including the poet—not surprisingly, since to sustain such festive occasions they must have been fairly wealthy. If not from the ranks of the nobility that entertained themselves at court with similar fare, including (in James I's case) the "redyng of romaunces" (see Chapter 3), these men were surely from at least the upper middle classes, a hypothesis sustained by the poet's desire to address the king on serious issues of national governance. In invoking the sort of reception environment characteristic of the English public-sphere setting (see Chapter 2), the author may be implicitly directing his *speculum* into a similar context of intimate, discursive auralty. It is not surprising, if so, that the author restores the enjoyable activity of shared vernacular literature to a positive valuation—and to an apparently woman-less context—nor that he bypasses the associations with Sloth and temptation that Gower, Langland, and the *Parlement* author had built around such "rioting with renkes."⁸

⁸There is one further instance of romance-reading in this time period, included in the Northern romance *Eger and Grime* (c. 1450). As part of an elaborate deception the two title characters are planning, Eger sits in a window "Bookes of romans for to reede / That all the court might him heare" (ll. 628-29).

Unfortunately, it's not at all clear whether Eger's reading is to be interpreted as private vocalized reading or as a public reading to friends or attendants inside the room at whose window he had appeared—a determination further complicated by the role of this event in the upcoming switch of identities between Eger and Grime. My conclusion is that there are not enough data to reach a conclusion, other than that the poet doesn't care which format we ascribe to this reading. Since the depiction is irresolvably unclear, I have left it out of my main discussion.

Reading Channels

In the following analysis I will begin with some more or less simple examples of the "classic" aural-narrative constellation, then move on to a detailed look at one text.

Simpler Cases

Many texts from the first half of the fifteenth century exhibit the by-now familiar reliance on standard aural phrases. The anonymous author of the prologue to the *Tale of Beryn* (bet. 1400-50), which brings Chaucer's pilgrims to Canterbury, uses "as ye shall hear" (prol., ll. 122, 127, 303, 397) and "as ye have heard" (prol., ll. 2, 15, 435) phrases to advance his narration. One translator of "Sir John Mandeville" prays to God on behalf of "alle tho that this bok redith or herith it to be red" (bet. 1390-1425; ed. Seymour, p. 147). Similarly, a self-styled "Prologe of the Knyghtes tale" in the mid-fifteenth-century Harley 7333 manuscript shows that its scribe, John Shirley, still considered aurality a likely means of experiencing Chaucer. He addresses the text to "yee so noble and worthi pryncis and princesse other estatis or degrees what euer yee beo that haue disposicione or plesaunce to rede or here the stories of olde tymis passed" (f. 37).⁹ The placing of a "read and/or hear" in a "sweep" position--towards the end of a prologue or epilogue, to include all possible readers in all possible formats--is a pattern that will become increasingly familiar.

⁹After what the catalogue calls Harley 7333's "curious introductory address in prose" (3: 526) and the admonishment, "Lowe here firste begynnythe tho prologe of the kneytis tale," the reader is surprised to find: "Whanne that aperyll with his showers swote ..." The "General Prologue" then follows in full. Strohm (1971: 75) quotes the complete text of Shirley's prologue, with some differences in transcription (and interpretation).

A passage in Lydgate's "Complaint of the Black Knight" (c. 1402) freely mixes references to his own writing, his audience's hearing, and a scribe's writing to another author's oral dictation:

But I, alas! that am of witte but dulle,
 And have no knowing of such matere,
 For to discryve and wryten at the fulle
 The woful complaynt, which that ye shal here,
 But even-lyk as doth a skrivenere
 That can no more what that he shal wryte,
 But as his maister besyde doth endyte (ll. 190-96; Skeat 1897 no. 8)

In Scotland, the author of the *Buik of the Most Noble and Vailzeand Conquerour Alexander the Great* (1438) shows that some of the self-consciousness of the court writer is penetrating into the work of the aural romancers (at 11,138 lines, the *Buik of Alexander* is clearly not meant for memorization). He offers some of the standard topoi about writing as a cure for love-sickness (pt. 2, ll. 17-28) and about his inadequacy as a translator (ep., ll. 1-20). Nevertheless, his transmission-reception system is still heavily aural, at both ends. Like the *Gawain*-poet but more unequivocally, the author claims to have heard his source; he has, he says,

translait in inglis leid
 Ane romans quhilk that I hard reid (pt. 2, ll. 21-22)

He apparently even wrote by dictating his translation to himself; he notes that he

Bot said [the text] furth as me come to mouth,
 And as I said, richt sa I wrait (ep., ll. 14-15)

Finally, he juxtaposes a format-neutral "read" with a "hear" to describe his audience's reception:

Quhairfoir I pray baith young and ald
 That yarnis this romanis for to reid,
 For to amend quhair I mysyeid!
 Ye that haue hard this romanis heir
 May sumdeill by exampill leir
 To lufe vertew attour all thing ... (ep., ll. 18-23)

An example of an ostentatiously scholarly author is Osbern Bokenham, who begins his *Legendys of Hooly Wummen* (1443-47) with a standard Aristotelian prologue, giving the four causes for the production of his book (ll. 1-28; see Minnis 1988: 164-65). Nonetheless, Bokenham consistently anticipates a listening audience for his saints' lives. He gives the full complement of "as ye shall hear" (ll. 82, 132, 1225, 5309, 9987); "as ye have heard" (l. 9946); "whoso list to hear" (ll. 31, 3140-41, 3465); and "read or hear" (l. 6347). The prologue to Mary Magdalene's "Life" envisages an audience convened to hear the tale read aloud:

Afyr hyr conuersyoun eek in goostly grace
 How stroung she wex & how myhty,
 Who lyst know, he not hens pace
 Tyl completly rede be this story (LHW: 5343-46; see also 9505-7)

Even in his more intellectual *Mappula Angliae* (c. 1445), a prose geography of England translated from Ralph Higden's *Polychronicon*, Bokenham speaks confidently to his audience's ear. In his "short epilogue excusatorie of the translators rudnesse," he addresses three apologiae to, in turn, "yche man that schalle be redere or herere ther-of," "my reder of or the herere," and "the redere or the herer of this seyde treetys" (ed. Horstmann, p. 34).

These sample texts have shown that references to aural, or bimodal, reception carried on, within the familiar framework of the aural-narrative constellation, in a variety of genres throughout the fifty years after Chaucer's death. Within this context, it is possible to question Derek Pearsall's interpretation of a passage from John Metham's *Amoryus and Cleopes* (1448-49). In his epilogue, Metham claims that he

off rymyng toke the besynes
 To comfforte them that schuld falle in heuynes,
 For tyme on-ocupyid, qwan folk haue lytyl to do,
 On haly-dayis to rede, me thynk yt best so. (ll. 2208-11)

Pearsall cites this passage because, he feels, it "indicates clearly a new role for verse-romance," i.e., private reading (1976: 69). It is true that the

epilogue mentions only reading (ll. 2137, 2138, 2157, 2205, 2211). On the other hand, in another metatextual statement Metham beseeches Fame to favor him "qwere this boke in chambyr or halle / Be herd or red" (ll. 242-43), and also deploys two "as ye shall hear's" (ll. 1645, 1861) in the text proper.

Metham's compartmentalization of reception verbs—"hear's" in the text, mostly "read's" with perhaps one "read and/or hear" in the metatext—is a pattern that we will note more fully below, in Lydgate's *Fall of Princes*. It may suggest the dawning victory of private reading (and of the privatization of "read"), but proclamations such as Pearsall's seem premature. For one thing, Metham's emphasis on group inactivity in the "haly-dayis" passage—"to comfforte them," "qwan folk haue lytyl to do"—may suggest that the remedy would be a group activity—reading aloud. Moreover, aural references and format-neutral "read's" continue to be plentiful well beyond this period.

Redactions of the *Secretum secretorum* produced around the same time as Metham's *Amoryus* certainly have no problem in ascribing aurality to their upper-class audiences. John Shirley, in a version that he claims to have translated, explains that "Daun Aristotles" wrote the *Secretum* "at the request of Alexandre the Grete, for naturall disciplyne of hem that list to here and rede" (*The Governace of Kynges and of Prynces* [c. 1450], ed. Manzalaoui, pp. 267, 269). In copying out another version, which he calls the *Decretum Aristotelis* (bet. 1447-56), Shirley associates prelection with highly exclusive and elite audiences. His book, he warns,

is nought to shewe to comvne, ne to rede to every man opunly, but secretly to kepe it and to rede it to-fore thestatly princes of the worlde. (ed. Manzalaoui, p. 203)

Lydgate's "Siege of Thebes"

As a more detailed illustration of the aural-narrative constellation ticking along as usual post-Chaucer, we can look at the *Siege of Thebes* (c. 1420). Lydgate gives this story as the one he supposedly tells Chaucer's pilgrims, after chancing to fall in with them as they set out to return to London. In the *Siege* we see Lydgate writing to his own sense of how literature functions, since, as the editors of this text note, "the *Siege of Thebes* was not, like the *Troy Book* and the *Fall of Princes*, made to order, for the pleasure of some noble patron" (ed. Erdmann and Ekwall: 9).

Along the lines laid out in Chapter 2, we can note in Lydgate's non-bespoke text some ten references to written sources, e.g., "As Stace of Thebes writ the manere howe" (l. 1272).¹⁰ He mentions himself as reading in his source eleven times, in many variations of the basic "as I read" phrase, e.g., "And as I rede, Spynx this monstre hight" (l. 624). As narrator of his story to the pilgrims, Lydgate urges them eight times to read his or other sources. Like Chaucer, he uses these references to bolster his authority ("But the truth yif ye lyst verryfie, / Rede of goddes the Genologye," ll. 3537-38); to get out of telling a bit of the story ("But ye may reden in a Tragedye / Of Moral Senyk fully his [Oedipus'] endynge," l. 994); and in general to dazzle his fictional or real audience with his erudition.

¹⁰To consolidate all the bulkier line-references in one footnote, these are the citations pertinent to the forthcoming discussion:

o References to written sources: ll. 199, 1272, 1505, 1679, 2599, 3839, 3848, 3971-72, 4235, 4501

o Lydgate reading in his sources: ll. 335, 452, 624, 1151, 1303, 2597, 2767, 3034, 3522, 3563, 4417

o Urging audience to read sources: ll. 200, 994, 1015, 1753, 3157, 3193-3203, 3538, 4679

o In-frame narrator using "hear" phrases: ll. 658, 1103, 1407, 1900, 2447, 2535, 2552, 2736, 3314, 3519, 3929

There are no format-specific references to the audience reading privately, but Lydgate mentions a hearing audience twice. The first time is in the last two lines of the Prologue, and therefore directed to his real future audience:

And as I coude with a pale cheere,
My tale I gan anon as ye shal here. (ll. 175-76)

Here he uses a tag--"as ye shall hear"--that Chaucer also used many times in the links of the *Canterbury Tales* to introduce the next story. A second reference by Lydgate occurs, rather confusingly, within the frame of his fictional oral narration. Citing the earlier part of his own story, he tells the pilgrims:

And of his exile the soth he [Tideus] told also,
As ye han herde in the storye rad. (ll. 1406-7)

There are no references to the text existing in manuscript or to the audience handling it, perhaps because, as noted, the work was not written to a commission; thus it has only a short prologue that does not imagine an audience. Lydgate does, however, exhibit in full Chaucer's habit of using the standard aural phrases to carry his in-frame narration. Lydgate as in-frame narrator uses variants on "as ye shall hear" and "as ye have heard" some eleven times. Since he is supposed to be narrating orally, these phrases are clearly appropriate.

