THE DEVELOPMENT OF ENGLISH REALISM
1362 TO 1400

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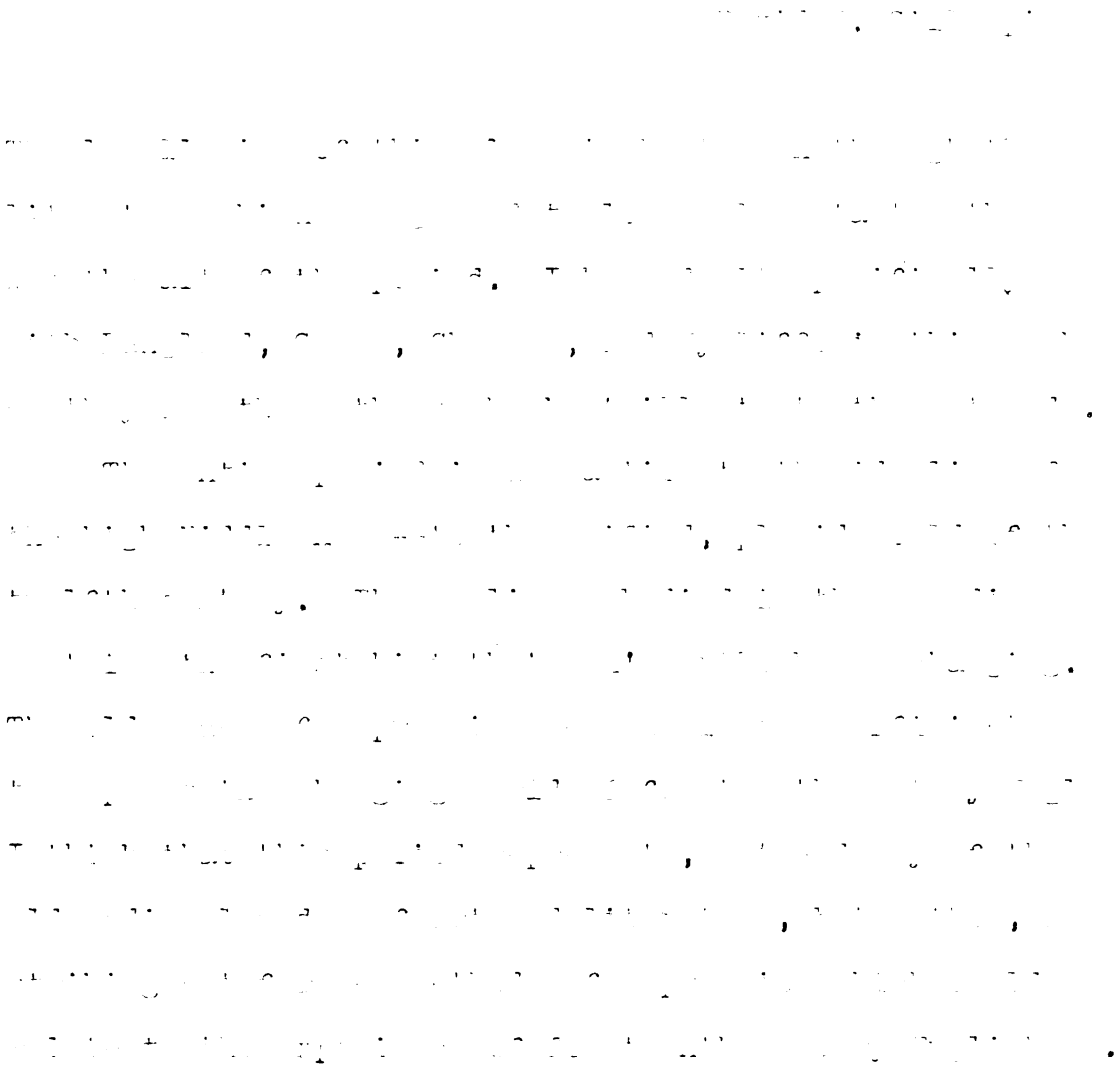

THE DEVELOPMENT OF ENGLISH NATIONALISM

1362 TO 1400

By

David B. Gillespie

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PREFACE

In offering this paper which has been my major occupation for the past few months I wish to make a few explanations and acknowledgments.

Surprisingly little work has been done on this subject or, for that matter, on the whole of the fourteenth century. While I do not make any claims to startling originality at this point I think that the realism which creeps into fourteenth century thought is very different from what went before and from what is to follow. I have not seen any work which deals with this particular area of English history and those who mention it do so only in passing or approach the problem from some point of view other than that of an historian.

English realism develops from roughly 1362, when Langland is thought to have written the Vision of Piers Plowman, to about 1400 when both Langland and Chaucer died. During this period Wycliffe, Langland, Chaucer, and Gower all did the majority of their writing. The art with which I deal takes form and reaches its peak. Though the realism I am dealing with does not

die out until the 1460's, this period is the age in which the disillusionment and reaction to the idealism of the Middle Ages is best expressed.

Most of the original works used in the second and third parts of this paper have been translated into English or French several different times. I have, therefore, attempted to use what is generally considered the standard translation; for example, the Robinson edition of Chaucer's works. Where quotations are included they will appear in the original language in the text with my translation in the footnote. I have resorted to this method because many of the quotations are in the form of poetry which could take on another meaning unless the reader is aware of the way in which I have translated them. For the sake of uniformity I have followed this proceedure with all quotations.

I have used the terms "Middle Ages" and "medieval" rather loosely. As a matter of convenience I mean to use these terms throughout to indicate the period of the high Middle Ages, roughly 1050 to 1300, though I realize that there are many different trends of thought running through this period which would frustrate a serious attempt to lump it under these designations.

My indebtedness to various authors will be mentioned in the bibliography and I will not belabor it

here. I would, however, like to take this opportunity to thank Dr. Marjorie Cesner who was good enough to take time from her own work and travels to help me both by directing my research and by reading and offering comments on my rough drafts. I also owe a debt of gratitude to my good friend Miss Jane Casner who volunteered to read and correct my manuscript for grammar and spelling errors and for veracity in translation. My somewhat tedious style has profited greatly from her suggestions.

David S. Gillespie

East Lansing, Michigan
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INTRODUCTION

The years between 1362 and 1400 present a picture of clashing swords and armies straining against one another. Perhaps correctly, historians have interpreted the Hundred Years' War and the Wars of the Roses as the last attempts of a feudal aristocracy to maintain their power and position against the new concept of a strong and centralized monarchy. Wars are the most understandable events in modern terms and thus, have been the center of attention to anyone studying the period, causing the whole conception of the period to appear as a decline in the ideals of the Middle Ages.

In reality this period is not a decline in old ways of looking at the world but is a striking out to find new methods of expression for a new and little understood world. Art and literature both manifest a profound disillusionment with the ideals that had sustained men during the Middle Ages, and, at the same time, they show a realistic reaction to the idealism of the Middle Ages.

The harshness of the fourteenth century in terms of disease, famine, and the decline of the basic

institutions which had unified the medieval world made the men of this period begin to question ideas and ideals which, a century before, had been accepted as a matter of course.

In this study I hope to relate this reaction to the basic disintegration of the medieval world which was taking place in the fourteenth century. There was a crumbling of the old order which, in turn, caused a certain uneasiness among the men of the age. There, ..., it seems to me, a loss of faith in the institutions and ideals which had been the basis of medieval life which is reflected in the form and content of artistic and literary endevor.

Any reaction to an idealistic period, once we discover the reasons for such a reaction, might quite logically take the form of a realistic trend. The aspects of life--and in this case, death--on which this reaction concentrates, give us a good clue to the ways in which men of the fourteenth century saw their age and to what factors were making them change their viewpoints. Since man, especially in the medieval and Renaissance periods, had always striven to express his world through some visible or concrete media, I have chosen art and literature as the best method of

seeing into the mind of this age. Artists and authors seem to me to develope a much more intimate feeling for the currents of any age because their purpose is to express many ideas in a single sculpture or story. Thus, it seems easier to capture the feeling of change involved in this period through these media.

The art and literature of the late fourteenth century both illustrate a change in form from idealism to realism. In content, they both illustrate the same basic points,but the emphasis is different. Literature is much less weighty, horrifying,than art,and views the period from a lighter, lower class view than does art which tends to reflect the outlook of the upper class whose members were, of course, the main patrons of expensive artistic works. The author is able to directly criticize in his writing but the artist can only criticize the system in a negative manner. He must make the existing situation look worse than it is to get his point across,and hence, we find a realism and concentration on the macabre which is a pointed indictment of the failing medieval ideals.

I think, therefore, that to view such a period of reaction clearly we must treat these media as interdependent and at the same time different in outlook. It is also important to realize that the type of art and

literature with which I am dealing does not constitute the entirety or even a majority of the art and literature produced during this period. The old medieval traditions do not suddenly cease but exist simultaneously with the new and do not die out until much later. The old modes as well as the new are visible in both these media but the injection of the realism overshadows the old and it is in this trend that the motion, the life of the period is to be found.

PART I

On the surface, the decline of the nobility appears in England some years after the decline became noticeable in France, but a close inspection reveals much the same deterioration which went on in France. The decline of the French feudal system has been seen as a result of the accession of the Valois dynasty in 1328.[1] This type of explanation, however, cannot account for the subsequent decline of feudalism as a system in the rest of Europe, nor does it help in a more general understanding of the period.

The feudal system grew up in much the same climate of disintegration and [illegible]onment as existed in the fourteenth century. It had grown up out of the remains of a crumbling Roman system but, by 1400, was finding that its solutions were no longer viable in a changing world.

In the period from 300 to about 750 the feudal system had grown up as a workable solution to problems which previous systems had been unable to cope with. The

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[1]Joan Evans, Life in Medieval France (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1925), p. 192.

necessity of protecting the lands from invasion and of supporting those responsible for this protection had been resolved through the creation of a hierarchic society. The relations between the lord and his vassals were determined by a set of regulations which were interpreted and enforced through the lord's court.

The ethical ideal of chivalry draws from romantic sentiment and heroic tales. It is impossible to have the ideal form of the noble life independent of religion and hence, piety and virtue were the essence of the knight's life. Within its basic context of religion the ideal was impossible to attain because of its earthly origin. Man is born in sin and can never quite overcome this fact.[2]

It is from this idea of aspiring to an earthly yet religious beauty that the formalized ideas of pride come. The central pole of the noble life was honor or pride.

> La gloire des princes pend en orgueil et en haut peril emprendre; toutes principales puissances conviengent en un point estroit qui se dit orgueil.[3]

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[2]Gustave Cohen, Histoire de la Chevalerie en France au Moyen Age (Paris: Richard-Masse, 1949), pps. 17-20.

[3]Chastellain as quoted in Johan Huizinga, The Waning of the Middle Ages (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Co., 1949), p. 70. The glory of princes is in their pride and in undertaking great peril; all the principal forces meet in one small point, that of pride.

The basic relationship, then, is not so much in the set of rules, enforced by the nobles' courts, but in the honor and loyalty which the ideal inspired between the noble and his vassals. The bonds of the feudal system were founded on "respect of mutual fidelity; but . . . not founded upon tenure of land, nor military service."[4]

By around 1350 the nobility was pulling farther and farther from the ideal though still giving lip service to it. At the base of the problem was the continual power struggle between nobility and crown. The position of the nobility decreased in respect to their inability to unite in order to contain a nascent, centralized monarchy. The most obvious result of this struggle are the civil wars which shock both France and England. Divisions among the nobles allowed strong monarchs to remove their most powerful enemies as was the case with Warwick the Kingmaker in the fifteenth century.

The continual wars brought about the invention of new weapons such as the Swiss pike, the longbow, and finally gunpowder, all of which tended to end the military dominance of the nobles. The original purpose of the class was one of war; they were the protectors of

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[4]Henry Hallam, View of the State of Europe During the Middle Ages (London: John Murray, 1819), vol. I, p. 142.

the realm and their business was war, but they were now losing the ability to perform this function.