Less obviously appropriate are the cases in which in-frame oral narration uses phrases that properly belong to the author. Lydgate's mentions of his own writing occur, confusingly, when he is supposedly narrating his tale to the pilgrims. This fictive performance situation does not stop him from identifying himself as a writer:

I am wery mor therof [Oedipus marrying Jocasta] to write.
The hatful processe also to endyte
I pass ouer, fully of entent (ll. 823-25)

Nor how that they, wherto shuld I write,
Enbraced hym [Tideus] in her Armes white (ll. 2433-34)

I have already quoted the example in which Lydgate as in-frame oral narrator speaks of his audience as hearing his tale read (aloud).

As Chaucerian epigone both in the matter and manner of his narration, Lydgate in the *Siege of Thebes* seems well content to carry on a clearly aural frame of narration. He writes from written sources for a hearing audience, a situation so familiar to him that he carries it over even into his fictional self's supposedly oral narration.

Specula Principis

Three texts from this period deserve special consideration, because of the complex relationships they present between variously formulated authorial roles and audiences conceived of as reading in a pure or mixed scholarly fashion that further mixes private and public modes.

All three texts are, not coincidentally, *specula principis*. In this genre the author, through a series of more or less encapsulated exemplary narratives, seeks to teach his patron how to live and rule wisely. Both the immediate royal recipient and the possible further audience are expected, given the nature of the genre, to approach the text as students. Not incidentally, this casts the author in the role of wise counselor to princes--or as mediator of the "public voice" and creator, via the prelected text, of a "public sphere" in which the key issues it raises can be discussed (see Chapter 2).

Although the texts to be reviewed spread over some thirty years, they do not show anything that might be considered a development, in any literary-historical sense. Rather, their different "reading-maps" seem to reflect the authors' individual ideas about what they are doing, what their audience/patron is likely to do (or would be flattered to be depicted as likely to do), and how the particular text they are writing should be customized for that particular audience or patron. The only historically

resonant element comes with the last text, the *Fall of Princes*, with Lydgate's flattering evocation of Duke Humphrey's studious approach to books.

"Mum and the Sothsegger"

As noted above, *Mum and the Sothsegger* (1400-6) is comprised of two fragments written just before and soon after the fall of Richard II. Although the poem's editors claim that the author "shows no traces of exceptionally wide reading or of university training" (p. xxiv), he makes extensive use of the paraphernalia of academic reading. In seeking to understand society, he finds nothing useful in the works of Sidrac, Solomon, and Seneca,

But glymsyng on the glose, a general revle
Of al maniere mischief I merkid and radde:
That who-so were in wire and wold be y-easid
Moste shewe the sore there the salue were. (M: 314-17)

The successful glossator interprets this to mean he should "cunne of clergie to knowe the sothe," so he heads off to "Cambrigge, ... Oxenford and Orleance and many other places" (M: 319, 322-23). Although the seven liberal arts (personified) can do little to help him, he does not abandon his fondness for academic terms--e.g., "construe" (R prol.: 72; M: 240), "culorum" ("conclusion"; R prol.: 72), "disputeson" (M: 242), "texte" and "glose" (M: 388), and "the pro and the contra as clergie askith" (M: 300). At the end of the poem, the poet caps his use of scholarly metaphors by opening a bag full of books and writes, each of which lists some form of wrong in the land, and each of which he then reads out.

As he is busily marking and reading his way through the text of society, the author readily applies the same imagery when suggesting how his audience should read his text. He comments that young men might benefit if they were to "mvse" on his book (R prol.: 67), while "elde" (old age), as quoted above, might wish to "opyn" his text

And poure on it preuyly and preue it well after,
And constrewe ich clause with the culorum. (R prol.: 71-72)

He recalls Thomas Usk's ideas of "in-seeing" in exhorting his audience:

And wayte well my wordis and wrappe hem to-gedir,
And constrwe [clerlie] the clause in thin herte
Of maters that I thenke to meve for the best (R 1: 82-84)

Whether "wayte" has the force of "hear" in these lines or not, and despite the prevalent academic metaphors, the text abounds as well in references to hearing audiences. The author requests them once to "listen ane hande-while" (M: 106) and another time to "herken" for the same odd measure of time (M: 167; see also M: 656, 865), and he intends to withhold distribution of his poem, he says, until "it be lore laweffull and lusty to here" (R prol.: 63). Later, he delivers a spirited rebuke to the imagined reader who has not understood his allegory about a partridge:

A! Hicke Heuyheed! hard is thi nolle
To cacche ony kunynge but cautell [deceit] bigynne!
Herdist thou not with eeris how that I er tellde
How the egle in the est entrid his owen ...? (R 3: 66-69)

As with Usk, these phrases are not standard tags; the poet's easy mingling of academic terminology with ears that do or do not attend to his doctrine reminds us that most of his academic terms are in fact based on public forms of scholarly reading: i.e., construing, in the form of lectures, and disputations. Such activities existed in a dialectic with the margin-marking of the glossator and the private construing of the student; they were not superseded by them.

Aurality, in fact, is not a relatively extrinsic issue to *Mum*: the question the poet and the poem asks so insistently is, precisely, should the wise man, the sooth-sayer, speak or keep *mum*? To speak is to bring the poet's--and the country's--concerns into the public sphere; to keep *mum* (perhaps, even, to read privately) is to keep these vital truths privatized, ensuring the sothsegger's personal safety but exposing the polity to manifold dangers.

As in all aspects of the *speculum principis*, publicity--publicness, including public reading--is the efficient agent: the public voice of the reader is the means by which the public sphere is constituted. Of course, *Mum* resolves its dilemma in the very act of recounting it: by writing the poem the poet has chosen publication, has put his constructions of society into the public record, and voice. The magisterial vocabulary he employs to frame his critique is part of the self-protective camouflage he adopts in this perilous publicity; he gains both authority and some degree of anonymity by posing as a lecturer conning over the text of society. Appropriately, his closing comprehensive indictment of that society is delivered in the form of the public reading of a series of writs.

Hoccleve's "Regement of Princes"

A more traditional form of *speculum principis*, based on the *Secretum secretorum* and two other *specula*, Hoccleve's *Regement of Princes* (1411) was written for Henry V when he was still Prince Henry. As in the *Series* Hoccleve is very conscious of his authorship. Given that he was a professional clerk of the Privy Seal, it is not surprising to find his plangent description of the physical toil involved in writing (in full, covering ll. 989-1022). Mind, eye, and hand must labor together, Hoccleve laments. The scribe cannot talk to his friends or sing, as laborers do; rather, "we labour in trauaillous stilnesse; / We stowpe and stare vp-on the schepes skyn" (ll. 1013-14). The result is a stomach

whom stowpyng out of dreede
Annoyeth soore; and to our bakkes, neede
Mot it be greuous; and the thrid, our yen
Vp-on the whyte mochel sorwe dryen. (ll. 1019-22)

Besides this unusually precise image of the physical effort involved in writing, Hoccleve combines references to his own writing with some rather individual-sounding receptive "read's." "I write as my symple conceyt may

peyse" (l. 4401), he tells Henry--whose "Innat sapience," he is sure, already "redde hath & seen" (l. 2130) Hoccleve's three sources. The advantage of the poet's redaction is that "In short ye may behold and rede / That [which] in hem thre is skatered ferre in brede" (ll. 2134-35).

One other factor might seem to mark this text as indisputably intended for private consultation, namely, the presence in the Harley manuscript (no. 4866, f. 88)¹¹ of the famous picture of Chaucer (Fig. 24), commissioned by Hoccleve to remind people of his recently deceased master (ll. 4992-98). Clearly, one cannot see this important picture unless one is holding the manuscript in one's hands.

On the other hand, Hoccleve is not destitute of references to hearers. He deploys an "as ye herd me seye" (l. 136), an "as ye schulle here" (l. 3395), and a "herkneþ wel nowþe" (l. 4585). Some passages even suggest that Hoccleve may have written for his own delivery before the prince. "Yf your plesaunce it be to here, / A kynges draught, reporte I shall now here" (ll. 2127-28), he offers, in the proem to the *Regement* proper. "I beseche your magnificence," he concludes, "Yeve vnto me benigne audience" (ll. 2148-49). One recent editor of Hoccleve notes specifically that his work would have been read aloud before his patron (Seymour 1981: xxv). Presumably, in such circumstances, the prelector would only have to pause when he came to the Chaucer portrait and offer the manuscript to the prince. Henry could then

¹¹The picture was also originally present in BL Arundel 38 (following f. 90), like Harley 4866 a presentation text whose creation was overseen by Hoccleve (Seymour 1981: 124). It was copied into a few subsequent manuscripts of the *Regement* (BL Royal 17 D.vi, f. 93v; BL Harley 4826, f. 139; Rosenbach 594, f. 68v). Both the Arundel and the Harley 4826 portraits have been cut out; at the bottom of the offended page in Harley 4826 an indignant bibliophile wrote:

Off worthy Chawcer
here the picture stood
That much did wryght
and all to doe us good

Sum ffuryous ffoole
Have Cutt the same in twayne
His deed doe shewe
He bare a barren Brayne

handle it, see the picture, read the lines beside it--and give the manuscript back.

Besides any such possible command performance, Hoccleve also seems to imply a future in which the *Regement* has become part of the prince's library, a book he may read or have read to him for didactic purposes (in an unspecified setting) or may choose to hear for simple pleasure in his chamber (cf. R.F. Green 1980: 38):

And although it be no maner of nede
 Yow to counseile what to done or leve,
 Yf that you liste of stories to take hede,
 Somwhat it may profite, by your leve:
 At hardest, when that ye ben in Chambre at eve,
 They ben goode to drive forth the nyght;
 They shall not harme, yf they be herd a-right. (ll. 2136-42)

While seeming to favor the sort of formal (and public) readings practiced by rulers such as Charles V and Philip the Good, Hoccleve is equally open to the entertainment rationale more characteristic of English reading-reports. Yet as suggested in Chapter 3, the informal and diffuse British prelections were in fact more conducive than the Franco-Burgundian to the general discussion constitutive of the public sphere.¹²

Lydgate's "Fall of Princes"

Finally, John Lydgate's *The Fall of Princes* (1431-38) offers an alternate construct, in which the patron's scholarly tendencies seem to outstrip the

¹²One seventeenth- or eighteenth-century reader, at least, thought that Hoccleve had succeeded so far in promoting his sociopolitical doctrine as to convert the dissolute Hal into a model king. On f. 83 of the BL Harley 4826 copy, he or she wrote in approbation of the *Regement*, "which happily, next unto the goodness of God, might give occasion to the strange mutation, which happened in the lyfe and manners of that Prince, from deboshed and vicious, to Heroical and virtuous. How so ever it wears, certaynely the work is well worthy to bee taken from obscurity; and placed before the eyes of kinges and princes."

author's. Written at the request of Humphrey, duke of Gloucester, it begins with a prologue invoking a scholarly, apparently private reader (with many "see" phrases), while the body of the text contains many references to aural reading. The epilogue, in the form of an envoy to Humphrey, reverts to the more "visual" world of the prologue. This is a pattern already encountered, in less rarefied form, in Metham's *Amoryus and Cleopes*.