Europe could not afford to withdraw large numbers of men from the land to fight until the fourteenth century. New agricultural methods had raised farm production to the point where it could support a non-agricultural class. This in itself was a new weapon. The English footsoldier took over many of the duties of the warrior class and the monarchs began to use this class against the power of the nobility and to emancipate themselves from dependence on powerful nobles. Even more importantly the English footsoldier learned, both in the Hundred Years' War and in the revolt of 1381 that he could overcome and kill a fully armed knight.[5]

From the time of King John the old feudal levies had been increasingly often converted into money payments. In order to raise the cash to pay for their exemption from service the nobles had resorted to the commuting of many of their rights into money payments. Land was let out at a fixed rent for as many as 999 years. Of course the varying degrees of inflation brought on by wars and famines in the first half of the century made the noble class

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[5]Arthur B. Ferguson, The Indian Summer of English Chivalry (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1960), p. 3.

comparatively poorer. This trend was offset, to some extent, by the considerable booty brought back from France during the thirteenth century, but the nobility was looking for a new base and tried various other money-making schemes, often at the expense of their tenants. They often dealt in trade with Europe, they fenced in their land and evicted tenants to raise sheep, and, less frequently, could be found in attempts to improve the output of the land.[6]

The nobility, as a group, had lost sight of its original purpose and had come to regard its position as an hereditary right but without the obligations which had been the reason for its creation. The nobles were well aware of what was owed them but tended to forget that it was, originally, a reciprocal affair.

> . . . ne that ther shold be gyuen to them the moost noble beste/ and the beste/ the most noble armures/ and the beste only/ But hym behoueth/ and it must be/ that he be made lord of many men/ for in seygnorye is much noblesse . . . [7]
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Thoffyce of a knyght is to mayntene the londe/ for by cause that the drede of the comyn people have of the knyghtes/ they laboure and cultyue the erthe,/ for fere leste/ they shold be destroyed . . . [8]

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[6]G.M. Trevelyan, History of England (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Co., 1952), vol. I, pps. 294-97.

[7]William Caxton (trans.), The Book of the Ordre of Chyvalry (London: Oxford University Press, 1926), p. 19.

[8]Ibid., p. 32.

The [illegible] thought [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] . . ."[9]

[illegible] [illegible]. [illegible], [illegible] in [illegible] [illegible] little [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]. The [illegible] of lineage by the Black Prince [illegible] the fact that the nobility [illegible] no longer [illegible] the [illegible].

> It was [illegible]; for all [illegible], [illegible] before them, begging for mercy; but he was so inclined [illegible] that he listened [illegible], and all [illegible] to the [illegible], wherever they could be found, even those who were not guilty: for I know that [illegible] the poor [illegible], who could not have had any part in this treason; but they suffered for it, and indeed [illegible] that [illegible] had been the leaders of this tragedy.[10]

The increasing amount of literature devoted to the [illegible]

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[9] Ibid., p. [illegible].

[10] [illegible] Froissart, Chronicles of England, France, [illegible], [illegible] Johnes (New York: J. Winchester, [illegible]), Chap. [illegible], pp. [illegible]-1. See also, [illegible], John of Gaunt (New York: [illegible], Inc., [illegible]), pp. [illegible].

ideals of chivalry which appeared in the late fourteenth century seems to indicate that the nobles were not living up to these ideals. It was necessary to remonstrate or at least to remind them of their duty.

Just as the nobility was rapidly losing its position in the late Middle Ages so, too, was the institution of the Church. Like the nobility, its base had been built during the early Middle Ages in response to a need which had existed at the end of the Roman Empire. It had become increasingly politically oriented at the expense of the spiritual, and it is during the fourteenth century that many of the abuses which led to the final schism in 1517 developed. Priests were uneducated, monastic rules were relaxed, and a vast portion of the higher clergy was comprised of second sons of nobles out to make their fortunes.[11] Nor was there any lack of ability to make fortunes among the ranks of these higher clergy, making the Church as an institution extraordinarily rich. The Church owned great quantities of land and through this could control the political scene to a great extent. Frequent legislation throughout Europe concerning Mortmain suggests that the rulers and people were not unaware of

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[11] Roland H. Bainton, The Medieval Church (New York: D. Van Nostrand Co., inc., 1962), p. 64.

this increase in the power of the Church and they regarded the Church's ever growing dominions with some jealousy. This seems to be one of the major points of criticism made by the authors of the age.

Another close parallel with the decline of the nobility was the increasing formality of the Church. The theory of justification by works deprived religion, to a great extent, of its spiritual vitality and only replaced the essentials with a dry, meaningless formalism.

> It was not that men were becoming indifferent to the destiny of their souls, for never, perhaps, have the terrors of perdition, the bliss of salvation, and the never-ending efforts of the arch-fiend possessed a more burning reality for men, but religion had become in many respects a fetichism.[12]

The practice of sending quaestuarii to pardon sins began to be thought of in terms of buying pardons and thus buying a ticket into heaven.

The most important facet in the decline of the Church's influence in England was the Babylonian Captivity which in turn resulted in the Great Schism of 1378.

Probably the most powerful of the medieval Popes, Boniface VIII, embarked on an attempt to enforce his rule over the kings and princes of Europe. This interference in the political affairs of Europe, though it

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[12]Henry Charles Lea, A History of the Inquisition of the Middle Ages, (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1922), vol. I, p. 76.

had been a long time in coming, was looked upon as a sudden and unwarranted infringement on areas where the Pope had no business. Boniface died in 1303 after he had been captured and manhandled by men in the service of the King of France. His successor, Benedict XI, died almost immediately and Clement V, elected largely because of the influence of Philip IV, decided to remain in France.[13]

For the Papacy the domicile beyond the Alps between 1305 and 1377 marks no sudden break. In the thirteenth century both Innocent IV and Gregory X had lived in Lyons for several years at a time. Clement himself seems to have regarded his stay in Avignon as a temporary arrangement. Schemes were always underway for the move back to Rome, and in 1322, detailed plans were worked out for a move to Bologna.[14] The decision of Benedict XII to build a palace at Avignon marks the final acceptance of the 'captivity.'

While the move to Avignon may not have been a radical departure from the practice of the Pope's residence, it certainly was a radical departure from the fact. It was assumed that the affairs of the French Monarchy

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[13]Trevelyan, History of England, op. cit., p. 76.

[14]Daniel Whaley, Later Medieval Europe from St. Louis to Luther (New York: Barnes and Noble, inc., 1964), p. 116.

would take precedence over the affairs of the Church. In retrospect this was not, strictly speaking, the case, but to the English, the Avignese Popes were French puppets.

The Captivity and Schism served to accent the problems of the English Church. The Church, already under attack because of its riches and morals, lost the prestige of the Papacy leaving the way clear for a national and anti-clerical wave of sentiment to develop. The Statute of Provisors, passed in 1351 and again in 1365, limited the right of the Pope to interfere in the affairs of the English Church, and a later act mentions the evil effects which directives from Rome had on the country's life.

The wealth of the higher clergy and their position as barons was another source of complaint. The Conciliar movement closely paralleled the struggle between the state and nobility which was going on at the same time. The cardinals were here in the role of barons attempting to limit the power of the Pope. For this role they needed a base of power and collected huge amounts of land and goods, thus it is not hard to understand the feelings of the majority of the people and the badly paid lower clergy toward these rich churchmen who more closely resembled the nobility than clergy. Neither, however, was this arrangement acceptable to the crown. Much of

the money received by French ecclesiastics holding benefices in England was turned against the English and used to support the French war effort. The Pope also claimed and exercised the power of taxing the Church in England. Regardless of how empty the king's coffers might be, the Papal collectors sent huge sums of money to the Pope to be used in his private wars in Tuscany and Romagna.[15] While Edward I's Statute of Mortmain forbade the alienation of land to the clergy, it did not solve the problem of the drain on the country's economy represented by Papal taxation. In this climate it is not hard to see how the preachings of men like Wycliffe might become popular.

The medieval ideal of society was essentially one of unity. Under the leadership of the Church all of society was welded together by social as well as political ties. The stark realities of the fourteenth century combined to dispel the social unity of England through a series of economic changes. An economic system which had arisen at the collapse of the Roman world was, in its turn, giving way to an entirely new concept.

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[15]George Macauley Trevelyan, England in the Age of Wycliffe (London: The Camden Society, 1912), pps. 181-89. Trevelyan quoted many examples of reaction to Papal taxation in this chapter.

In the eleventh and twelfth centuries the concept of the manorial system worked smoothly in England. The three estates seem to have worked together fairly well, and there was relatively little friction between them. Prices had remained fairly stable, and the general standard of living seems to have gone up steadily if slowly.[16]

Prior to 1300 land had been plentiful in England. The peasant usually had little trouble getting permission from the lord of the manor to open up a new strip of land. Soil exhaustion was an important factor, but, as Bennett points out, the land was probably already worn out long before 1300.[17] While land was plentiful, however, the industrious peasant could use a piece of land until it had been exhausted and then open a new plot using the cut and slash method, i.e., clearing land by burning the undergrowth. Thus, the peasant could probably have maintained a fairly high yield on the land by moving from plot to plot.

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[16]Denys Hay, Europe in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., ltd., 1966), pps. 22-31.

[17]H. S. Bennett, Life on the English Manor, A Study of Peasant Conditions, 1150-1400 (Cambridge: The University Press, 1990), pps. 78-89. If a strip of land is used for 100 years and left without manure for the first thirty the crop diminishes rapidly, but then it reaches a sort of plateau where it will remain averaging about 12 bushels per acre for many years thereafter. Using these figures Bennett comes to the conclusion that an industrious peasant could end the year with a surplus to sell and thus, make a fair profit.

Neither were the peasants unaware of the need for fertilizing the earth. The change in the tenth century to the three field system was a result of the discovery that the land could be made to produce more by alternating the types of crops grown on it. As the peasant had very little land, the amount of livestock which he could keep was limited, and therefore the amount of manure available was also limited. With fewer animals and ones which were more poorly fed than ever, the peasant got even less manure and he found himself in a circle which he could only counteract through a move to new land.[19]

By the beginning of the fourteenth century the land had all but run out. The lords no longer encouraged the clearing of new land but rather preserved their hunting forests imposing heavy penalties on any found tampering with them. About the same time a cyclical change in the weather seems to have occurred. The winters became longer and harsher while the growing season was shorter and colder. Crops began to fail, animals died, and famines took place more and more frequently.[19]

The population, which had been on the rise for the past two centuries, began to level off and even to drop

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[18]Ibid.

[19]Hay, op. cit., p. 32. See also Paul Vinogradoff, Villeinage in England (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1892), p. 290.

slightly. Several severe famines, the worst being the famine of 1316, produced a drop in the population curve and had the effect of weakening the resistance of the survivors to disease. Several epidemics ravaged England in the years prior to 1349 when the Black Plague swept England in all its fury.

The effect was immediate. On the Taunton estates of the Bishop of Winchester, for example, the deaths were recorded as follows: 23 in 1346, 54 in 1347, and 707 in 1349![20] Heavily populated urban areas were the hardest hit where, in some cases, up to eighty percent of the population may have died.[21] Russell's estimation of the population of England in 1347 is 3,700,000. Between 1347 and 1377 the population, according to his estimate, dropped some forty percent to about one and a half million.[22]

The scarcity of labor had the effect of driving wages and prices up rapidly.[23] A shortage of labor could not be offset by better use of machines as it can today. The remedy was either to substitute for serfdom free

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[20]M.M. Postan and J. Titow, "England During the Plague," Economic History Review, series 2 (1959), table I.

[21]G.G. Coulton, The Black Death (New York: Jonathon Cape and Harrison Smith, 1930), p. 103.

[22]Josiah C. Russell, "The Preplague Population of England," Journal of British Studies, vol. V, no. 2 (May, 1966), p. 16.

[23]James E. T. Rogers, A History of Agriculture and Prices in England from the Year After the Oxford Parliament (1259) to the Commencement of the Continental War (1793) (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1866), vol. I, tables I and II,

hired labor which is more effective, or to change the character of farming. Both these answers came into use.

The hiring of free labor increased competitive conditions and hence increased output. But, at the same time, it tended to increase wages drastically so that in 1349-50 the crown was forced to issue the Statute of Labourers aimed at holding prices and wages down. It tended to classify the free peasant and the serf together, increasing the discontent of the serf who could see advantages of moving someplace where the wages were high, and, where he was unencumbered by servile dues.

In the thirteenth century the land had been cultivated by the lord for subsistance only. Money was scarce, and most of the work was done by serfs. With the emergence of the town market for his goods, currency became an advantage. Because of the decimation of the populace there was more money per capita. The French booty of the period also augmented the supply of gold in England, and hence services were increasingly commuted to money payments. The lord then used this money to hire laborers. There was also strong incentive for the serfs to leave the manor and join the free labor force;

to keep them on the manor the lords were forced to commute their labor services.[24]

The growing market for wool coincidental with the growing cloth industry in England created another option for the land owner. Sheep running requires much less labor than does farming. Enclosures of the common land for sheep runs became common but did not cause trouble immediately as there was not enough labor available to till the land, and thus it caused no hardship.

"What was new in the slump conditions of the fourteenth century was a bitterness in the lord's relations with the villagers," says Hay. While there was land and while conditions remained good, the peasant could always improve his position through hard work, but these opportunities no longer existed. The lords, in many cases, had gone quite a way in giving up their ancient rights, but some attempted to ensure the ' ic services by strictly enforcing some of the ancient dues.[25]

The old thus lingered with the new causing discontent. The lower classes had a glimpse of a better life, but at the same time their complaints grew in numbers and intensity. The manorial system was, indeed, crumbling

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[24]Milton ' iggs and Percy Jordan, Economic History of England, 11th ed., rev. (London: University Tutorial Press, ltd., 1964), p. 61.

[25]Hay, op. cit., p. 35.

under the strain of new economic forces. The stronger central government growing up next to the feudal system placed an additional burden of central taxes upon the peasant, and it was one such tax which sparked the Peasants' Revolt of 1381. The Black Death is important as a landmark by reason of the fact that it created conditions which were unfavorable to feudalism as an economic system and created conditions which questioned it as a political system as witnessed by this revolt. "It upset the stability of medieval society, and strengthened a spirit of restlessness which led men to question the validity of existing institutions."[26]

This was a period of instability and turbulence in England. The four dominating political ideas of the Middle Ages, the Empire, the Papacy, the Monarchy, and the Corporation were all decaying. The Empire had, of course, ceased to exist as a unified whole long before and the positions of each of the other three were rapidly changing.

The Monarchy, in the medieval sense, was no longer able to cope with the problems of the state. The king, as a leader in war but with few other resources or powers,

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[26]Briggs and Jordan, loc. cit.

was unable to defend his kingdom and found it necessary to acquire increasing powers. The Hundred Years' War pointed out not only the faults of the medieval monarchy but of the whole political framework. New weapons such as the Swiss pike and the English longbow ended the superiority of the fully armed knight in war. Perhaps even more important for this paper is the effect of the Peasants' Revolt. Here, for the first time, English peasants found that they could stand up to armed nobles and win. The nobility had already seen the differences between the realities of life and the ideals of chivalry. Old ideals of love and virtue were not regarded with the seriousness which had characterized the early Middle Ages. They were often scoffed at and ignored by this class. "The whole chivalrous culture of the last centuries of the Middle Ages is marked by an unstable equilibrium between sentimentality and mockery."[27] The mental gulf between the classes was beginning to break down in this period.

The internal troubles of the Church were especially hard on its position in England where the Popes were spoken of in the same breath as the French Monarch.

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[27]Huizinga, op. cit., p. 69.

The increasing powers of the individual monarchies cut not only into the powers and rights of the nobility but also into the authority and pocket of the Church which had claimed to be the ultimate temporal authority. Although this claim was never recognized, the Papacy could make its powers felt if necessary. Increasing abuses further weakened the stature of the Church in England, and its distance from the Papacy made it hard to correct these abuses.

The Church had become a business enterprise for many of the bishops and those of the higher echelons. Religion had become a fetishism, dry and formal, but without the vitality which had characterized it earlier. Interest in the individual soul had died out to a great extent and the members of the clergy had become mere functionaries doing their jobs and drawing their pay.

The Plague emphasized a trend which was already beginning to overtake England--the ineffectiveness of the old agricultural system. Lack of land had made it increasingly difficult for the peasant to make a living, and bad weather, epidemics, and natural disasters emphasized the problem. The Plague cut the population so drastically that the peasant was offered an alternative which he had never had before. He could enter the free

labor market, or he could get higher pay and concessions from his lord. The existence of the old servile system alongside the free laborer created unrest. The position of the peasant was going up relative to the position of the noble, further narrowing the gap between them. The agrarian risings of the century originated mainly from richer lands, and their leaders were the prosperous rather than the poorer elements of rural society. Questions of status and envy of the privileges of the gentleman and priest seem to have been major causes of the unrest.

The conditions of fourteenth century England were not extremely different from the conditions in much of Western Europe where the clergy was just as corrupt, the nobiliar class carried on a struggle against the centralization of power in the hands of the crown, and the Plague had done as much or more damage creating the same labor shortages. The various solutions found to these problems constitute interesting fields of European history. But solutions are not found to problems which are not enunciated by some segment of the population and it is the enunciation of grievances which interests me here.

Changing social attitudes were reflected first through the media of art and literature in the late Middle Ages. In this paper I will examine the new modes, the new outlook on life, which develops out of this period. It is a sort of blunt realism which represents the reaction to the problems of which I have been speaking, and represents a reaction to medieval idealism. Langland, Gower, Wycliffe, and Chaucer all represent, in a great many ways, the old tradition and ideas of the Middle Ages as do the artists of the period. At the same time, however, they work in a new mode which is very different from what had gone before. They are much more similar to the medieval artists than to modern, but at the same time they foreshadow the changes which brought England from the medieval to the modern outlook.

PART II

The late fourteenth century represents a period of reaction to the hard times and social deterioration of the first half of the century. The art and literature of this age reflect the resulting changes in outlook and attitude by the second half of the century. Unfortunately, painting of this period is almost nonexistent today, much of it having been destroyed in the Wars of the Roses and the Revolution of 1649. The more solid forms of art and especially tomb sculptures, have survived in sufficient quantity that we may draw some conclusions about the period.

Early Christian art, especially Byzantine, had developed an elaborate set of symbols illustrative of their idea that in God nothing is empty of sense: nihil vacuum neque sine signo apud Deum.[1] Symbolism was a method of transcending the faults of pure logical expression. It places an architectural structure over the world--a 'hierarchic subordination'--which connects and makes meaningful things or ideas which logic alone

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[1]St. Irenaeus, as quoted in Huizinga, op. cit., p. 202.

cannot explain. A perspective is imposed upon the world which is very ordered and implies a difference of rank or sanctity for every object. The belief that the world is a mirror of God and that He can somehow be seen in everything is implicit in all the art and literature of the Middle Ages.

By the thirteenth century the intertwining of symbols had become incredibly complex. The four beasts, for example, had a multitude of meanings all very much related. The ox was the sacrificial animal of the Old Testament and symbolizes St. Luke whose gospel opens with Zacharias' sacrifice. The eagle is reported in the bestiaries to be the only animal capable of gazing straight into the light of the sun and is, therefore, the emblem of St. John whose gospel "transports men to the very heart of divinity." The Man is the symbol of St. Matthew whose gospel begins with the genealogy of the Old Testament. Finally, the lion is the symbol of St. Mark. It is the symbol of the courage--"The voice of one crying in the wilderness."[2]

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[2]Mark 1:3.

The four animals also symbolize the life of Christ. Christ was born a man. He died as a sacrifice hence, the ox. The principle attribute of the lion is that he sleeps with open eyes and is, therefore, the figure of Jesus in the tomb; the Resurrection. The lion is the figure of the Resurrection for another reason.

> The third feature is this, that when a lioness gives birth to her cubs, she brings them forth dead and lays them up lifeless for three days--until their father, coming on the third day, breathes in their faces and makes them alive.[3]

Finally, the eagle is the symbol of the Ascension.

The animals also have a third meaning, to express the virtues necessary for salvation. To be saved, the Christian must be, at the same time, all four. He must be a man because man is a reasonable animal and is therefore alone able to be saved. He is an ox because the ox is the sacrificial victim and, in renouncing worldly pleasures, the Christian sacrifices himself. He must be a lion because the lion is the most courageous of all animals. The Christian fears nothing after renouncing all worldly things. "The wicked flee when no man pursueth: but the righteous are bold as a lion."[4] He is an eagle

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[3]T.H. White (trans.), The Bestiary: Being a Translation From a Latin Bestiary of the Twelfth Century (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1960), p. 8.

[4]Prov.28:1.

because the eagle flies in the heights and looks directly into the sun so the Christian who has renounced the world may look directly at the things of eternity.[5]

This art was, I think, a comprehensive expression of Christian thought and philosophy in the Middle Ages. Art was conceived of as a sort of sacred writing; it is a symbolic code through which man may see the hand of God impressed upon the world. Characteristic of this art is its obedience to rules of a sort of sacred mathematics. Position, grouping, symmetry and number are all of great importance to the expression of this symbolic code. An example of this may be seen in plate I. The figures are not in their true proportions but are given size and form according to the medieval law of "spiritual dimensions" under which the figure's relative dimensions are equal to his relative importance. Thus, we see in this portrayal of the Lazarus scene that the Christ figure is the largest and that of the grave digger is the smallest. In the second plate of the Madonna and Child the latter appears to float over the left knee

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[5]More complete discussions of medieval symbolism are given in Huizinga, op. cit., pps. 200-214; and Emile Male, L'Art Religieux du XIII Siecle en France (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1919). This latter book is one of the most complete and definitive works on the subject yet written.

of Mary. The size and formation of the legs indicate that He was portrayed as a large baby or small man relative to the size of the mother.

The body is reduced to its simplest terms in an effort to de-emphasize the importance of the personality and to emphasize the sanctity. Each is a symbol for something else and therefore can have no personality of its own to interfere with the interpretation of the work. The size of the Child indicates that He is not to be regarded as a baby--a human--but an idea. The figures are generally frontal so as to engage the viewer with the eyes. It is in the eyes that the discourse may take place hence, the very schematic rendering of the lines of the clothing in plates I through IV. In plate III the very simple lines of the face--the inverted 'Y' shape and the schematic clothing combine to make only the most cursory glance necessary to comprehend the figure thus leaving the viewer to be engaged almost immediately by the eyes which gaze penetratingly at the viewer as if seeing into his very soul. Further, these figures are silent as if to emphasize the solitude and peacefulness of their state. They are anatomically immobile. One could not imagine them suddenly standing up. The lines of the clothing while individually indicating

Plate I

PLATE II

PLATE III

PLATE IV

PLATE V

movement, are arranged so as to balance each other creating the impression of immobility. Vertical lines are carefully balanced by horizontal. The combination of these factors again focuses the attention upon the eyes where the only motion may be found.

What was required of the sculptor of these works was a divine representation and not mundane realism. He was convinced that by reaching out to the immaterial through the material, man might have a fleeting vision of God.