Lydgate first draws a picture of the "old tyme" (1: 359) when

lordis hadde plesance for to see,
To studie a-mong, and to caste ther lookis
At good leiser vpon wise bookis. (1: 362-64)

After this, the clearest suggestion of private recreational reading, Lydgate eulogizes Duke Humphrey, who

hath gret ioie with clerkis to comune:
And no man is mor expert off language,
Stable in study alwey he doth contune ...
His corage neuer doth appalle
To studie in bookis off antiquite,
Therin he hath so gret felicite
Vertuously hymself to ocupie,
Off vicious slouthe to haue the maistrie. (1: 386-89, 395-99)

This stress on apparently private study goes with reception phrases such as "Off sundry pryncis to beholde & reede" (1: 103-5) and "as men may reede & see" (1: 285).

Once into his narration, however, Lydgate makes heavy use of the standard aural phrases common in his other works and in many other English poets; variations on "as ye shall hear" and "as ye have heard devise" occur dozens of times.¹³ One three-line passage manages to lay out the complete aural-narrative constellation, in which a written source (Boccaccio's *De*

¹³*Fall of Princes*, variants of "as ye shall hear": 1: 1210; 2: 763, 1379; 3: 4775; 4: 518, 3064, 3956; 5: 1803; 6: 987; 7: 77, 329; 8: 11, 1426. Variants of "as ye have heard devise": 1: 1741, 2081, 3468, 3656; 2: 7, 3134, 4323; 3: 1703, 2600, 3062, 3908; 4: 2134, 2144, 2498, 2879, 3562, 3570, 3862; 5: 1727; 6: 2749; 7: 132, 278; 8: 1878, 2151; 9: 1101.

casibus virorum illustrium) passes from a (re)writing author to a listening audience:

How it [the Roman triumph] was vsid, he [Boccaccio] maketh
 mencion,
 Ceriousli reherseth the manere,
 Which I shal write, yif ye list to heere.
 (4: 516-18; see also 4: 3064-65, 3862, 3955-57; 6: 987; 7: 74-77; 8:
 3029-31)

At another point Lydgate envisages a research project undertaken by listeners:

In the firste age from Adam to Noe,
 Prudent listres, which list in bookes reede,
 Fynde off Fortune no mutabilite ... (1: 1450-52)

In his epilogue, Lydgate reverts to a more "visual" sensibility, apostrophizing the duke, "Whan this translacioun ye haue rad and seyn" (9: 3369), and asking correction from those who will "rede" (9: 3378) or "beholde" (9: 3394) the book--although one line does note that the book's matter has been "Lamentable and doolful for to here" (9: 3502).

Conclusion: Reception-Verbs in a Shifting Semantic Field

The material analyzed here seems to support a conclusion that despite an association of learnedness and prestige that was investing "read" with some sense of private reading, aurality was still thriving. The fact of its persistence seems well supported by the many conventional and unconventional literary passages that invoke the hearing of books, as well as by the historical texts reviewed in Chapter 3.

The most significant new player in the system is the humanism represented here by Humphrey of Gloucester. The figure of the scholar-prince casts a new aura of glamour and fashion over the pedantries of "Gowerian" scholarly-professional reading, diverting reception-phrases from the habitual channels of the aural-narrative constellation. Whenever Lydgate addresses

Humphrey directly, he tends to configure the verbs available to him in a way that narrows the usually broad semantic field associated with "read" and "see." Instead of "experience a text," these words begin to mean "read more intensely, study," with some weighting towards "read privately." Yet when he commences the many small narrations that comprise the body of the text, Lydgate reverts to kind, to an expectation of aurality that reflects his own feelings about readers and narratives (as displayed in his unpatronized *Siege of Thebes*). He might even have anticipated that Humphrey would have the stories read aloud, as a prelude to, or even as a form of studious, intensive reading.

It may be that in this time a prefatory implication of scholarly intensity was becoming one way of flattering patrons and audience as the author eased them into the book he had prepared for them. This is much the likeliest explanation for Metham's procedure; it is improbable that his patrons Lord and Lady Stapleton were eagerly importing Italian reading styles to the wilds of Norfolk. In such cases, a reversion to "hear" phrases in the text would suggest everyone relaxing into their accustomed relationship to reading.

Overall, the authors of courtly literature, and even of the *specula principis*, continue to endorse the bimodality of their literate audiences' reading. The default expectation seems to be that the audience would hear the text, while private, or at least studious, reading would be in order if someone wanted to get the full didactic benefit out of the work. As well, they might read or just *look* at it privately if they wanted to enjoy the pictures.¹⁴

¹⁴Even looking doesn't have to be a solitary activity; then as now, two or three people could have sat together to turn over the pages of an illustrated book and admire and discuss the pictures. Readers may even have sat together to read a text. Francesca and Paolo, for example, were certainly sitting side by side with their book before them. Either one of them was reading it aloud or one was running a finger along the text as each read it silently to him or

AUTHORS IN THE AGE OF INCUNABULA (1450-1491)

The Court of Sapience, mid-15th c.

The Floure and the Leafe, 3d qtr 15th c.

Sir Gilbert Hay: *The Buke of the Governauce of Princis*, 1456

The Buik of King Alexander the Conqueror (mid-15th c.)

Knyghthode and Bataile, 1458-59

George Ashby: *The Active Policy of a Prince*, c. 1470

Robert Henryson: *The Moral Fables of Aesop*, last qtr 15th c.

Orpheus and Eurydice, last qtr 15th c.

The Testament of Cresseid, before 1492

Sir Thomas Malory: *Le Morte Darthur*, 1470

William Caxton: prologues and epilogues to publications, 1473-91

The Book of Curtesye, pub. 1477/78

The History of Reynard the Fox, trans. and pub. 1481

The Mirroure of the World, trans. and pub. 1481

The second half of the fifteenth century is a period of sparse evidence and much importance for the history of medieval modalities. Unlike Chaucer and Gower or Hoccleve and Lydgate in the previous periods, no author emerges from this one with a corpus of works reflecting a significant interest in reception-channels, although Malory's single work does raise interesting issues. However, we do have, in Caxton's prologues, epilogues, and translations, the comments of a man who must be judged the pre-eminent expert on the reading modalities of the English upper and upper-middle classes.

The texts written during this period corroborate Robert Yeager's comparison of the fifteenth century to a "crossroads nation" (1984: vii). Certain works manifest traits often associated with humanism and the English Renaissance; others seem more classically "medieval." During this time of cultural flux a privatized sense and to some extent practice of

herself--because they read simultaneously the crucial passage that led to their kiss and their perdition (*Inferno*, 5: 124-42).

"reading" seem to be taking hold, balanced by a persistent aurality. The texts show an increasing reliance on "read" and the "look" verbs, as humanism adds its influence to, or crosscuts the crossover influence of, traditional scholarly-professional reading. That pattern, however, is usually offset by at least one metatextual "read and/or hear" and, often, by a textual "hear" or two or by an invocation of the hearing of books. This seems a further development of the pattern that the previous section noted in Metham and in Lydgate's *Fall of Princes*, in which metatextual "read's" were countered by a strong presence of textual "hear's." In the latter half of the century the "read's" have colonized the text as well, but still without eradicating the "hear's." Some texts remain as "ear"-oriented as ever, and to the end of his career Caxton takes frequent note of potential hearers.

Although such uses of "hear" verbs, occurring out of synch with the putative linear evolution from "oral" to "literate," are often dismissed as archaisms (see, e.g., Pearsall's edition of *The Floure and the Leafe*, pp. 17, 49, 67), I see no reason to discount data with such pre-emptive interpretations. As will emerge in the discussion of Malory, for instance, the hearing of books may be invoked in a context explicitly identified as current, not archaic. The implication is that the slow ascendancy of a privatized sense of reading co-existed throughout the latter half of the fifteenth century with a persistent, un-stigmatized aurality. People who wanted to read books may have just gone ahead and read them, privately, more often than before. But another time they might just as well have chosen to read the books aloud with their household, for mutual entertainment and/or instruction. No text within this period attaches any negative connotations--either of illiteracy or unfashionability--to the hearing of literature.

Reading Events

Professional Reading

Several instances of both private and public scholarly-professional reading are provided in an anonymous text known as the *Court of Sapience*. Since it is dated to the mid-fifteenth century, this work could have fit into this section or the previous one. It seems to belong here, however, because it is an allegory mixing a young man's search for divine wisdom with his pursuit of the liberal arts--thus, arguably, tempering medieval spiritualism with humanist science.

The narrator visits the courts of various allegorized females, in several of which he witnesses the appropriate form of reading. At the court of Dame Intelligence (inner knowledge), for example, he saw a collection of church fathers and was ravished

to byhold how fresshe, lusty, and grene
Was theyr desyre to loke on bookes clene,
And hevenly thyng with eye mental to see (ll. 1719-21)

At Sapience's own court, "Theologie" read from a Bible to the four evangelists among others, while a variety of theologians "studyed upon" other books, apparently privately (ll. 1793-1806). In a parlor Dialectic "red," i.e., lectured, to "many clerk and scoler of yong age" (ll. 1842-45), while in another parlor Rhetoric delighted an audience of clerks with her "beauperlaunce" (ll. 1891-1904). This set of descriptions offers a cross-section of scholarly reading practices, from private study-reading through aural lecturing and oral/rhetorical virtuosity.

A much more famous instance of professional reading is Robert Henryson's perusal of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, described in the opening of his *Testament of Cresseid* (before 1492). Chilled by a vigil in his cold "oratur," the poet enters his "chalmer":

I mend the fyre and beikit me about,
 Than tuik ane drink, my spreitis to comfort,
 And armit me weill fra the cauld thairout.
 To cut the winter nicht and mak it schort
 I tuik ane quair--and left all vther sport--
 Writtin be worthie Chaucer glorious
 Of fair Creisseid and worthie Troylus. (ll. 36-42)

After summarizing Chaucer's plot, Henryson takes up "ane vther quair" (l. 61); it tells, he claims, the story of Cresseid's demise, and his retelling of that story forms the substance of the poem that follows.