> L'ignorant regarde, voit des figures, des lettres mystérieuses, et n'en comprend pas la signification. Mais le savant s'élève des choses visibles aux choses invisibles: en lisant dans la nature, il lit dans la pensée de Dieu. La science consiste donc, non pas à étudier les choses en elles-mêmes, mais à pénétrer les enseignements que Dieu a mis pour nous en elles; car "toute créature, dit Honorius d'Autun, est l'ombre de la vérité et de la vie."[6]

In fourteenth century England there seem to be two trends in art--and literature, too, for that matter. The most predominant of these is, of course, the continuance

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[6]Male, L'Art du XIII Siecle, op. cit., p. 44.
The ignorant see the forms, the mysterious letters, and do not comprehend their meaning. But the enlightened pass from the visible to invisible matters: in reading nature they read the thoughts of God. The science (knowledge) consists, not of the study of the things themselves, but in penetrating to the deeper meaning which God intends for us; for "every creature," says Honorius of Autun, "is a shadow of the Truth and of the Life."

of the medieval tradition but the other is the important one for this study. It is here that the symbolism and idealistic tradition begins to give way to realism. The individual takes on an increasing importance in the eyes of the artist. Professor Ladner would like to read the same all encompasing symbolism into the art of the fourteenth century as in previous forms of art but I think that there is a significant difference which is most apparent in tomb sculpture of the period.[7]

Christian sepulchral monuments generally have one of three subject themes. The first deals with the fate of the soul; the second gives a sort of review of the life of the deceased, portraying him in some active and very alive role; and the last deals with death, the funeral, and the effigy of the defunct. The first two of these are characteristic of medieval art up to and including the fourteenth century. While the effigy is intended to be a rendering of the deceased it is used for different purposes. Plates VI through IX portray the deceased in a calm, restful position. Edward (plate VII) seems to stare upward toward heaven and to have discovered something which mere mortals cannot find. The focus is

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[7]Gerhart B. Ladner, "Vegetation Symbolism and the Concept of the Renaissance," Essays in Honor of Erwin Panofsky, edited by Millard Meiss (New York: New York University Press, 1961).

PLATE VI

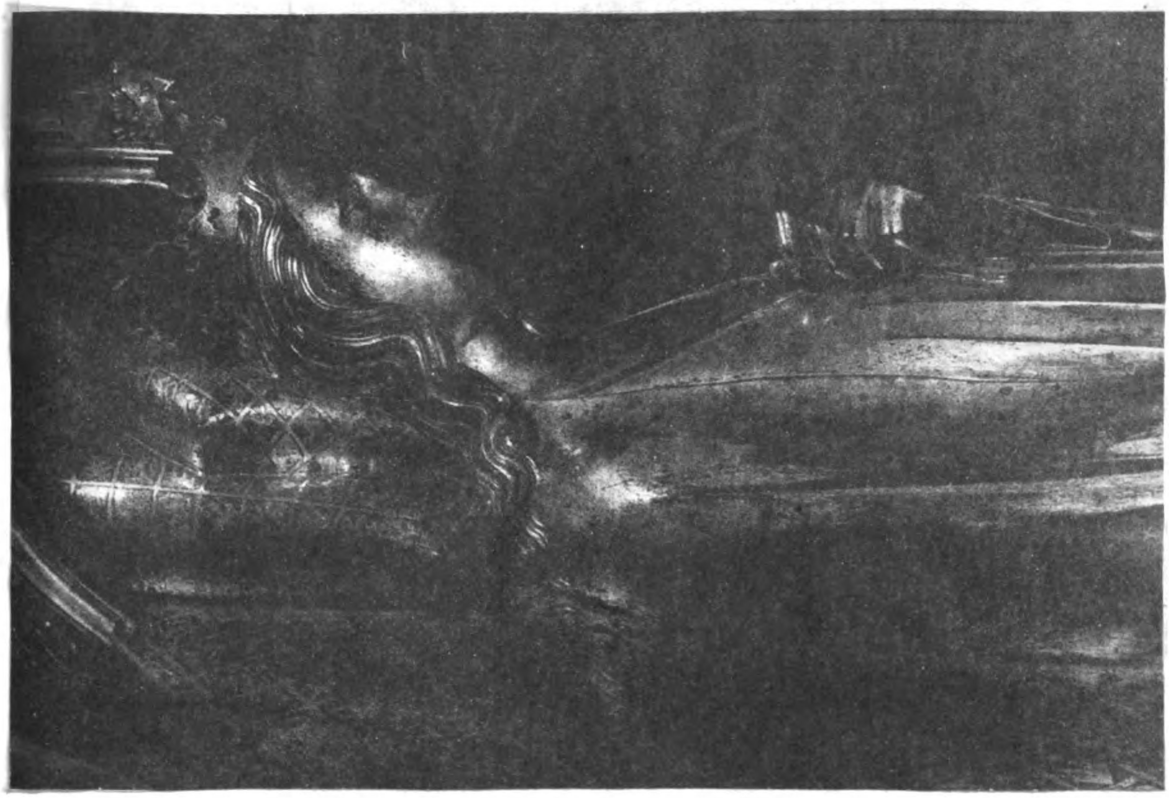
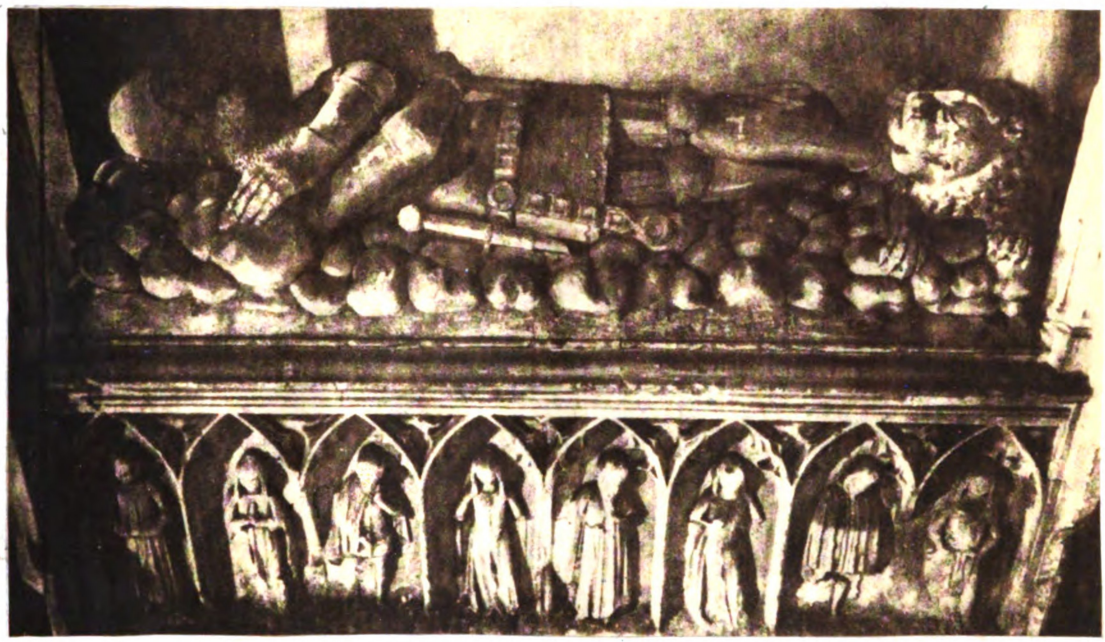


PLATE VII

PLATE VIII



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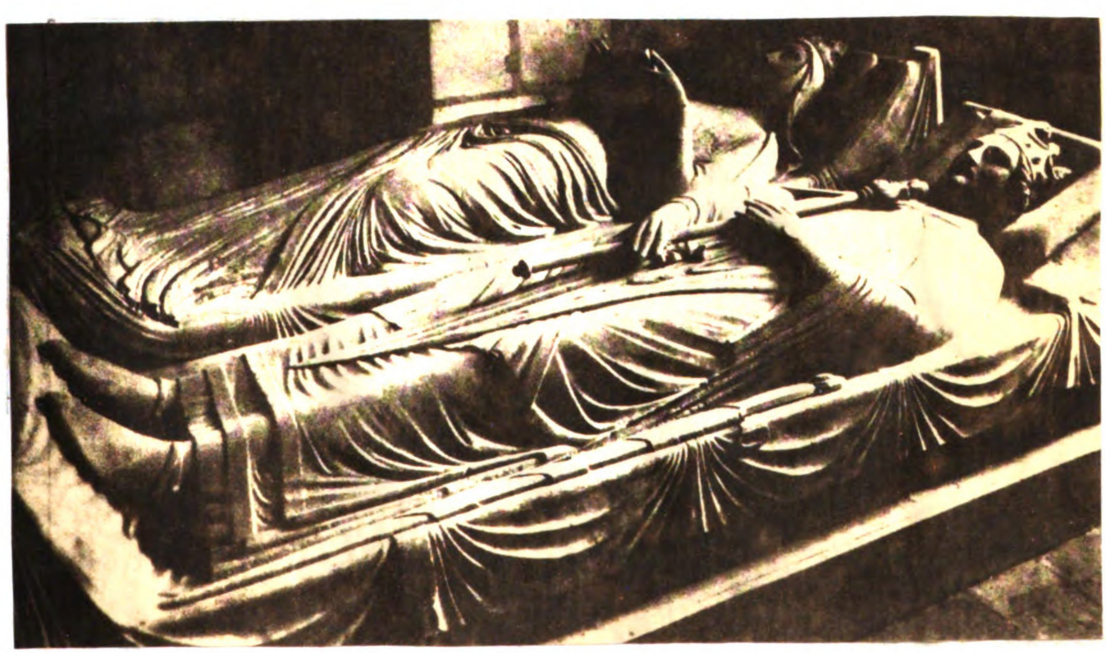

PLATE X

PLATE XI

PLATE XII

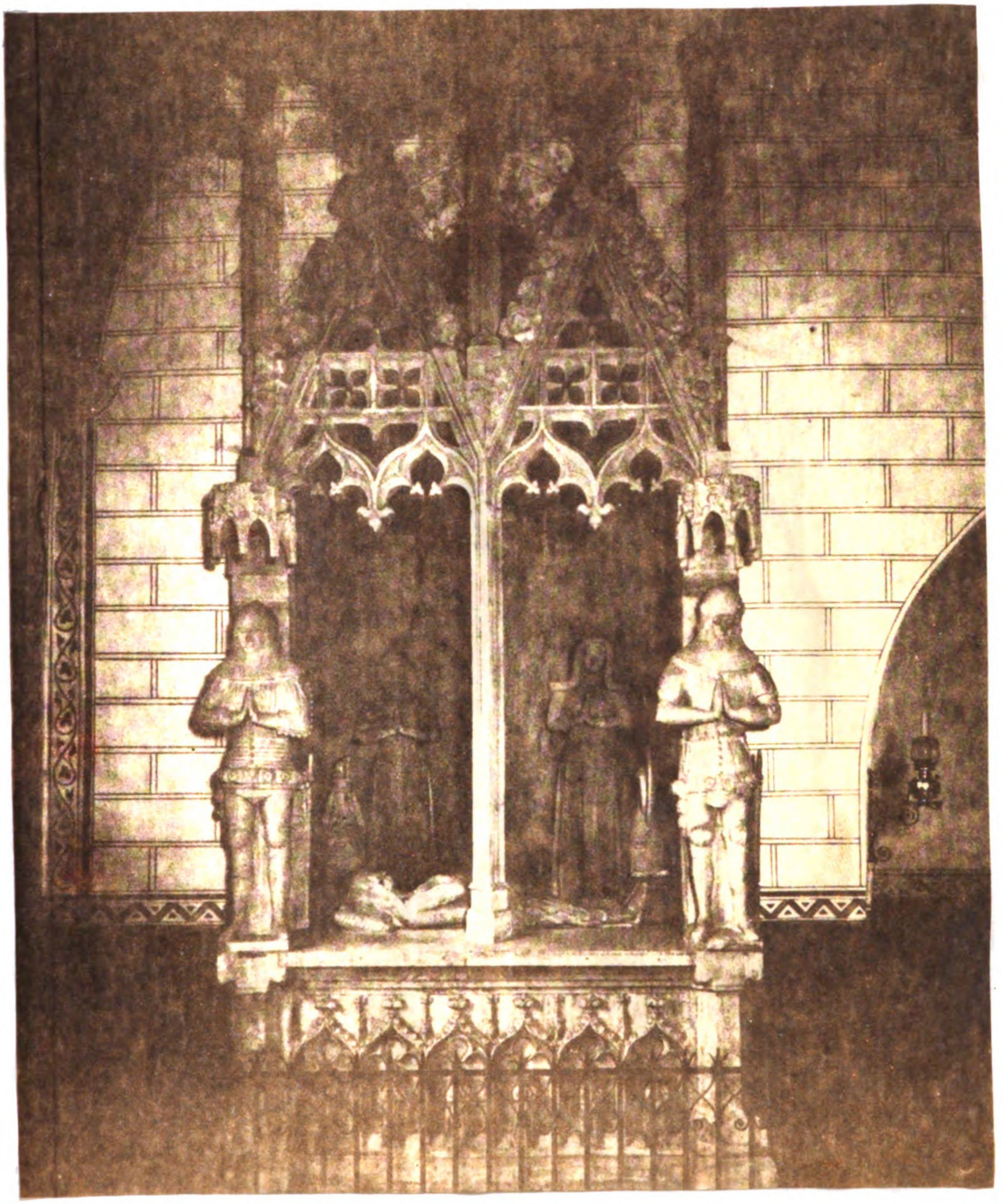

PLATE XIII

still very much upon the eyes, and the hair and facial lines are drawn in a symmetrical and schematic manner. The faces in both these portraits show a certain sense of peace and uninvolvement with the world. We are to see them as portraits not so much of the person but of the soul of the person as it is now to be found--at rest and separated from the cares of the world. The faces are those of young people in keeping with the medieval belief that at the Last Judgement man would appear at the same youthful age as Christ had been when He died.[8]

The second type of depiction is fairly common and is usually used to show the person in prayer or some other religious function and serves to remind those left behind that this person was holy, not as a matter of conceit but to indicate that for them too, there will be salvation and eventual bliss.

The last theme deals with the actual death of the person and centers on the more frightening aspects of death. Gone are the idealistic traits; the open eyes, folded arms, and youthful age (plates VI-X). S'Jacob distinguishes three general catagories taken from the epitaph on Henry Chichele's tomb in Canterbury Cathedral.

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[8]Henriette s'Jacob, Idealism and Realism, A Study of Sepulchral Symbolism (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1954), p. 29.

Miniatures on the tomb itself depict the three stages of decay; caro vilis, vermis, and pulvis.[9]

The caro vilis or vile flesh depicts the condition of the body shortly after death. Usually these depictions do not emphasize the horror as much as the peace of death (Plates XIII-XV). This, however, is not the same sort of peace found in earlier works. It seems to emphasize the idea that the troubles of life are at an end. The peace is not that of one whose soul is now in touch with the Creator but of something which no longer lives and breathes. Many of these figures are shown wrapped in shrouds (plates XIV, XV) which are not particularly horrifying. When the body itself is seen the artist does not shrink from showing the sutures used to close the body after embalming (plates XVI, XVII) but even here the aspect of horror is not entirely present. Plate XVIII shows the body in a more advanced state of decay and here the aspect of horror is increasingly evident. It is hard to tell whether such works fit more easily into the category of caro vilis or vermis.

Vermis usually indicates the corpse in the last stages of decay and, as the name implies, there are often

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9. Jacob, op. cit., p. 48.

worms and other types of loathsome animals present. The effigy of Francis de la Sarra (plates XI and XII) shows worms crawling through the arms and four frogs eating out the eyes and nostrils of the subject. The effigy of Henry Chichelle exhibits a somewhat hard to see animal eating out the stomach cavity while worms vie for the spoils, so to speak.[10]

Pulvis is a somewhat later development which portrays the body in a much more advanced state of decay--usually to the point that only the skeleton remains. This state is a product, I think, of the attempt to reconcile the idealism and the realism which I am dealing with in this paper. It is, therefore, somewhat outside the scope of this paper.[11]

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[10] Ibid.

[11] As I mentioned earlier, the period I am dealing with here appears to me to be a reaction to the medieval which is seperate and distinct from both the medieval and Renaissance styles. In the earliest stages of reaction the caro vilis and the vermis stages are used to make the portrayal realistic and at the same time shocking. The pulvis, however, is a stage which developes in the late fifteenth century and which combines the ideal and the real. The depiction of a skeleton is certainly realistic but it does not have the same effect on the viewer as the depiction of a rotting body. A skeleton may be viewed with a greater degree of detachment and it is meant as a depiction of death itself, a general concept while the caro vilis and vermis depict an individual personality. An individual's dead body does not allow the viewer to remove it from his experience by turning it into a general concept. The pulvis is thus a later development which comes out of an attempt to reconcile the idealism of the twelfth century with the realism of the fourteenth.

The purpose of the artist in this type of sepulchral art is to show the body of the deceased in transi, that is, the state between life and dust "to which ye shall return." The depiction of the embalming incisions such as are found in the tombs of John Colepe at Fyfield, Oxfordshire, and the tomb of Louis XII shown here (plates XVI and XVII), are obvious attempts to portray the reality of death. These transi's are what is left of real people, of people who once lived and breathed, they are not general concepts of the soul or of the beauty of the human form. Often the artist would make a death mask from the body or from the exhumed body of the deceased in order to make it more realistic to the viewer.[12] His object was to capture the state of decomposition at some particular moment in time. This points up the ideal that the passage of time which brings on this decomposition are all that the living and the defunct have in common.

The emphasis in the tombs is on the life of the transi rather than the death, if that is possible. The dead and decaying body has a certain macabre life

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[12] c.f. Jacob, op. cit., pps. 58-9. Exhumations were done in specific instances, normally when a likeness was desired for a tomb not finished at the death of the patron. This practice indicates that the old taboos against exhumation was no longer regarded with the same seriousness. It is also a part of the general attempt to preserve the visible form of the body which these tombs embody.

PLATE XIV

PLATE XV

PLATE XIV.

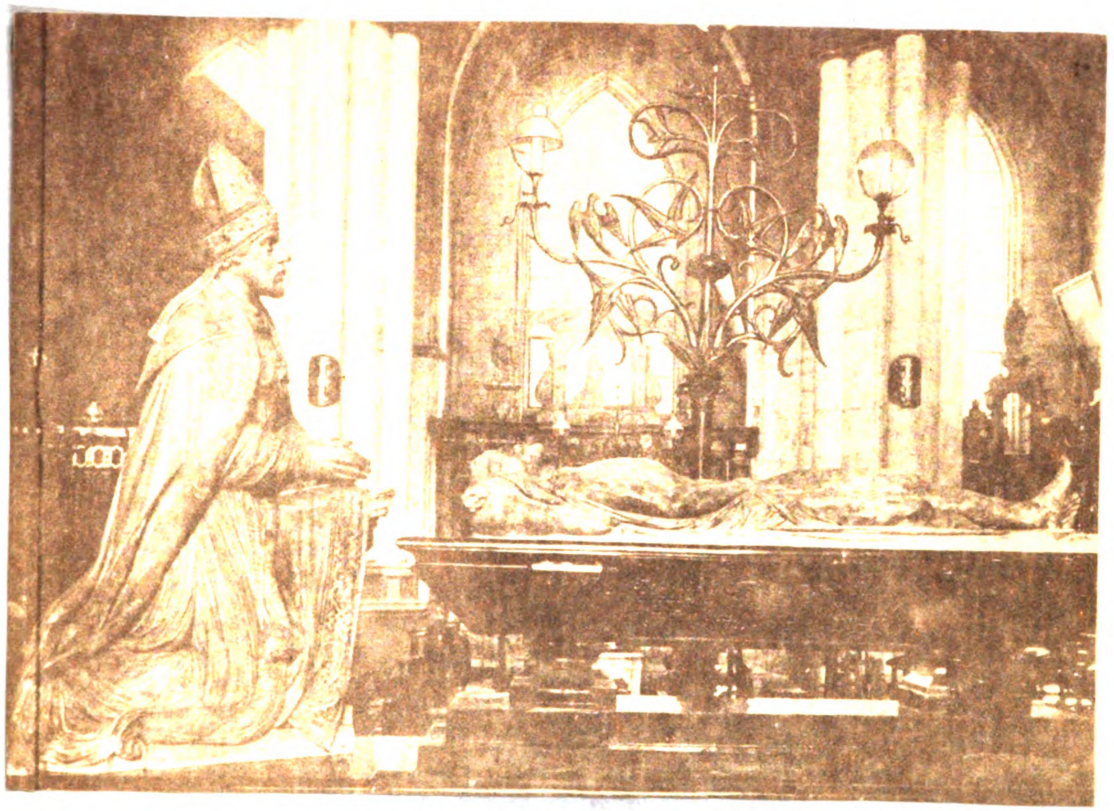

PLATE XLI

PLATE XLII


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LIST OF PLATES

PLATE XVI: Tomb of Louis XII and Anne of Bretagne (c. 1515).

PLATE XVII: Tomb of Louis XII.

PLATE XVIII: Louvre, Paris: Tomb of Catherine de Medicis (c. 1575).

PLATE XIX: Notre Dame Church, St. Omer: Tomb of Bishop Eustache de Croy (d. 1359).

PLATE XX: Straubing, Germany: Tomb slab of Johannes Grainer (d. 1482).

PLATE XXI: Bamberg, Germany: Tomb slab of Johannes Kamerarer (c. 1479).

PLATE XXII: Bodleian Library: "Death with His Spear", a miniature illustration of Lydgate's Death's Warning to the World.[13]

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[13]Plates I-V and X are taken from John Harvey, Gothic England, 2nd ed., rev. (London: B.T. Batsford, ltd., 1948); plates VI and VII are taken from Marcel Aubert, The Art of The High Gothic Era (New York: The Crown Publishers, inc., 1963); plates VIII, IX, and XI-XXI are taken from Erwin Panofsky, Tomb Sculpture, 2nd ed. (New York: Harry N. Abrams, inc., n.d.); plate XXII is from Roger Sherman Loomis, A Mirror of Chaucer's World (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1965).

of its own as compared to the dead, immobile effigies we have seen up to this point. The movement is not seen in the abstract soul--a soul which is outside the body and does not have any immediate influence upon the living--but in the body itself and in its relationship to the living; i.e., the real world. The soul has departed the body and we are left to look at the body which is the only reality. The presence of vermin makes the corpse a much more alive form than the skeleton and hence, more terrifying as "it seems to be animated by a life of its own."[14] But it also serves to make the tomb more closely related to the living and is meant to be seen as contemporary while the soul itself is beyond time and space. The standing effigy signifies the hope of resurrection while the reclining figure seems to portray the defunct as he was in life and has no allusions to resurrection or the soul. The soul is of little interest in the context of these tombs. These artists attempt to capture an instant in the life of the dead body. This time element is very necessary to relate the transi to the living viewer. Panofsky quotes the inscription on the tomb

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[14]Emile Male, Religious Art From the Twelfth to the Eighteenth Century (New York: Pantheon Books, Inc., 1949), p. 147.

of Johannes Grailmer of Bavaria; "In Johannes Grailmer behold the looking glass of life, Such you will be, for I was what you are."[15] It is the relationship to the living which the artist is trying to emphasize.

The medieval emphasis on the nobility of pain and death is gone. Death is considered here as man's enemy because of its suddenness. It does not allow man to better himself and because of its inevitability, it haunts all men. The idea that death was only the beginning of true happiness for the soul, and in that sense no tragedy, as seen in the Consolation of Philosophy of Boethius seems to be entirely absent in these works.[16] This type of art does not reflect the nobility of pain and suffering but rather the horror and pathos of it. The horror of the decomposing transi is almost a recrimination against God and the fate for which He is responsible. We are not looking at the world as a vast symbol but at the realities which are cold and merciless.

The dead man in these sculptures is the double of the living--the image of what he will soon become. The

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[15] Panofsky, op. cit., p. 64.

[16] Boethius, The Consolation of Philosophy and The Theological Tracts, trans. by H.F. Stewart and E.K. Rand (London: William Heinemann, 1926), see especially bk. 3, prose 2.

ancient theme of the three dead and the three living is carried over into art.[17] The transi does not represent death itself but a dead man and is, therefore, a realistic portrait.

The moral of this art, the suddenness of death, is directed to young and old, clerics, laymen, kings, and peasants alike. This brings us to another aspect of the realism of the fourteenth century art: the theme of death as a leveller. This theme was, I think, picked up by artists from the last decades of the fourteenth century and continues until 1471 when the skeletal brass of John Rudying in Biggleswade again turns to an allegorical or symbolic rendering of death.[18]

In both early Roman art and late thirteenth century art death is treated with great respect. There is a certain amount of nobility connected with death and the accompanying misery. To the ancient mind the figure of death as a skeleton was a reminder that one might die at any moment and hence one should make the most of

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[17]Francis Douce deals extensively with the original tale of the three dead and the three living tracing it back as far as Herodotus. Francis Douce, The Dance of Death (London: William Pickering, 1833), pps. 1-13.