Henryson's fireside reading seems paradigmatic, not of the New Literate Reader but of the classic Chaucerian literary-professional reader. He passes smoothly from an apparently casual scene of recreational reading into a retelling of his reading material that defines it as a source-text and himself as a poet. Henryson thus retrospectively places his reading behavior within the special category of literary-professional reading--an impression strengthened by his coy doubt "gif this narratioun / Be authoreist, or fenyeit of the new / Be sum poeit" (ll. 65-67). Finally, Henryson exophorically effaces his contribution by retro-fitting his narrative into the tradition, as a retelling of a non-existent continuation to Chaucer's *Troilus*.

Recreational Reading

The only example of recreational reading from this period is a fascinating, you-are-there glimpse of patronage in action. The anonymous author of *Knyghthode and Bataile* (1458-59), a translation of Flavius Vegetius' *De re militari*, tells in the proemium how he accosted Viscount Beaumont, chamberlain to Henry VI, during a "love-day" celebration in 1458:

What seith my lord Beaumont? "Preste, vnto me
 Welcom." (here is tassay, entre to gete).
 "Of knyghthode & Bataile, my lord, as trete
 The bookys olde, a werk is made now late,
 And if it please you, it may be gete."

"What werk is it?" "Vegetius translate
 Into Balade." "O preste, I pray the, late
 Me se that werk." "Therto wil I you wise.
 Lo, heer it is!" Anon he gan therate
 To rede, thus: "Sumtyme it was the gise"— [= the first words of
 the text]
 And red therof a part. "For my seruyse
 Heer wil I rede (he seith) as o psaultier."
 "It pleaseth you right wel; wil your aduyse
 Suppose that the kyng heryn pleasier
 May haue?" "I wil considir the matier;
 I fynde it is right good and pertynente
 Vnto the kyng; his Celsitude is hier;
 I halde it wel doon, hym therwith presente." (ll. 47-64)

It is not a hundred-percent clear that Beaumont was reading aloud, but this seems to suit the action best; one can see this scene, with crowds around and the affable viscount sounding out the text to his entourage, as the eager author awaits his verdict.

This episode of "pragmatic-recreational" reading, in which the royal chamberlain's discourse with the priest flows easily into and out of a prelection of the self-quoting text, seems paradigmatic of the ever-imminent vocality of such works.

Reading Channels

As noted above, the data-pool from the later fifteenth century is sparse, consisting to a significant degree of single, often anonymous, and sometimes incomplete texts. Even when we have a known author and enough texts to make a corpus, the texts invoke reception format less frequently than in earlier periods. Nonetheless, even this inattention forms a pattern of sorts. In this section I will group together all the more minor witnesses in an attempt to tease out their patterns, after which I will look in greater detail at the two most forthcoming sources on reception, Malory and Caxton.

Shorter Examples

Sir Gilbert Hay's *speculum principis*, the *Buke of the Governauce of Princis* (1456), shows auralness still in full flower. A translation of the *Secretum secretorum*, it was written for his patron William Earl of Orkney and Caithness, Lord Sinclair, the chancellor of Scotland. Like John Shirley, Hay emphasizes both the exclusively upper-class and the aural nature of his version of the *Secretum*. Hay introduces one section, for example, with a rubric explaining:

Here declaris the noble philosophour how it efferis wele to kingis
and princis to have and ger rede before thame oft tymes alde
ancienne noble stories. (ed. Stevenson 2: 103)

Hay's text goes on to recommend that the ruler "ger rede in thy presence bath cronykis and histories" (ed. Stevenson 2: 103-4).

The scribe who wrote out another of Hay's translations, *The Buik of King Alexander the Conqueror*, declares in his own epilogue to the manuscript (1493):

Thair is na man without sum falt may wreit.
Ye worthe readeris, richt harlie [*sic*] I yow pray,
Quhen ye it reid, ye help it thar ye may,
Sillabis or wordis heir suppois that I
Throw negligence I haue lattin pas by;
I pray yow, readeris--I can not say no mair--
Quhen ye it reid, ye keip it clein and fair,
Nor bland it not, as blekerris dois of buikeis,
Quhilk to thair honestie full litell or no that luikeis.

(ed. Cartwright, ll. 19,345-53)

The "reader" in this "read"-heavy passage seems to be a prelector, who is asked both to fill in missing syllables and words and not to dirty the book when handling it.

The author of the *Court of Sapience* (mid-15th c.), while favoring "look" and "see" when referring his audience to sources (e.g., "Gay thinges y-made eke yf the lust to see / Goo loke the *Code* also, the *Dygestes thre*"; ll. 1922-

23),¹⁵ relates in his prohemium that he dreamt he met Wisdom in a meadow and "spak with her, as ye may here and rede" (l. 13). The dreamer-poet in *The Floure and the Leafe* (3d qtr 15th c.) seems equally committed to a "read"-biased bimodality. After her dream she "put all that I had seen in writing, / Under support of them that lust it to rede" (ll. 589-90), and she worries "who shall behold" her book's "rude langage" (ll. 594-95). Yet the text of this elegant dream-vision also includes two standard aural phrases—a "who-so list heare" (l. 204) and an "as ye have herd" (l. 228)—along with a possibly format-neutral "As ye may in your old bookes rede" (l. 509).

George Ashby *speculum principis*, *Active Policy of a Prince* (c. 1470), written for Henry VI's son, Edward, Prince of Wales, is "humanistic" in that it tends away from narrative and more towards practical advice. This includes advising Edward to "rede in cronicles the ruine / Of high estates and translacion" (ll. 155-56) and to

take hede,
Redyng the bible & holy scripture
And there ye may see to what ende dothe lede
Vertuous dedys & condutes seure (ll. 127-30)

He anticipates great benefit if Edward will educate his children:

Do them to be lettred right famously
Wherby thei shall reule bi Reason and skele,
For leude men litle discrecion fele.
Who that is lettred sufficiantly,
Rulethe meche withoute swerde obeiceantly. (ll. 648-52)

Yet literacy per se is not the key to such wise rule, for it can come as well from hearing:

Who that herith many Cronicles olde,
And redithe other blessid Scripture,
Shall excede al other bi manyfolde
Resons, and his discrecions ful sure ... (ll. 204-7)

¹⁵See also ll. 101, 1092, 1096-97, 1190, 1260, 1781, 1784-85, 1918.

The most distinguished author to be examined in this section is Robert Henryson. Although Henryson offers a very detailed depiction of private literary-professional reading in the prologue to the *Testament of Cresseid* (before 1492; see above), his personal reading-map is otherwise rather blank. His writings refer a few times to reading, along lines familiar from the aural-narrative constellation: his reading as author ("Of Ixione, that in the quhele was spred, / I sall the tell sum part, as I haue red"; *Orpheus and Eurydice* [last qtr 15th c.], ll. 489-90); the reading of other professionals ("With quhome the Feynd falt findes, as clerkis reids"; *Moral Fables of Aesop* [last qtr 15th c.], l. 2435; see also *Orpheus*, l. 477); and source-reading recommended to his audience ("And Solomon sayis, gif that thow will reid"; *Fables*, l. 391). The most interesting use of the word comes after an ostentatiously learned explication of the duality of fable (*Fables*, ll. 2588-94); its "similitude of figuris," he concludes, "Geuis doctrine to the redaris of it ay" (ll. 2593-94). This context of learnedness may imply a more private "read." In his frequent display of learned vocabulary, and in his favorite stance as explicator of hidden textual meanings, Henryson seems to align himself with the scholastic tradition and the prestige to be derived therefrom (cf. Fox 1981: xxiv-xxv).

With an equal sparseness, however, Henryson also invokes the standard auralities. Apart from the rhetorical flourish in the prologue to the *Fables*, which notes that their "polite termes of sweit rhetore / Richt plesand ar vnto the eir of man" (prol.: 4-5), the cock is mentioned with an "Of quhome the fabill ye sall heir anone" (prol.: 63). The arbiters between the sheep and the dog, "Off quhome the namis efter ye sall heir" (l. 1208), and Orpheus' journey "nethirmare he went, as ye here sall" (*Orpheus*, l. 260), are the other two uses of that phrase. The *Orpheus and Eurydice* opens, moreover, by noting that praise of a lord's ancestors will encline his heart "The more to vertu and to worthynes, / Herand rehearse his eldirs gentilnes" (ll. 6-7). For all the cleverly versified aureation and scholarly terminology, therefore,

Henryson in his few glances at modality does not seem inclined to exit from the aural-narrative matrix of professional private reading and reception via hearing or format-neutral reading.

Finally, I will draw again on *Knyghthode and Bataile* (1458-59) to illustrate the aural-narrative constellation's persistence, now somewhat dividualy biased, into this period. The author refers to his written sources (e.g., "Cotidian be mad this exercise, / On fote & hors, as writeth olde wise"; ll. 444-45) and to his own writing ("Do me to write of knyghthode and bataile"; l. 94).

The bulk of the reception-references are to "reading" and "seeing" (ll. 90, 309, 312, 624, 626, 641, 3007, 3011, 3023). "Rede vp thistories of auctoritee," he advises, for example:

And how thei faught, in theym it is to se,
Or better thus: Celsus Cornelius
Be red, or Caton, or Vegetius. (ll. 309-12)

So many "read's" begin to seem less likely to be format-neutral. Yet along with the public reading with which the poem begins (see "Reading Events," above), the text claims

that daily wil thei ["chialeres"] lere,
And of antiquitee the bokys here,
And that thei here, putte it in deuoyre (ll. 1693-97)

A listening audience is also invoked via direct address, e.g., "That archery is grete vtillitee, / It nedeth not to telle eny that here is" (ll. 446-47). Finally, in his envoy the author prays:

Go, litil book, and humbilly beseche
The werriourys, and hem that wil the rede,
That where a fault is or impropir speche,
Thei vouchesafe amende my mysdede.
Thi writer eek, pray him to taken hede
Of thi cadence and kepe Ortographie,
That neither he take of ner multiplie. (ll. 3022-28)

The reader here would seem to be a prelector assigned to read to the warriors; the author implores him to correct as he reads, just as, acknowledging the work's textuality (and, of course, echoing Chaucer), he hopes future scribes will abstain from mismetering his verse.

All elements of the aural-narrative constellation thus seem to be operating normally in *Knyghthode and Bataile*, with the one difference, characteristic of the later fifteenth century, that the "read's" are beginning to outnumber, without extinguishing, the "hear's."

Sir Thomas Malory

The "prosification" of the medieval romance is often cited as evidence of the victory of private reading. "The spread of the custom of reading to oneself had already favoured the practice of retelling inherited romances in prose versions, beginning in French as early as the thirteenth century," notes Schlauch (1963: 5). Similarly, Huizinga comments, "The growing predilection for prose means that reading was superseding recitation" (1924: 272; see also Pearsall 1976: 71-72). This argument is based on the familiar polarization of conflated modalities. Verse romances are identified with oral (really, memorial or minstrel) performance, but since prose—especially prose of any length—was much harder to memorize, it could only have been intended for private reading.

Since Sir Thomas Malory's prose romance, *Le Morte Darthur* (1470), is 1260 pages long in Vinaver's edition, it must by this argument have been written for a privately reading audience. Malory, however, gives quite a lot of evidence that he is writing for a publicly reading audience, for reading aloud. His standard back-reference is the familiar "as ye have heard before," e.g., "So sir Trystram tolde La Beall Isode of all this adventure as ye have

harde toforne" (p. 692).¹⁶ He effuses that as a youth Tristram "laboured in huntynge and in hawkyng--never jantylman more that ever we herde rede of" (p. 375). In the famous bibliography-dirge with which he closes out Arthur's worldly life, he declares:

Thus of Arthur I fynde no more wrytten in bokis that bene auctor-
ysed, nothir more of the verry sertaynté of hys dethe harde I never
rede, but thus was he lad away in a shyp wherein were three quenys
... (p. 1242)

Mark Lambert has pointed out that references to historical remains, including textual sources, escalate abruptly in the *Morte's* last two books. The effect is to create a cumulative sense of Arthur and his age slipping into the past, further and further away from the reader's present (Lambert 1975: 125-38). That effect reaches a climax in the description of Arthur's passing. Here if anywhere--if private reading were indeed a key index of the post-Arthurian, post-oral, endophoric new order--Malory might have signaled a transition into this new means of transmitting and interpreting source-tradition. Instead, he seamlessly connects aurality with his latter-day research efforts and with the authenticating textuality of books.

Malory's depictions of reading are also instructive. His upper-class protagonists, male and female, all seem to be literate: they read a fair number of letters, not to mention the occasional magic sword. In one episode in the "Tristram" (pp. 615-18), for example, loyalties are asserted and slanders promulgated in a set of letters that circulate energetically among Lancelot, Isode, Tristram, Mark, Guenevere, and Arthur. The private reading of these letters is emphasized by the repetition of the ominous word "privy." Arthur and Guenevere, for example, "opened the lettirs prevayly" that each had received from Mark; the enraged Guenevere sent

¹⁶See also pp. 298, 318, 624, 637, 722, 776, 975, 1011, 1078, 1088, 1169, 1241; as often, the phrase does similar duty with in-frame narratives, e.g., Lancelot telling a hermit: "Holy fadir, ... I mervayle of the voyce that seyde to me mervayles wordes, as ye have herde toforehonde" (p. 897).

hers on, "prevayly," to Lancelot (p. 617).¹⁷ The privacy in which these letters are read signals a privatization of experience, but for Malory this is an entirely threatening development, symptomatic of the oncoming factionalization of the court and of the dangers of over-privatized behavior--i.e., the parallel adulteries of Cornwall and Camelot. Significantly, this particular episode is resolved when Lancelot's friend Dinadan punishes Mark's privy scandal-mongering by composing a scurrilous lay and commissioning minstrels to perform it throughout Wales and Cornwall (p. 618). Thus public sanctions contain private mischief--for the time being.

By contrast, when Arthur took Elaine of Astolat's last letter to his chamber, "he called many knyghtes aboute hym and seyde that he wolde wete opynly what was wryten within that lettir. Than the kynge brake hit and made a clerke to rede hit" (p. 1096). This public process leads to a public mourning and a public explanation from Lancelot that removes any dangers of misinterpretation and allows the episode to resolve itself successfully.

Malory's personal reading map, therefore, seems to regard private reading as suspect and public reading as socially restorative. Rather like Plato regretting that writing will sap the powers of memory (*Phaedrus*, pp. 560-71), Malory sees unexpected disadvantages to a development we are accustomed to think of as entirely positive. In anticipating his readers'

¹⁷Malory emphasizes the importance of the letters and of the multiple forms of privy-ness associated with them by means of a stylistic trait particularly appropriate for oral or aural literature. Rather than communicate emphasis through one telling statement, he broadcasts it, repeating "letter(s)" 26 times over 78 lines and "privy" (in various forms) 5 times over 36 lines. (Significantly, too, "privy" carries a positive connotation when linked finally with Dinadan, who is going to punish Mark's slanders [p. 617]). The importance of these key words must sink into even the most inattentive of listeners (or private readers). Many of the tensions involved in the collapse of Arthur's kingdom are plotted through the intersections of "privy" and "open" words and actions (as in the "opyn" reading of Elaine's letter, cited here next).

behavior or reporting his own, moreover, Malory repeatedly assumes aural-ity as the channel.

William Caxton: Prologues and Epilogues

Writing his summa of Arthurian romance in a decadent age, as he felt it to be, perhaps Malory hoped that public reading of such a text would help reknit the unraveling fabric of society. It would not have been as impractical a hope as it sounds, given that Caxton in fact published the *Morte* in the year of Henry VII's accession, and at the instance of "many noble and dyvers gentylnen" who felt that Arthur "ought moost to be remembred emonge us Englysshemen" (ed. Blake: 106).¹⁸ And while Caxton's prologue mentions his own professional reading and speaks twice simply of his customers reading the book, it concludes by directing the work "unto alle noble prynces, lordes and ladyes, gentylnen or gentylwymmen, that desyre to rede or here redde of" Arthur (p. 109). Whatever the aged, idealistic, and possibly incarcerated Malory did or did not know about reading behavior in 1470, surely the savvy Caxton would not have ascribed aural-ity to such a distinguished audience in 1485 if doing so could have given offence.

Malory may thus bridge us into the uniquely significant set of prologues, epilogues, and other comments of William Caxton, appended by him to some 106 of the books he published between 1473 and the year of his death, 1491. I have already analyzed these metatextual statements extensively in a published article (Coleman 1990a). One conclusion presented there was that 60 percent of Caxton's references to his audience's reception used the word "read," while 40 percent used "hear." (All of Caxton's metatextual "read's" and "hear's" are quoted in the Table appended to my article.) Moreover, the context of some of these "read's" in fact designates public reading, which

¹⁸All page references for Caxton's prologues and epilogues refer to *Caxton's Own Prose*, ed. N.F. Blake (London: Deutsch, 1973).

suggests that other "read's" as well may be format-neutral. A breakdown of Caxton's publishing career into three periods (pp. 96-97) showed the proportion of "read's" to "hear's" highest from c. 1473-79 (73%-27%), nearest the mean from 1480-85 (56%-44%), and rising again from 1486-91 (67%-33%). This pattern may reflect a heightened interest in reading both at the beginning of Caxton's venture into publishing and as he came under the influence of the humanists (see below). It certainly does not show the steady rise in "read's" one might expect as printing began to transform the relationship of text and audience. Similarly, a breakdown of Caxton's prints by four broad subject-areas (pp. 95-96) showed that the 60%-40% rate was slightly skewed by the relative prominence of "hear" for religious/moral works (51% "read's" to 49% "hear's"). By comparison, the distribution for philosophy was 63%-37%; for history/science, 64%-36%; and for romance/chivalry, 64%-36%. The gross numbers, thus, seem to sustain an argument that aurality was holding its own in England throughout the first decades of printing and in all genres of vernacular writing, particularly the devotional.

Many of Caxton's "hear's" come as half of the familiar pair "read and/or hear." Like Shirley, for example, Caxton introduces the *Canterbury Tales* (2d ed., 1484) with an "alle ye that shal in thys book rede or heere" (ed. Blake: 62). Very commonly, the "read and/or hear" comes in the final statement to the audience, after a series of "read's" that may have been either format-neutral or privacy-biased. These "sweep" statements seek to pull in, or make explicit, all possible reading formats and every conceivable reader, and they usually introduce a request for correction. Thus, in the epilogue to Earl Rivers' translation of the *Dicts and Sayings of the Philosophers* (1st ed., 1477), Caxton refers twice to his own reading (p. 73), then to "al them that shal rede this lytyl rehersayll" (p. 75) and to persons "that have red this booke in Frensshe" (p. 76). His final statement sweeps in "my sayd lord or ony other persone whatsoever he or she be that shal rede or here it" (p. 76). An even more striking instance exhibits the pattern in reverse. An opening

comment to the *Polychronicon* (1482) notes that histories "shewe unto the reders and herers by the ensamples of thynges passyd what thyng is to be desyred and what is to be eschewed" (p. 128). This is followed later, however, by the statement that via such histories a man "syttynge in his chambre or studye maye rede, knowe and understande the polytyke and noble actes of alle the worlde" (p. 129).

One might conclude that for Caxton, "read" had begun to take on its modern connotation of private reading, and that his use of "read and/ or hear" in the "sweep" position represented a politic nod in the direction of those still attached, for whatever reason, to the old-style reception format. Nonetheless, few "read's" are as privacy-biased as the one just quoted from the *Polychronicon* prologue. There are texts where all the reception-statements are of the "read and/or hear" form: the prologue to *Charles the Great* (1485) has three in a row (p. 67), with one in the epilogue (p. 68); the prologue to the *Book of Good Manners* (1487) also has three in a row (pp. 60-61). And in other cases, public reading is explicitly invoked.

The most significant example of the latter point, and a generally important and interesting invocation of late-fifteenth-century reading modalities, is Caxton's statement in the prologue to his translation *Eneydos* (1490). In this, one of the last books he published, Caxton mentions his own professional reading twice (pp. 78-79). Reflecting the influence of humanistic ideas about text-editing, he claims to have even invoked the help of John Skelton--who "hath redde" not only "Vyrgyle" (p. 80) but even "the ix muses" (p. 81)--in establishing his text. After these flights of professional reading, it is not surprising to find Caxton emphasizing that the *Eneydos* "is not for a rude, uplondysssh man to labour therin ne rede it, but onely for a clerke and a noble gentylman." He goes on to suggest to these learned men a subsidiary research project: "And yf ony man wyll entermete in redyng of hit late hym goo rede and lerne Vyrgyll or ... Ovyde." But the final end of all this upmarket reading is that the willing

scholar "shall see and understonde lyghtly all yf he have a good redar and enformer" (p. 80). Caxton's source, the late-fourteenth-century *Livre des Enéides*, had merely advised: "Who that will know how Aeneas went to hell, let him read Virgil, Claudian or the Epistles of Ovid and there he shall find more than truth" (quoted in Painter 1976: 176 n. 2)--with no "redar and enformer" in sight.

Caxton, as sensitive to the times as ever, has caught the sense of the oncoming humanistic revolution, while retaining his more traditional roots (and potential audience). The description of his target reader--"a clerke and a noble gentyman"--recalls the figure of the scholar-prince then being formulated as the archetypal patron of the literary humanist. Yet deeds of arms, love and noble chivalry--the subject matter that Caxton describes as of interest to this reader (p. 80), and indirectly as the topics of the *Eneydos*--are standard medieval preoccupations. Caxton thus seems to visualize readers on the cusp, still happy to read his vulgate *Aeneid* as a "ripping tale" but also potentially aware of its role as a key humanistic text that they can master as part of a program of self-education and improvement.

But while, like Malory, accelerating us away from the past and the passé, Caxton, also like Malory, fails to make the persistent modern connection between this new age and private reading. Rather, he presents us with an aurality repackaged. His prologue's closing reference to a "redar" makes it clear that the preceding "read's," not to mention the "see and understonde," are suggesting a research project conducted by means of a trained reader (a Skeltonian reader of the muses) prelecting and expounding the Latin sources. Such reading is presented as elite, fashionable behavior (not for a "rude uplondyssh man"); the reader is flatteringly assumed to have the time, the competence, and the texts on hand to do follow-up reading in important Latin sources, as well as to be wealthy enough to employ a

scholar-prelector.¹⁹ This scenario recalls the fashion, noted in Chapter 3, of royal or noble sixteenth-century households maintaining readers for just such purposes--to read and expound the classics.