[18]s'Jacob, op. cit., p. 63.

life now. Herodotus describes Egyptian banquets where a dead body was carried around the table while the bearer exclaimed, "Behold this image of what yourselves will be; eat and drink therefore, and be happy."[19] There was a sense of thankfulness that death had not yet taken the living.

The fifteenth century, on the other hand, retains the allegorical rendering of death but the moral is entirely different. It is meant to warn those not yet taken that death may strike at any moment and that they should be prepared to face the Last Judgement at any time.

For this period, however, the effect is very different. The emphasis on the horror, the reality of death, for the individual does, of course, frighten the viewer and impress upon him the suddenness of death and the necessity of preparing for the Last Judgement but this is not the main objective. Nor do we find any emphasis on the nobility of death; in fact, just the opposite is true. The very stress on reality is the moral. We are impressed with the idea that death strikes all equally and that the

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[19]Douce, op. cit., p.3.

body of the rich, the noble, deteriorates and rots in the same manner as does the body of the poor, the unimportant man.

This may be construed as a sort of religious message which, no doubt, it was in some cases, but I think that to focus on this point is to miss an essential part of the message. We must also look at the social criticism embodied here. The outlook on the nobility was changing. The medieval ideas of a structured world where each man had his own class and each class its own set of rules and norms were beginning to give way to the new idea that all men had in common a servitude to natural laws as well as to spiritual on a--something which comes out more clearly in the writings of John Donne. There seems to have been a sort of awakening to the fact that men all feel the same emotions, react in much the same ways, and, of course, die in the same way. The desire to live and the impossibility of escaping death is the terrible contradiction inherent in all men equally. The end is the same for all and it is not necessarily an after-life. The inscription at the foot of a picture of a dead woman, standing with worms crawling in her bowels illustrates well this idea.

Ma fois ce fut belle femme
Mais par la mort m'a devenu telle,
Si belle estoit très belle, femblable de tendre,
Or, est-elle toute tournée en cendre.
Mon corps estoit très plaisant et très gent,
Je me doulois souvent vestir de draps,
Or en drolet fault que toute me gesse.
Toujours estoit de gris et de menu vair,
En grand palais me logeois tout seul,
Or suis logée en ce petit cercueil.
Ma chambre estoit en beaux tapis ouvrés,
Or est d'araignes mon feurre environné.[2]

This trend of discouragement and nihilism is more representative of the upper than the lower classes, however. As it will see in the following pages, the lower classes embraced their levelling ideas in a different and somewhat purer manner.

It may be objected that I have dealt almost exclusively with body sculptures and have left out much other art of the period. I have failed to take into account the many examples of the old courtly types of art. The fact that the old art exists alongside the trends which I have tried to develop here does not affect my thesis since the ideal is bound to exist for a time and to find patrons who like the old art better than the new.

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[2] Adelgard Dubruck, The Theme of Death in French Poetry of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance (The Hague: Mouton and Co., 1964), p. 54. At one time I was the most beautiful woman/ But by death I became like this,/ My flesh was very beautiful, fresh and tender,/ Now it is all turned to ashes./ My body was very pleasing and very pretty,/ I used to dress myself in silk frequently,/ But now I am rightly nude./ I was dressed in gray fur and timber,/ I lodged in a great palace at my pleasure,/ Now I am lodged in this little coffin./ My room was ornamented with beautiful tapestry,/ Now my grave is enveloped with cobwebs.

Because of the length of time involved in the building of most cathedrals they do not reflect a period which covered only a maximum of fifty years. It is unfortunate that we do not have more surviving examples of English painting from this period. Only in tomb sculpture do we have enough examples to make valid generalizations. This art form has the advantage of survival because of the material of its composition, its placement within the confines of a church or holy place, and the taboos which prevent the desecration of tombs. Other sculpture does embody the same trend toward realism as seen in tomb sculpture but this latter form is particularly adapted for this type of expression. Because of the increased involvement of England in the French wars such expensive or frivolous forms of art as architecture and painting came to a pretty general halt until the beginning of the sixteenth century.

One aspect of the late Middle Ages not yet mentioned but which deserves some attention before concluding this section is the increasing body of knowledge of medicine. During this period much progress was being made in the study of the human body and, to a certain extent, the macabre in tomb sculpture is a reflection of

this increasing interest in the structure and make-up of the human body (see figures XX-XXII). Many of the woodcuts and illustrations look very much like medical illustrations rather than art forms (figure XXII). On the other hand, we must not over-emphasize a point which is only infrequently true of tomb sculpture. The realism of the tomb effigies is a trend based on an interest in realism and not in medical knowledge.

The realism of this type of art constitutes a reaction to the complex symbolism found in the art of the preceeding two or three centuries. The art of the symbol had been exploited to its furthest limits and was, by the end of the thirteenth century, becoming dry and lifeless. At the same time the nobility and the Church, the main support of this type of art, were becoming equally dry and lifeless. Popular reaction to these institutions would also encompass the means of expression which they commonly used. Thus, a reaction to a dry and formal church finds expression in a reaction to a dry, meaningless art which that institution uses as a means of expression. Just as the religious art of the Middle Ages reflected the state into which the Church was falling, the art of the late fourteenth century aptly reflects the reaction to this state.

I think that the ideals of the Church and nobility, the use of the allegorical and symbolic modes, were not sufficient to express the uneasiness engendered by the calamities of the early part of the century. It is important to note that the majority of this type of macabre realism is found in England and in France, the two countries most affected by the wars which, in turn, engender famine, disease, and hardship. Male further notes that in France this type of art appears most frequently in Normandy, Lorraine, and the central provinces, precisely those provinces most affected by the war.[21]

The art of the late fourteenth century reveals a three-fold reaction to the idealism of the Middle Ages. First, the art no longer deals in abstruse, intellectual, and upper class portrayal of the world through the mode of the symbol. Secondly, the attempt to portray an ideal, and an ideal of perfection, is dropped in favor of the attempts to portray the real world as it appears to the artist at a certain point in time. Finally, the suddenness of death and the fact that it comes equally to both noble and peasant lends a degree of levelling to the art of the period.

There was a need for some method of expressing the hardship, the raw pain and guts of the period--something

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[21] Emile Male, L'Art Religieux de la fin du Moyen Age (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1932), p. 358.

of this the cold, intellectual, idealistically-oriented art of the twelfth century was incapable. The attempt to express this feeling produced a new type of art which is a direct reaction to the art of the Middle Ages.

In dealing with realism the artist tries to project on the viewer of his art the same horror he feels when he views the death and destruction of his age--the same horror instilled by the sight of a dead and decaying body. To accomplish this shock effect the artist of this period resorts to the macabre, designed to shock and to bring the concept of death as close to the viewer as it had become to him in his everyday life. The idea of inevitable fate, which is again designed to shock the medieval mind which believed in salvation through the goodness of God, also appears as a condemnation of God and His creation.

The type of tomb sculpture I have dealt with here indicates a growing amount of cynicism brought out even more obviously in the literature of the period with which I intend to deal next. The type of art illustrated by figures III through XVII are not merely an artistic reaction but constitute a reaction in the minds of those non-artists who commissioned them. There is a reaction

to the promise of the after-life held out by the Church which, in turn, represents a reaction to the Church itself which is just as strong as the more obvious revolt against Church institutions which Wycliffe was to voice. The major difference is that it is the reaction of a class which is drawing away from the Church altogether and becoming anti-religious rather than a reaction to specific doctrines of the Church which could be remedied without the critic becoming any less religious.

This type of condemnation of fortune, and indirectly of Church doctrine, also involves another important attitude which was growing up during the period. The portrayal of death as irrevocable for all, regardless of station, emphasized the equality of man. Not only does the subject matter emphasize this equality before death but the very realism of the art takes it out of the hands of the educated upper classes and makes it painfully understandable to all. A breakdown of the gulf between the classes seems to be taking place. The medieval ideal of a place for each class gives way before death which recognizes no class lines. Thus, there are two aspects to be seen here. Among the upper class this constitutes an anti-Church reaction which condemns

God for creating such a world and disbelieves the teachings of the Church. It is a nihilistic reaction of a class which has seen its reasons for existence cut away. From another aspect it is a levelling movement which emphasizes the equality of all men.

As we have seen, then, a trend of reaction develops out of the circumstances of the age: the breakdown of the old social order and the constant hardship. This attitude finds its expression in art through reaction to the old modes of artistic expression and reveals to us previously unknown attitudes of class breakdown which take the form of cynicism and class levelling.

While the art of realism is certainly very different from previous Romanesque and Gothic trends it must not be assumed that this is Renaissance art. Realism and the Renaissance are not synonymous terms. The scrupulous realism, the attention to detail, the attempt to instill horror are, I think, reactions to certain trends of the late Middle Ages--something also present in literature. The revolt against idealism quite naturally takes a somewhat materialistic form. The attempt to preserve the visible form of the body through the use of various techniques such as the deathmask and the exhumation of

bodies to use as models was an attempt to preserve matter, a refusal to surrender the body up to the unknown.

To medieval man the material death and the subsequent process of destruction were not of great importance. What was important was the fate of the soul. Death and decay are not the result of natural laws that had to be accepted as a matter of course but are the direct result of the fall of man. Thus, this art of the real, the emphasis on the decaying body of the defunct is a sort of rebellion against this idea. It contains the implicit assumption that death and decay are a result of natural laws, and the three categories of decay described earlier--caro vilis, vermis, and pulvis--describe this natural and incontravertable process.

By the late fifteenth century the skeleton had lost its emphasis on individual traits and was once again an ideal form. Yet it was not an ideal in the medieval sense in that it was a symbol but rather, it was an ideal of beauty as illustrated by the tomb of Louis XII (figures XVI and XVII). This tomb contains all the elements of the realistic school but at the same time it is meant to delve into the realm of ideal beauty and simplicity of form. The triumph of the Renaissance was, in effect,

to explore or study the curious mixture and the stark humour of the ancient world with a breath of simplicity reminiscent of the pre-Christian world of Greece and Rome imparting into it many of the more admirable trends of the High Middle Ages.

PART III

The results of the catastrophic events of the fourteenth century seem to be illustrated clearly by the art of the last quarter of that century. It is not only in art, however, that these attitudes are brought out. Literature is the other principal method of expression to which medieval man had recourse.

The literature of this period illustrates essentially the same attitudes which we have seen in the art of the period. There is the same broadening, factual reality in the form and content of the works which, in turn, leads to concentration on devil and fate. Just as does the art, the literature of the age embodies a great deal of the bewildering sentiment of the century.

The emphasis in literature is somewhat different and for this reason it is instructive to view it in conjunction with art before attempting to arrive at any conclusions about this period.

The emphasis in these two intellectual fields is different to the extent that the artist deals with the morbid and with fate extensively while the bewildering

aspect of art is not so noticeable. In literature, while there are many instances of the same type of morbidity found in art, the point is not here but rather in the social criticism. There is more emphasis on the levelling and in the correcting of abuses than is found in art, perhaps because of the possibilities and the limitations of these two media.

The emphasis in the art involves a reaction to the medieval idealism which takes the artist into a direct revolt against the old form. One counters simply idealism with macabre realism--the first lulls and the other shocks. In literature the stress also involves a sort of reaction,but this is a reaction embodied in satire. The author of this period criticises social institutions; he criticises the idealism of the former age but in a way which produces thought or laughter but only infrequently shocks. Both media show profound discouragement, but there is at least some note of hope and levity to be found in the literature; something entirely absent in the art of the late fourteenth century. It is important to examine the literature of the period to get a somewhat different perspective of the same trends.