As a late and suggestive Caxtonian "read," therefore, the *Eneydos* passage seems to signal not a decline in but a transmutation of aurality, from the more communal exophoric practice of previous ages to the more individualized, endophoric self-improvement of his own time. If the flattering tongue of the publisher had reinvented his audience as gentleman-scholars sitting over their books in chamber or study, he had no less thought to provide them with a fashionable personal prelector to read and expound those same books to them.

A review of all of Caxton's "read's" and "hear's" thus leaves one with a sense of bimodal reading still a well-entrenched reception format among English audiences. In one of his very last reception statements, from the last year of his life, Caxton explains that "wel-disposed persones that desiren to here or rede ghostly informacions maye the sooner knowe by this lityll intytelyng th'effectis of this sayd lytyll volume" (*Horologium Sapientiae* [c. 1491], p. 102). A century after Chaucer stumped his (future) critics by telling people who didn't want to hear a story to turn the page, Caxton is unconcernedly telling people who do want to hear "ghostly informacions" to look at the table of contents. Aurality remains as much, or as little, of a conundrum on the threshold of the English Renaissance as in the reign of Richard II.

¹⁹ Unfortunately for all his would-be humanist readers, Caxton's text, as Gavin Douglas was to point out scathingly in the next century, was as like Virgil as "the devill and Sanct Austyne" (*Eneados*, bk. 1 prol.: 143; see discussion of Douglas in the next section).

William Caxton: Publications and Translations

The same points may usefully be identified in a sampling of texts that Caxton published, some of which he translated. The anonymous *Book of Curtesye* (1477 or 1478) includes a long passage recommending that "the little victim to whom it is addressed" (as Painter [1976: 93] calls him) read the English classics Chaucer, Gower, Lydgate, and Hoccleve. "Redeth my chylde / redeth his [Chaucer's] bookes alle" (l. 344), the author urges; and again, "It wil prouffite to see suche thingis [good writers] & rede" (l. 427). The heavy use of "read" and "see" suggest a private engagement with these worthy texts; yet in praising Chaucer's powers of description the author remarks:

It semeth vnto mannys heerynge
Not only the worde / but verely the thyng (ll. 342-43)

Caxton's translation of the *Mirroure of the World* (1st ed., 1481) presents an even more striking juxtaposition of studious, earnest "read's" with vivid auralities. The prologue uses "read" six times without a single "hear," and with a strong sense of studious private engagement, e.g.:

nobles ... ought t'excercise them in redyng, studyng and visytyng the noble faytes and dedes of the sage and wyse men. ... And emonge alle other this present booke whiche is called the *Ymage* or *Myrrour of the World* ought to be visyted, redde and knowen. (ed. Blake, p. 114; ed. Prior, pp. 5-6)

Yet the work opens, after the rubric "Prologue declaryng to whom this booke apperteyneth," with a woodcut showing a master sitting in his chair and addressing four small (but not clearly young) scholars, the front three of whom hold books (ed. Prior, fig. 1, p. 7; see Fig. 25). Thus the studious reading invoked in the following prologue is keyed off of a standard "accipies" scene that defines learning as an aural process. To complete the confusion, in the British Library copy on which the EETS edition is based, a scroll was drawn issuing from the teacher's mouth, with the words "audita

pereunt, scripta manent" ("heard things perish, written things remain," a paraphrase of a Latin tag Caxton quotes in the prologue; ed. Prior, p. 7 n. 1).²⁰

The work is provided with 37 other woodcuts, mostly demonstrating the scientific principles, including gravity and the sphericity of the earth, propounded in the work. Nonetheless, within the body of the text itself, "hear" occurs as ascribed reception format over a dozen times, including in such standard phrases as: "Syth that the erthe is so lytil as ye haue herd here to fore deuised" (ed. Prior, p. 61). The most puzzling reference of all notes: "And by this fygure [woodcut] ye may vnderstonde playnly this that ye haue herd here to fore" (ed. Prior, pp. 140-41 and fig. 37, p. 141; see Fig. 26). While Caxton was of course translating from an older source, he had the choice of words to use in translating. Moreover, he provides several metatextual summations along the lines of "In the thirde partye ye have herde how the day and nyght come" (ed. Blake, p. 118; ed. Prior, p. 182).

The *Mirroour's* text also refers several times explicitly to the hearing of books, e.g.:

we ought not to mysbileue in no wise that we here redde ne tolde of the meruaylles of the world vnto the tyme we knowe it be so or no.
(ed. Prior, p. 96)

And in his epilogue, Caxton reverts to a "read and/or hear," claiming that "as nygh as to me is possible, I have made it [the translation] so playn that every man resonable may understonde it yf he advysedly and ententyfly rede or here it" (ed. Blake, p. 119; ed. Prior, p. 184).

The *Mirroour of the World* contains the first printed illustrations in England (Painter 1976: 110), presumably copied from Caxton's now-lost manuscript

²⁰Similar woodcuts illustrate the chapters on grammar (here the master has a birch and his students are clearly boys) and logic (this master has an open book on a lectern and his hearers are grown men; one has a beard) (ed. Prior, figs. 5-6).

original. The printer would not have gone to the trouble and expense of commissioning so many woodcuts if he didn't think people would look at the pictures, and most of the references to the figures do speak, naturally enough, of "seeing" or "beholding." Moreover, the pictures are not mere decoration; they are vital for following the technical explanations about eclipses and other phenomena. Yet Caxton also speaks of his heavily illustrated text, quite soberly, as suitable for advised and attentive hearing.

Two related but divergent conclusions suggest themselves. The "hear's" in the text--those preserved by Caxton from his source and those he added himself in the chapter links--might show the word beginning to generalize beyond the strict sense of absorbing information carried on sound waves, to include cases where the information was absorbed visually. On the other hand, illustrations and hearing do not have to be mutually exclusive. A "redar and enformer" might sit next to a hearer or two and prelect the text, pausing for group examinations of the illustrations. Or the hearer(s) might sit with their own copies of the *Mirroure* and follow along.

Caxton's pronouncements, or intimations, about reading formats have a unique weight. If anyone should know how English people were reading in the late fifteenth century, it would be him--who was so successful at pleasing his audience that his was the only early English printshop that did not go quickly bankrupt (Blake 1969: 212). The picture Caxton gives of modalities does not correspond to any simple evolutionary scheme whereby rising literacy rates and the availability of more and cheaper books led naturally to the replacement of public reading with private, and of "residual orality" with "literate" modes of thinking and writing. In addressing his upper- and upper-middle-class audiences, Caxton continually refers to the hearing of his prints. He would not do this if such references were either inaccurate or insulting (implying any deficiency such as illiteracy). He clearly is carrying over the long-standing sense that public reading is a respectable, enjoyable,

and common way of experiencing literature among the upper classes. Moreover, he acknowledges, in the *Eneydos* prologue, his awareness of a new form of public reading, the fashionable practice of employing a professional scholar to read and expound classics.

At the same time, he uses "read" and "hear" in a significantly patterned way that suggests a semantic shift in operation. The "read and/or hear's" tend to occur in a final (or initial) sweep position meant as a global address to all possible kinds of readers and formats of reading, with relatively few "hear's" but many "read's" standing on their own. It may not be safe to conclude from this that "read" had begun to mean only private reading, but the pattern certainly suggests that this shift had begun. Yet few "read's" went by without at least one "hear" being attached before the metatext was over. I would hazard, as an explanation, that the semi-privatization of "read" was carrying on the valorization of studious reading, whose associations were generally scholarly and now increasingly humanistic. By ascribing such reading behavior to his audience, Caxton was flattering them with the implication that they were well-educated, thoughtful, and fashionable people. By emphasizing the depth and importance of the text he was offering them, he of course flattered both himself as publisher and his audience as prospective readers. That he was nonetheless careful not to forbid this connotation to "hear," presented in the sweep formula "read and/or hear," suggests two things. One is his awareness that hearing a text could also be the means of a scholarly engagement with it. The other is that, flattering ascriptions aside, he knew many people still continued to prefer hearing texts.

This examination of the crossover of scholarly reading practices, prestige, and even subject matter into the popular secular realm may be capped by a look at a final Caxton translation. In his edition of the *History of Reynard the Fox* (1481), Caxton passes on the prologue of the Middle Dutch prose *Hystorie van Reynaert die Vos*, which was probably written sometime close to its

Dutch publication in 1479 (Sands 1960: 11-12). The prologue to the story of the wily Reynard seems to parody the fashion for scholarly-style reading. (While Caxton merely translated these words, his original was closely contemporary and, again, he chose to preserve words he could have altered if he felt they misrepresented his audience.) As Caxton translates, it advises:

Thenne who that wyll haue the very vnderstandyng of this mater / he muste ofte and many tymes rede in thys boke and earnestly and diligently marke wel that he redeth / ffor it is sette subtylly / lyke as ye shal see in redyng of it / and not ones to rede it ffor a man shal not wyth ones ouer redyng fynde the ryght vnderstanding ne comprise it well / but oftymes to rede it shal cause it wel to be vnderstande. (ed. Goldsmid, p. 16)

In piling on the "read's," in urging multiple, studious perusals of the text, this stutteringly pro-"literacy" passage willfully communicates the exact opposite of what it says. Who needs all this scholarly head-butting to understand a story about a fox and a lion? *Reynard* is a narrative meant to amuse and relax its audience, and perhaps to pique them with its easy-to-follow political overtones, but not to challenge them with arduous semantic opacities. Such a parody seems timely for the later fifteenth century; it was not present in the century-old verse original from which the Dutch prosifier was working. Evidently, the Boccaccian call to "read, ... persevere, ... sit up nights, ... inquire, and exert the utmost power of your mind" (in Hardison et al. 1974: 208) had become enough of a commonplace by this time to merit comic debunking. The Dutch author's reading-orientation doesn't prevent him from inserting a "ghehoert" ("heard") and a "ghehoert ... ende ghelesen" ("heard ... and read") into sweep position in his epilogue (*Van den Vos*, p. 341).²¹

²¹Perhaps because he is so used to the word-pair, Caxton translates the "ghehoert" as "herd or red" (*Reynard*, ed. Goldsmid, p. 119), just as he translates a "lesende" ("reading") in the author's prologue as "redyng or heeryng" (*Van den Vos*, p. 5; *Reynard*, p. 16).

We have seen a semi-privatized reading audience invoked first by the earnest pedagogue who wrote the *Book of Curtesye*, and next for the illustrated popular science of the *Mirroir of the World*. It may be that the *Reynard* prologue clues us into the element of ostentation present in such invocations. Actual practice may have changed more slowly than the words used to describe it; what Gower once entrusted to "the worldes eere" still, in the late fifteenth century, found its way "vnto mannys heerynge."

Rather than any radical reorientation of reception channels, thus, the modality shift of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century shows public reading slowly becoming relatively less common and private reading relatively more so. The change comes less in the abandonment of oral performance--which did not occur--than in the slow absorption by a growing number of people of a sense that private reading--or, better, studious private reading--was a fashionably meritorious way to experience serious vernacular literature.

CODA: AUTHORS IN THE AGE OF TRANSITION (1489-1525)

- John Skelton: "Skelton Laureat upon the Dolorus Dethe and Muche Lamentable Chaunce of the Mooste Honorable Erle of Northumberlande," 1489
The Garlande or Chapelet of Laurell, c. 1495²²
 "Phyllyp Sparowe," before 1505
 "A Friar Complains," c. 1500 (Davies 1963 no. 158)
 William Dunbar: "The Flyting of Dunbar and Kennedie," bet. 1500-5
 "The Tretis of the Tua Mariit Wemen and the Wedo," c. 1508
 Stephen Hawes: *The Conforte of Louers*, 1509
The Example of Vertu, 1509
The Pastime of Pleasure 1509

²²Although the *Garlande or Chapelet of Laurell* was first published in 1523, Skelton seems to have written all but a few stanzas of it in the 1490s; the astronomical reference in the first stanza indicates a date of 1495 (Tucker 1969: 334).

Gavin Douglas: *Eneados*, 1512-13

Sir Thomas More: *Utopia*, 1516

Lord Berners, trans.: *The Chronicles of Froissart*, 1524-25

To my own surprise, in my initial analysis I reached the end of the period I'd set myself to cover without finding any text that clearly manifested the ascendancy of dividuality over aurality. Just beyond that boundary, however, some remarkably different formulations of literary transmission and reception come into play. I have not been able to read systematically among the texts from the very end of the fifteenth and the early sixteenth centuries, but I will review here some interesting examples both of disjunction and of continuity.

The disjunctive texts do not reflect the extinction of aurality. The historical evidence assembled at the close of Chapter 3, as well as the obvious continuity of aurality so far traced in this chapter, indicate that aurality survived vigorously into and beyond the Renaissance. What expired, instead, was the particular set of textual relationships involved in the aural-narrative constellation. That system had emphasized the continuity and shared values of the homeostatized narrative community. Yet the transition from exophoric to endophoric, or communalized to individualized, effected by the variety of cultural changes that converged to produce the English Renaissance entailed, as often noted, a distinction of present from past, and author from tradition. The emphasis on narratives whose exemplary function rendered anachronism irrelevant gave way to displays of humanistic virtuosity.

The Renaissance author spoke less for his community and more for himself--partly, no doubt, because with the advent of printing, the community itself dissipated into anonymity. Chaucer, A.C. Spearing notes,

wished no more than that his "litel bok" should kiss the footsteps of his predecessors. Skelton, however, goes much further. For him, the

poetic tradition which he evokes so fully seems to exist for his sake, rather than he for its. (1985: 243)

The literary-professional reading of such an individualistic, self-promoting author makes him special not because it gives him access to special texts that it is his job to reinterpret, but because it fuels his competitive displays of his own specialness as a creative poet. Though the audience's approval is often important for pragmatic reasons, its primary function seems to be to mirror the poet's brilliance back at him.

The evaporation of the "social contract" promoted among *auctor*, author, and audience by the aural-narrative constellation left all parties freer, in a sense, but also more vulnerable. An author feeling less subsumed in the reinterpetive enterprise could criticize sources or other authors. In presenting his text as a more personal, individualized statement grounded in self-referentially literary criteria, rather than as a retelling of a communally ordained story validated by its moral worth, the author invited criticism himself. The audience became more separate from and freer to criticize the text, but they also lost much of their importance to and investment in it: literature now told them not who they were, but who the author was.

"A Friar Complains"

A short poem of c. 1500 gives a lively, amusing glimpse into the consequences of both lay literacy and the Englishing of the Bible. Called by Davies "A Friar Complains" (1963 no. 158), it describes how the sedulous friar can no longer collect contributions from laymen who know the Scriptures as well as he does:

Alas! what shul we freres do,
 Now lewed men cun Holy Writ?
 Alle aboute where I go
 They aposen me of it. [ask me hard questions about it] (ll. 1-4)

I trowe the devil brought it aboute,
 To write the Gospel in Englishe,
 For lewed men ben nowe so stout
 That they yeven us neither fleshe ne fishe. (ll. 9-12)

If I say it longeth not
 For prestes to worche whether they go,
 They leggen [cite] for them Holy Writ,
 And seyn that Seint Polle did so. (ll. 17-20)

The Pardoner's credulous audience, awed by his Latin tags into outpourings of "moneie, wolle, chese, and whete" (CT 6: 448), has here given way to skeptical shopmen who spout St. Paul back in the face of the Pardoner's spiritual descendant. Their well-established literacy has enfranchised these readers--although it is interesting to note that the cultural event the text itself recognizes is the translation of the Bible, which allows "lewed" men access to it. These laymen have staged a return to the source that in a way rather resembles the humanists returning to their original classical sources. The shopmen's incipient authority as interpreters is suggested by the use of the scholarly term "aposen" to describe their activity as critical readers.

Gavin Douglas

With literacy working its way down the social scale to shopmen, it is no surprise to see illiteracy emerging (at last) as a form of drawback. The earliest reference I have found to illiteracy as a reason for prelection comes in Gavin Douglas' *Eneados* (1512-13). In congratulating himself on finishing his translation of Virgil, Douglas assures his book:

Now salt thou with euery gentill Scot be kend,
 And to onletterit folk be red on hight,
 That erst was bot with clerkis comprehend.
 ("Ane exclamatioun," ll. 43-45)

Douglas suggests that the "gentill," or upper-class, Scots will read privately, while the unlettered folk will be able to have the book read to them; even

the phrase "red on hight" is a new one. Except for one or two rhetorical "hear's," Douglas' standard reception-verbs, in his many metatextual statements, are "read" and "see." Thus, it seems, he expected all but the illiterate among his audience to read his text privately.

In several other notable ways Douglas also reflects a different state of literary affairs. In the passage quoted above, as well as elsewhere, Douglas seems to reinterpret the author/translator's traditional role of rewriter/transmitter of authoritative sources. Douglas poses rather as a popularizer--a subtle but significant difference. Instead of assimilating the tradition and re-presenting it, as medieval authors claimed to do, Douglas overtly operates as a separate agent. He has taken a classical text and performed certain difficult tasks in relation to it in order to produce a secondary text, dependent on the first in a way medieval translations of recreational material rarely were. The rationale for this operation is not (covertly) to give scope for his own creativity, but genuinely to broaden access to the *Aeneid* by translating it, by creating what he calls his "wlgar Virgill" ("Ane exclamatioun," l. 37).

Douglas thus evinces that heightened sense of the differentness of the past and of the integrity of authorial texts that characterize the humanist and the "literate" mentality. Douglas' famous attack on the *Eneydos* shows him failing to understand Caxton's more medieval approach to texts and translation. The Englishman's text, Douglas says,

has na thing ado tharwith [Virgil], God wait,
Ne na mair lyke than the devill and Sanct Austyne.
(bk. 1 prol.: 142-43)

He condemns not only Caxton's naïveté but even individual points of his translation--evidently totally out of sympathy with the easy medieval homeostasis that allowed the writer/translator to update or adapt whatever felt strange to him in his source. Douglas, by contrast, agonizes over the

inability of Scots to provide precise translations for every word of the original Latin (e.g., bk. 1 prol.: 347-92).

Yet although Douglas would aim at sheer transparency in his work as translator, he makes himself, paradoxically, far more visible than any medieval translator who has subsumed his creative work into his re-created text. Douglas writes not only a very long general prologue but also prologues to all 13 books (12 of Virgil's with Mapheus Vegius' recent addition), plus three epilogues. In his prologues he plays with different rhyme schemes and stanzaic forms, including one episode of painfully rum-ram-ruffish alliteration (prologue to Book 8). While his versification is calling attention to his artistry, or lack of it, the metatexts themselves are much concerned with a few self-serving topics: Virgil's genius, Douglas' approach to translation, the demerits of other translators/transmitters, threats against potential critics of his own translation, the daily work of translation, and praise of his patron. In his prologues, Priscilla Bawcutt observes, Douglas "suggests that he himself--not only Virgil--is at work on something momentous" (1976: 165). He even goes so far as to proclaim that long after his death, "the bettir part of me [i.e., his book] salbe vpheld / Abufe the starnys perpetually to ryng" ("Conclusio," ll. 8-9); this passage, Bawcutt remarks, makes Douglas "one of the first to express in English what by the end of the sixteenth century had become a poetic commonplace: the assertion that a work of art can confer immortality" (1976: 171). In thus forefronting himself incessantly, Douglas manifests the self-obsession and -aggrandizement characteristic of the Renaissance writer.

One very noticeable corollary of this attitude is Douglas' repeated defiances to anyone who might criticize his work. "Beis not ourstudyus to spy a moyt in myne e," he warns the censorious, "That in your awyn a ferry boyt can nocht se" (bk. 1 prol.: 499-500). One of the epilogues is devoted entirely to the subject, with the title "Ane exclamatioun aganyst detractouris and oncurtas redaris...." Although one might attribute some at least of this

defensiveness to a separateness from and consequent distrust of his audience entailed by the mass-production of the printing press, Douglas "published" in manuscript and was not printed until 1553, long after his death (Bawcutt 1976: 25). Nonetheless, the aggressive tone of his remarks represents a notable departure from the humility habitually assumed by medieval writers.

Douglas is also the first author I have found to attack his fellow-writers--and not just Caxton but even the great Chaucer:

And netheles into sum place, quha kend it,
My mastir Chauser gretly Virgill offendit. (bk. 1 prol.: 409-10)

Although he hedges his criticism around with reverent commonplaces, Douglas is venturing far beyond the medieval "old boys' network" of universally positive comments on other authors, into the logical outcome of the humanistic critical mentality. If translation should pass on the author's text and meaning as faithfully as possible, and Chaucer did not do so, then Chaucer is at fault. The author is not part of one complex, communal, mutually affirming interaction of source-texts and audience; he is not safely subsumed into a greater enterprise, craftily sub-scribing his creativity for the delectation of the more perceptive readers and hearers. If he is Gavin Douglas, he is separate from both source and audience, a simultaneously narcissistic and anxiety-ridden lone writer, manipulating an ancient text into a form that will communicate to a wide but potentially treacherous audience.

John Skelton

Even more strikingly "modern" than Douglas is John Skelton, who discarded narrative almost entirely in favor of sheer, exhilarating self-advertisement. When Skelton cites an *auctor*, he does so to show off his

learning, not to fit himself into a superordinate tradition. He uses "read" almost exclusively, and lots of it. He has Jane Scrope, for instance, babble:

Though I have enrold
 A thousand new and old
 Of these historious tales,
 To fyll bougets and males
 With bokes that I have red,
 Yet I am nothyng sped ("Phyllyp Sparowe" [before 1505], ll. 749-54)

The passage gives a vivid sense of a voracious private reader bemused by what was already beginning to feel like a glut of printed books (with its concomitant storage problems).