Wycliffe, Langland, Gower, and Chaucer all give penetrating analyses of society as they see it and all contain that element of reaction and realism which I attribute to this age. Langland's Vision of Piers Plowman is an allegorical poem of characteristic medieval unity having a beginning, middle, and end, all three parts being seen in the medieval mode of a vision. The dreamer falls asleep and has a vision which is explained as the Holy Church in the prologue. The second portion is the vision of Truth; the third, the vision of Repentance; and finally the epilogue which is a short summary of the teaching of the poem.

Similarly, Gower's major works are designed to present the same unity and are, again, in the dream-vision context. The Mirroure De L'Omme is an allegorical description of the origins of sin and vice. The Vox Clamantis deals with the way in which these vices have infiltrated and corrupted the social system. Finally, the Confessio Amantis gives a sort of over-all view of the purpose of the classes and a summary of the purpose and functions of the legal system. Chaucer's Canterbury Tales incorporates the medieval pilgrimage as its

framework and several of the tales bear a remarkable resemblence to the idealistic stories of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Wycliffe adopts a formula in his writings which is the usual attack of medieval theologians and resembles Boethius' Consolation in its method of attack.

That these authors drew much from the medieval tradition is unquestionable. At the same time they represent a new trend and they reflect new ideas. It must be kept in mind that these works do not, with the possible exception of the Canterbury Tales, represent a radical departure from the traditions of medieval literature.[1]

The fact that each of these authors wrote at least part of their works in the vernacular tells us something of their purposes. The use of English in documents did not suddenly come to a halt with the Conquest but died out gradually after the reign of Richard I. It is not until the second half of the fourteenth century that it begins to re-appear in public records, the earliest examples being some documents of the city of London dated 1384 and 1386. Private records are commonly

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[1]I am indebted to professors B.L. Jefferson and Greta Hort who have contributed exhaustive discussions of the medieval influences found in the writings of these authors.

in English after 1422, as are a large percentage of the public records.[2]

It is in the last quarter of the fourteenth century that the vernacular gets recognition as a legitimate vehicle of literary expression. As Mr. Leach has pointed out, the standard of education in the fourteenth century was by no means as low as has been assumed. Knowledge of Latin and French required a certain degree of higher education, but most people above the rank of common laborer had some knowledge of reading and writing English.[3] Wycliffe's Sermons were given in English. The Vision of Piers Plowman is essentially a sermon and is written in the vernacular. It is interesting to note that Gower writes only the Confessio Amantis, which deals with the lower classes and their relationship to society, in English. Criticism of the king, nobility, and clergy are in French or Latin. Miss Giffin points up evidence suggesting that Chaucer wrote on various occasions, including the Canterbury Tales, for audiences other than courtly groups. The striking contrasts and rich variety

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[2]Oliver F. Emerson, The History of the English Language (New York: Macmillian and Co., 1894), pp. 69-77.

[3]A.F. Leach, "St. Paul's School Before Colet," Archaeologia, vol. LXII (Oxford: The Society of Antiquaries, 1910), p. 191.

of the Tales are to some extent the result of the author's experience of writing for his London neighbors.[4]

The use of English made these works available to a far wider public. Writing in English allowed not only a greater reading public, but made them more adaptable to the oral tradition. Frequent employment of such phrases as, "Now lat us ryde, and herkneth what I seye./ And with that word we rydon forth oure weye,/ And he bigan with right a myrie cheer/ His tale anon, and seyde as ye may heere,"[5] indicates that the poet meant his words to be read aloud. The increasing use of English as a medium of satire and complaint reduced the gulf between noble, clergy, and peasant.

I think that we must now try to illustrate more precisely the distinctive realism which enables the reader of these various authors: it is a realism of a good deal of later medieval literature and is remarkably close to the realism we have seen in the art of this period. We might begin by looking at the form. These descriptions are intended to bring the work intimacy and to illuminate

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[4]Mary Giffin, Studies on Chaucer and His Audience (Quebec: Les Editions "L'Eclair," 1956), pp. 19-20.

[5]Geoffrey Chaucer, The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, edited by F.N. Robinson, 2nd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1957), General Prologue, lls., 855-859.

the same human personalities as did the realistic tales we have just examined.

Writers no longer depict their moral lessons in terms of allegorical figures. Langland's depiction of Gluttony is a realistic, everyday 'sketch'. The description is paralleled by a description of a night at the pub which sets a very real and raucous atmosphere.

> There was laughing and louring and 'Lat go the cogge!'
> Bargaynes and bevereges bygan tho to aryse,
> And seten so til evensong, and songen wel-whyle,
> Til Glotoun hede yrobbed a gallon and a gylle.
> His guttes gan to gothly as two erydy sowes;
> He pissede a potel in a pater-noster-whyle,
> He blew his rounde ruet at his ryghebones ende,
> That alle that herde the horne helde here nose after
> And wenched hit hadde be vasche with a wepe of heores.
> He ughte nother stoppe ne stande til he a staf hadde,
> And thenne gon he go lyke a gleeman byche,
> Ous tyne aside and ous tyne a-rere,
> As who-so leyth lymon for to lacche foules.[6]

This drunkard is very real, made even more so by the fact that he is a blusterer who cannot hold his ale and must be helped home and into bed by his wife and friends. His first words upon awakening are, "Who holt the bolle?" adding a note of humour to the description.

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[6]William Langland, The Vision of Piers Plowman, edited by Elizabeth Salter and Derek Pearsall (London: Edward Arnold, Ltd., 1967), chap. 4, lls. 191-199.

Chaucer and Gower both treat gluttony in the same realistic manner ascribing this characteristic particularly to monks, though Chaucer's principal glutton is the Franklin.

> His heed was balled, that shoon as any glas,
> And eek his face, as he hadde been enoynt.
> He was a lord ful fat and in good poynt;
> His eyen stepe, and rollynge in his heed,
> That stemed as a fornyes of a leed;[7]

Gower's monks avoid

> . . . being hungry, and slake their thirst with wine. They get rid of all cold with their warm furred cloaks. Faintness of the belly does not come upon them in the hours of night, and their raucous voice does not sing the heights of heaven in chorus with a drinking cup. A man of this kind will devour no less than several courses at table, and empties a good many beakers in his drinking.[8]

Langland, though more charitable towards the monk, is equally realistic in his portrayal. The medieval sense of awe is missing here just as it is in Chaucer and Gower.

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[7]Chaucer, op. cit., General Prologue, lls. 198-202.

[8]John Gower, The Major Latin Works of John Gower, Vox Clamantis, edited and translated by Eric W. Stockton (Seattle: The University of Washington Press, 1962), bk. IV, chap. 1, lls. 25-30.

> I have be prest and person passynge thretti wynter,
> yete can I neither solfe, ne synge, ne seyntes lyves rede.
> But I can fynde in a felde, or in a fourlonge an hare,
> Better than in beatus vir, or in beati omnes
> Construe can clawe wel, and kenne it to my parochianes.[9]

All three passages reflect an attitude of degeneration in which the Church, and especially monks, were held, but more importantly, they reflect an attention to the personality and to realism in writing which is closely akin to the realism of late fourteenth century art.

The vision of the Holy Church in passus two of the Vision of Piers Plowman describes an etherial scene which very aptly gives the reader the impression of a dream. Chaucer, on the other hand, was not attempting to describe a dream but rather a wide-awake and slightly crass scene. His description of the Knight who "loved chivalrie,/ Trouthe and honour, fredom and curteisie," placed in opposition to the Franklin, Shipman, and the Wife of Bath whose teeth were missing and rotten, who rode a horse and laughed uproariously with the men, creates just such an impression.

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[9]William Langland, Vision of Piers Plowman pass. V, lls. 422-426 as quoted in G.R. Coat, Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England (New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1961), p. 278.

The realism of this literature makes the scenes vivid and probable. Often, little comparisons are used, such as Gower's description of the peasant rabble in which he compares them to a farmyard full of beasts. This is not in the allegorical sense but merely to illustrate and to make understandable in everyday terms what he is trying to say. In much the same way Langland often injects little quips which the hearer will laugh at but which will make the point clear.

> But yf ye longe lesinge and lete the pore
> Of swich good as god yef yow good goddliche parte,
> Ye na haveth no more mercy te in manide he is hedres
> Than Malkyn of hare ayebbed whan no man hem cumeth to.[10]
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Chastite withouten charite worth chaved in helle;
> Wit is an Angel thyng and a lauhge thyt no liht
> is yuele.[11]

In literature, then, we find the same realistic, lower portion which existed in art. Scenes are portrayed in terms which are familiar and therefore understandable to a much larger portion of the population. Things are seen in a more realistic light--in terms of what is rather than in terms of that ought to be. There is a growing appreciation of realistic, earthy stories as

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[10]Langland, op. cit., chap. 2, lls. 178-182.
[11]Ibid., chap. 2, lls. 195-2[illegible].

opposed to the idealistic, romanticized stories of the Middle Ages which always portrayed the world in allegorical terms. Shades of gray indicative of a more complicated world view were coming into the writing of the period. Simplicity, idealism, and the black and white illustrations of the medieval authors were no longer sufficient to express the mood of the age.

Just as in art, the attempt to portray morals in familiar terms often focuses upon the relationship of man to fate and destiny. The preoccupation with fate and destiny was seen in the early Middle Ages when Boethius came out with his reconciliation of God's knowledge and man's free will and again comes to the fore with the scholastics of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. It is not surprising, therefore, to find that this became a topic of interest to fourteenth century authors and artists. The effect of the new realism, however, changes the manner in which man look at fate and destiny. A good illustration of this combination of realism and destiny comes from a sermon by a late fourteenth century preacher, the Master of Hypon, who, in order to shock his readers, uses the death image combined with a realistic image of the corpse in a tomb.

> For they rejoice more in artificial beauty than in natural beauty; and be they men or women, such as adorn themselves in their garments or by means of some other artificial decoration, to give wanton pleasure to each other are well compared to a painted sepulchre in which lies a foul corpse . . .[12]

The medieval idea of death as illustrated by the Consolation of Philosophy is seen not as an affliction but rather as the culmination of a long journey. Life is transitory and painful as opposed to the perfect bliss of the world to come. Thus, death is a release from the shortcomings attendant on man in a mortal state. Death shows up the evilness of the body for what it is and must, therefore, be looked upon as somewhat of a blessing.

It is not until the fourteenth century that death comes to be viewed as something to be feared. In part a result of the hard times of the fourteenth century and a result of the trend toward realism, death becomes very real, very graphic, with the focus being on the more morbid aspects. Another important factor in the understanding of this phenomenon is the changing way in which man looked at his position on earth with regard to free will, salvation, and questions of theodicy.

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[12]Owst, op. cit., p. 405.

Langland considers love, charity and the other Christian virtues very necessary for salvation. Man has free will to chose his actions and thus, only those who have fallen away from the life of a Christian are barred from heaven. By the same token it is man's free will which preserves him from damnation. Good works without faith are useless just as faith without good works is useless yet in the end, it is God's own free will, or God's Grace, which saves man. "Thus myhte thow lesen his love, to lete wel by thysulven,/ And geten hit agayne thorw grace, ac thorw no gifte elles."[13] In Langland's view this gift of grace went to all men and is an instrument of universal salvation with God having mercy on all except those who have chosen the evil over the good. Of evil in the world he merely says that since God has made the world it must be good.

> God, that of thi goodnesse gonne the world make
> And wadest of nauhte auhte and man liche thysulve,
> And sethe soffredest hym to synge, a sykonesse to us alle,
> And for oure beste, as I beleve, what-so the book telle.[14]

Langland's view is close to that of the medieval church in that man, through his free will may save himself from falling into evil. There is no predestination present here even though man is seen as saved only through

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[13]Langland, op. cit., chap. 5, lls. 149-50.
[14]Ibid., chap. 5, lls. 4-7.

the grace of God. He does not see this as an answer to the predestination argument but says that this cannot be answered by those who "seekest after the whyes."[15]

This doctrine of salvation by grace was taken by Wycliffe in an entirely different vein. Faith, to Wycliffe, only makes the soul ready to receive the grace and to understand God's purposes.[16] Wycliffe's doctrine of predestination is in sharp contrast to the somewhat kindly interpretation of God's grace given by Langland. "His doctrine of Predestination," says Stacey, "is as rigid a one as can be found outside of Calvin."[17] For Wycliffe, man's free will is non-existent. "No man," he says, "can work well, and love God, or be chaste, unless God give it to him. . . . Not of thyself hast thou power to gainstand, but of Him."[18]

Langland differs only moderately from the Catholic doctrine in that he emphasized the grace of God above and independently of good works. Wycliffe differs radically in his predestinational outlook, which lends a feeling of hopelessness to this outlook. This view is,

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[15]Greta Hort, Piers Plowman and Contemporary Religious Thought (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1936), p. 109.