Skelton invokes auralty on only two occasions—or, rather, he *quotes* auralty, carefully framing his aural phrases as deliberate archaisms. The first case comes in "Skelton Laureat upon the Dolorus Dethe and Muche Lamentable Chaunce of the Mooste Honorable Erle of Northumberlande" (1489), an early poem that offers a stiff imitation of an epic opening:

In sesons past who hathe harde or sene
 Of formar writinge by any presidente
 That vilane hastarddis in ther furious tene,
 Fulfyld with malice of froward entente,
 Confeterd togeder of commoun concente
 Falsly to slo ther moste singlar goode lorde? (ll. 22-27)

In the more accomplished *Garlande or Chapelet of Laurell* (c. 1495), Skelton peoples the House of Fame with a large assembly of poets, classical and medieval. Finally he spies the three great English poets, Chaucer, Gower, and Lydgate, very nicely dressed but, as he notes, laurel-less. Their purpose in the poem is to introduce Skelton to Fame, who will confer the laurel on him; the implication is, clearly, that he represents the culmination and perfection of the poetic enterprise initiated by these musty old *auctores* (cf. Spearing 1985: 243). Skelton describes how the three poets approached him:

And of there bounte they made me godely chere
 In maner and forme as ye shall after here. (ll. 398-99)

This, the only time Skelton ever uses this most familiar of aural phrases, registers resoundingly as a quote, an invocation of the now-outmoded phraseology and modality associated with his poetic predecessors. Like Chaucer's quotes from memorial romance in "Sir Thopas," Skelton's conscious and implicitly ironic "as ye shall after here" seems to signal the effective cessation of the modality system that it had served so long. In fact, Skelton seems in the mid-1490s to mark the boundary that many scholars claim Chaucer was marking in the late fourteenth century: between aural and "literacy." For Skelton, aural, or the aural-narrative constellation of reception-phrases, really is an anachronism.

Stephen Hawes

Douglas and Skelton between them seem to close out aural and the aural-narrative constellation for good. With them a plethora of new attitudes and relationships have crowded out the old; and this development seems to occur in close correlation with the narrowing of "read" down to something like its modern semantic range: meaning, in the absence of any contextualization to the contrary, "read privately." Even so, the message did not get through to everyone. Other writers, less avant-garde than Douglas and Skelton, went on using "read and/or hear's" and speaking of the hearing of books.

Stephen Hawes, for example, fits into the pattern noted in the last section, mixing a dominant "read" with persistent aural phrases. He adapts a standard "hear" phrase to be used with "read," for instance, in *The Example of Vertu* (1509):

Dame dyscrecyon ferther me brought
 Into a fayre chambre as ye may rede (ll. 534-35)

Yet he is no less ready, when speaking of the behavior suited to "hye degre and lowe" (*The Conforte of Louers* [1509], l. 112), to declare that

The lorde and knyght delyteth for to here
Cronycles and storyes of noble chyualry (ll. 106-7)

In *The Pastime of Pleasure* (1509) he considers his audience may "here or se" Lydgate's books (l. 1170) and "se or here" the story of Joshua (l. 5535); and there are many books whereby "the reders who lyst gyue audyence" can "here reporte of [Jason's] grete excellence" (ll. 5528-29). Over fifty lines of the *Pastime* (ll. 1184-1239) are devoted to a discussion of the performance of poetry. "The famous poete who so lyste to here" (l. 1226) will observe that if the matter "be sadde his chere is dolorous" (l. 1230), while if it "be ioyfull and gladde / Lyke countenaunce outwardly they make" (ll. 1233-34). This is the standard analysis of the rhetoric handbooks, considered still relevant by Henry VII's groom of the chamber.

William Dunbar

Hawes' discussion of performance reminds us that court poets were still expected to read or recite their poetry. This comes across very clearly in the work of William Dunbar, whose mostly short pieces are entirely suited to amuse or edify a court. Sometimes he deliberately invokes such an event, as in his famous concluding *demande d'amour* to the "Tretis of the Tua Mariit Wemen and the Wedo" (c. 1508):

Ye auditoris most honorable that eris has gevin
Oneto this uncouth aventur quhilk airly me happinnit:
Of thir thre wantoun wiffis that I haif writtin heir,
Quhilk wald ye waill to your wif gif ye suld wed one? (ll. 527-3)

Similarly, in "The Flyting of Dunbar and Kennedie" (bet. 1500-5), the former threatens the latter:

The erd sould trymbill, the firmament sould schaik,
And all the air in vennaum suddane stink,
And all the divillis of hell for redour quaik,
To heir quhat I suld wryt with pen and ynk (ll. 9-12)

It would be a great performance lost if the "Flyting" was not, as Dunbar's modern editor hypothesizes, "recited before the king as a stylized duel in verse" (p. 284).

Sir Thomas More

Another familiar court tradition is preserved by the inhabitants of Sir Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516). Hythlodaye observes of the Utopians' communal meals:

They begin every dinner and supper with some reading which is conducive to morality but which is brief so as not to be tiresome. Taking their cue from the reading, the elders introduce approved subjects of conversation, neither somber nor dull. But they do not monopolize the whole dinner with long speeches: they are ready to hear the young men talk and indeed deliberately draw them out ... (trans. Hexter, p. 145)

It is interesting to note, in the midst of this aurally orthodox procedure, a new sense of the practice's potential tedium--not only of the reading itself, but of the improving dialogue it would engender. The fact that the prelection is sponsored by the elders adds to the sense of its weightiness. Does this imply an impatience with aural reception from a generation that had become more familiar with private reading? Or is the impatience limited more to the improving content of these mealtime readings?

John Bouchier, Lord Berners

As late as 1524-25, John Bouchier, Lord Berners, introduced his translation of the *Chronicles of Froissart* with a pattern very familiar from Caxton: a host of "read's" capped by, in sweep position, a "read and hear." Berners' text, translated at the request of Henry VIII and published by Richard Pynson, begins with a preface praising the writing of history with a blizzard of Caxtonian triplets. "Whan we," he says, "(beynge vnexpert of chaunces) se, beholde, and rede the auncyent actes, gestes, and dedes, howe and with

what labours, daungers, and paryls they were gested and done, they right greatly admonest, ensigne, and teche vs howe we maye lede forthe our lyues" (1: xxvii). Seven other "read's," recording his practise and that of "the noble gentylnen of England," concludes with a request to "all the reders and herers therof to take this my rude translacion in gre" (1: xxviii).

CONCLUSION: DECONSTELLATED AURALITY

From the time of Chaucer through the late fifteenth century, the presence of aurality and of the aural-narrative constellation was clear and unambiguous, although "read" was gathering force in the second half of the century. In this last coda section, we've seen the aural-narrative constellation snuffed out at last, with "read" apparently privatized and "hear" persisting among the more conservative writers and the more traditional genres.

With the extinction of the aural-narrative constellation went the exophoric encoding of relationships among sources, authors, and audience that had dominated secular vernacular writings since the time of Chaucer. Literary texts over the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century reflect authors slowly centralizing prestige on their own function, departing from the self-effacement of the status-diffusing "public voice" in favor of the dominant tones associated with, originally, the scholarly lecturer and, later, the laureled humanist. This new wave of authors seem to write either for studious private reading or for a public reading more along the lines we are familiar with today--to the sorts of respectful, passive audiences V.A. Kolve envisaged, anachronistically, as listening to Chaucer (1984: 15-16; quoted in Chapter 1).

Whatever style of reading the more ambitious early Renaissance authors craved, however, more evidence is needed before we can know what style of reading they actually received. It is hard to believe that the taste for listening in companionable groups evaporated with the advent of the

Tudors. Perhaps public reading in that and later times could be described as constituting a "secondary aurality," i.e., one that presupposed private reading as a norm.

CONCLUSION

After so much time traversed, and so much variety encompassed, I lay down my ethnographer's staff. The voyage--touted in all the literary travel brochures as a thrilling ascent from the stumbly foothills of orality to the soaring alps of literacy--has turned out, in practice, to be at once less glorious and more interesting. The simplistic alignments have not held, and the readers have defied the rules codified six centuries after their demise.

The evidence shows that the hearing of books continued to be a favored mode of reading well past the expiration date dictated by purely technological, evolutionary premises. Despite the Great Divide mandated by "strong" theorists, aurality mixed the two poles of orality and literacy in a long-term, stable relationship that can be meaningfully described as "transitional" only from the perspective of a half-millennium. Although the logic of unilinear evolution would associate "orality" in an age of literacy with poverty, ignorance, and low status, almost every aural reader we have encountered was wealthy, literate, and powerful. Reductive essentialist generalizations are further invalidated by the finding that while the French and the English both favored public reading, they conducted their reading sessions and distinguished among genres very differently. Factors ignored by the standard theories have proved more crucial in influencing such behavior than the technological achievements those theories fetishize. Above all, medieval readers chose to share their experience of literature because they valued shared experience. For them, a book read aloud came alive not only with the performer's voice but with the listeners' reactions and responses, with their concentration, their tears and applause, their philosophical or political debates, and their demands that the page be turned.

Books written for such reading came out of and fed back into an exophoric, communalizing impulse that bound author to audience in mutual

dependency and respect. It is traditional to assume that such a literary matrix could only hamper creativity--and thus (circularly) that Chaucer could not have been writing for aural reception. Since the evidence suggests strongly that Chaucer *was* writing for aural reception, however, we may have to revise our opinion of the constraints that situation imposed. While oral or aural literature, when mediocre, may have been mediocre in certain characteristic ways, the modalities themselves did not mandate literary failure--any more than dividuality ensures literary success. In fact, writing for a listening audience may have presented an exciting challenge: the author had time to reflect on and polish his words knowing that they would take on life and vigor from the dynamics of presentation before an audiate audience. Similar conditions, after all, seem not to have hampered Shakespeare's creativity.

The energetic imposition of twentieth-century values misrepresents and disenfranchises the realities of late medieval reading, substituting for the complex interlinking and differentiation of modalities the clear, well-lit progression from "orality" to "literacy." Many scholars, convinced of the "strong" model's validity, devote themselves to self-fulfilling explications of the transforming powers of literary literacy. Buttressed by the survivalist logic of evolutionism, they have institutionalized the view that Chaucer's references to hearing represent a nostalgic carryover from bygone oral days. They have further shut their ears to the persistent "hear's" of Chaucer's contemporaries and successors, only reiterating at times the timeworn characterization of such references as "archaisms."

I can only hope that the evidence assembled in this thesis will contribute to the archaizing of such arguments. The time is coming to prize open the doors of critical perception, to make room for a more nuanced and conceivably more accurate conception of the cultural matrix within which medieval authors worked. Further investigations along the lines of the one conducted here might considerably enlarge our understanding of medieval reading

practices and of the complex relationships among various genres, areas, and periods.

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