[16]John Wickliff, "On Belief," Writings of John Wickliff (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1831), p. 52.

[17]John Stacey, John Wyclif and Reform (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1964), p. 96.

[18]Wycliffe, "Of Man's Will," op. cit., pps. 119-20.

I think, similar to the treatment of fate and destiny given by Cohen and Chaucer.

In the Knight's Tale Palamon adopts a resigned predestinational attitude of discouragement when he says,

> The destinee, ministre general,
> That executeth in the world over all
> The purveiance that God hath seyn biforn,
> . . . Be it of werre, or pees, or hate, or love,
> Al is this reuled by the sight above.[19]

Again in the Wife's Prologue Chaucer seems to set by a pre-ordained fate.

> "Charbocles, cursed be that proude
> That thou lyst to that yonge knyght fre the bryde!
> Thou were ful wel ywarned by Medea
> That subtile day was perilous to thee;
> But that thou feledest noght what harm it ment,
> After the opinion of certein clerkis."[20]

In this way the story of Troilus and Criseyde is caught also by inevitable fate. The love of the hero and heroine are inexorably linked to the fate of Troy, a fate which "is more terrible, it seems, than themselves, aside from human frailties, do nothing to bring on the sad tragedy."[21] Why, Chaucer seems to be asking, is

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[19] Chaucer, op. cit., Knight's Tale, ll. 1663-68.
[20] Ibid., Wife's Prologue, ll. 3699-3705.
[21] Samuel L. Jefferson, Chaucer and the Consolation of Philosophy of Boethius (Princeton: The Princeton University Press, 1917), p. 121.

man so often the victim of arbitrary, cruel, and ironical fate? Why is it "That folk unguilty suffren hire injure,/ An who that giltif is, al quyt goth he?"[22]

The vision of Fortune seems to have lost its original position as the servant of God's will and now comes to represent that will itself which is more often than not seen as a pre-ordained fate. Jean de Meun describes Fortune with her wheel as moving from place to place, always spinning up and down, always bearing men to their destruction as she spins downward.[23] The wheel picks up men and throws them out as grinning skeletons. She is often seen as presiding over a group of men digging for gold. Chaucer's Pardoner's Tale tells the old story of the three revelers who are irresistibly drawn to death which they find in a pile of gold. But, as in the depiction of the legend by the sculptor, Chaucer strives to make this a realistic story in the sense that the hearer can relate intimately to it, just as the viewer relates intimately to the tromi which represents an individual rather than a general concept of death.

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[22]Chaucer, op. cit., Troilus and Criseyde, bk. III, lls. 1018-19.
[23]Jefferson, op. cit., p. 51.

In the prologue of the Confessio Amantis Gower pictures fortune and her wheel.

> For the wheel turns and turns about,
> Not for an hour is Fortune still;
> No man alive has all his will.
> Nothing, as far as we may know,
> Endures beyond a breath or so;
> The world stands ever in debate,
> And safety dwells with no estate,
> For here and there this world must go,
> And up and down, and to and fro,
> And ever has done and shall do.[24]
>
> . . . . . .
>
> But sche which keeth the blinde wheel,
> Venus, whan thei be most above,
> In al the hoteste of here love,
> Hire wheel sche torneth, and thei falle
> In the manere as I schal telle.[25]

The horror and discouragement of this type of fatalism seems to pervade the period and is intended to have the same effect on the listener as the cure vilis or vermis stages of decay had upon the viewer of a tomb. Thomas Walsingham refers to the lords who believed that there was no God, no sacrament of the alter, no resurrection after death, but that as the animal dies, so also ends man.[26] Gower confirms this outlook when he speaks of

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[24]John Gower, Confessio Amantis, edited by Terence T. Miller (Harmondsworth, Eng.: Penguin Books, 1963), bk. I, lls. 562-571.

[25]Ibid., bk. I, lls. 2490-94.

[26]MacEdward Leach (ed.), Studies in Medieval Literature in Honor of Professor Albert Croll Baugh (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1961), p. 26.

a merchant in the Mirroure de L'Omme who lacks any faith in the after life.

> Dont un me disoit l'autre jour,
> Cil qui puet tenir la doulcour
> De ceste vie et la dervoie,
> A son avis ferroit folour,
> C'apres ce nulz scist la verrour,
> Quel part aler ne quelle voie.[27]

Chaucer's attitude toward fate seems to be rather explicitly stated in the conclusion of Troilus.

> Swich fyn hath, lo, this Troilus for love!
> Swich fyn hath al his grete worthynesse!
> Swich fyn hath his estat real above,
> Swich fyn his lust, swich fyn hath his noblesse!
> Swich fyn hath false worldes brotelnesse!
> And thus bigan his loving of Criseyde,
> As I have told, and in this wise he deyde.[28]

And as in Troilus dies dying he proposes to enter the place "Ther love, withouten any contrarye." As to where Arcite is going the Knight declines to say.[29]

Chaucer's questioning attitude, his asking of questions such as,"Why hast ye wroght this werk unresonable?" of God, led him into the sort of predestination hopelessness

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[27]John Gower, The Complete Works of John Gower, edited by G. C. Macaulay, Vol. I: The French Works (Mirroure de L'Omme) (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1899), lls. 15915-920. One told me the other day/ that he who could have the ordering/ of this life and turns it down,/ to his opinion is a fool,/ after this life no one knows the truth/ of where to go or by what road.

[28]Chaucer, op. cit., Troilus and Criseyde, lls. 1828-34.

[29]Chaucer, Ibid., Knight's Tale, lls. 2810-11.

which Tolstoy's outbursts against the inequities of man's lot seems to illustrate. The difference between the authors and artists is one of accent. The artist seems to be portraying the nihilism of a discouraged and disenchanted upper class while the author is speaking to questions which arise out of the rising lower classes.

The good and merciful lord which Lang'land sees behind God's power is absent in Gower and, to a greater extent, Chaucer and Wycliffe. The influence of Wycliffe's predestinarian doctrine is evident in the following paragraphs. It is not Wycliffe's ideas which form these ideas, however. Wycliffe is only a floating attitude which had begun to form in the middle of the fourteenth century. Besides the attitude which he reflects there is also a considerable amount of social levelling implicit in the rise of fate and death just as there is levelling involved in the increasing use of the English language.

There was considerable sentiment in favor of various types of levellation in the last half of the fourteenth century. As Owst puts it "a wave of democratic agitation was sweeping over Europe. . . . the pulpits of the land were often no better than rostra, stirring the blood of the multitude . . ."[2] The pulpit then of the

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[2]Owst, op. cit., p. 307.

them, "When Adam delved and Eve span,/ Who was then a gentleman?" became the watchword of the day. Complaint, after citing their common religious privileges, says, "In these and many other things the right of the poor [illegible] *[illegible]*."[21]

Wycliff's theological views tended also to liberate the common man from the domination of the Church. His political views seem to be closely tied to his own position and to his need for the protection of the nobility. He insisted at several points that nobility is due to virtue rather than birth but he also makes it very clear that no matter how bad they are the kings and nobility are to be obeyed.[22]

Gower, on the other hand, argues for the original equality of man saying:

> Tous suimes d'un Adam issuz,
> Combien que l'un soit au dessus
> En halt estat, et l'autre enbas;
> Et tous au mond nasquimes nudz,
> Car je nasquist si riches nulz
> Qui de nature ot un [illegible].[23]

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[21] *Ibid.*, p. 292.
[22] [illegible], *op. cit.*, p. 1[illegible].
[23] Gower, *Mirrour*, *op. cit.*, lls. 23389-394. We all issue from the same Adam,/ Even though one is in high estate and the other in low;/ And all are born nude into the world/ for never is one born so rich as to/ possess by nature a single shoe. (The phrase 'single shoe' emphasizes man's nudity.)

The law is the salvation and also the guarantee of equality to Gower.

> Justice est ferme entent
> De volenté que jo ne fine,
> D'un riche et pobre en jouste ling,
> Son dreit a chescun voit current:[34]

In the Speculum, Gower says that the law itself is pure and good but it is the guardians of the law who pervert it.[35] Thus, Gower sees the duty of the upper classes to be one of defending and administering the law. In the medieval vein he expounds the cause of the common good, with each element of society fulfilling its task. We attribute the Peasants' Revolt as folly because it breaks down the cause of law and order.

Gower is essentially a political theorist. In this respect he differs from Wycliffe for, although both seem to see sin as the cause of the troubles of the century, Wycliffe finds this sin in the structure of the Church and Gower in the structure and administration of the laws.[36] Wycliffe would radically alter the structure of the Church as a remedy for the situation but Gower would only take

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[34] Ibid., Mirroure, lls. 15195-198. Justice is a firm determination/ of the will that never ends/ which gives justly to rich and poor/ each his right.

[35] Ibid., Mirroure, lls. 24601-604.

[36] Ibid., Mirroure, lls. 27929-240. See also Rose-Edward Leach, loc. cit.

over the system of the law is working or it is supposed to and does not consider his idea new or different. He only wants to remind the guardians of the law to uphold it as or not to give the peasants a cause to overthrow it. He sees the peasant's view in this speech, which he attributes to John Ball, as the overthrow of all law and order; aims which are abhorrent to him.

> O you low sort of wretches, which the world has subjugated for a long time by its law, look, now the day has come when the peasantry will triumph and will force the freemen to get off their hands. Let all honor come to an end, let justice perish, and let no virtue that once existed endure further in the world.[37]

At the same time these lines betray some of the leveller spirit which was popular during these years. Gower speaks frequently of the common good, seeking to emphasize this concept. The bad conduct of the rulers destroys "l'oeur comun", covetousness on the part of the king or nobles destroys "la comun profit vert" and on the part of the knights who are supposed to protect "le comun droit", concord among the clergy spoils "la pes comune" and failure of any class works against "le comun pes".[38]

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[37]Gower, Vox Clamantis, chp. 8, lls. 693-700.
[38]Ibid., Prologue, l. 6787, 22172, 22410, 13971, and 21540 respectively.

Chaucer refers to every man "lered other lewed/ That loved commune profyt," saying that those men would surely go to heaven.

> . . . Knew thyself first immortal,
> And lerne ay bisyly thou werche and wyte
> To commune profit, and thou shalt not myse.
> To coveyte swiftly to that place deere
> That ful of blysse is and of soules cleere.[39]

In the Clerk's Tale he speaks of the "commune profit" as being in need of "redresse".[40]

Chaucer and Gower seem at first glance to have remarkably similar political views but there is a very different note in the Canterbury Tales. Like Gower, Chaucer comes out with an argument for original equality among men but he injects into this the idea of common profit. As I just mentioned he refers to those who love the common profit as the truly good men and those destined for heaven. Again in the Prioress's Tale he combines criticism of the Church and the idea that men are originally created equal. The Church should enforce love and defend the lower classes. This is very similar to Gower but Chaucer goes on to say that if the nobility

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[39]Chaucer as quoted in John H. Fisher, John Gower, Moral Philosopher and Friend of Chaucer (New York: New York University Press, 1964), p. 217.

[40]Chaucer, op. cit., Clerk's Tale, l. 431.

and the Christians do not prefer their fanatical "They shall prosper, by the same measure that they have learned to serve God."[1] Chaucer, then, seems to go a bit further than Gower in that he does not look with the same amount of disapproval on the pagans' discontent of the era. He seems to sympathize with their problems and to be able to see their side.

In both the Knight's Tale and Troilus Chaucer exposes the idea of chivalry to the "relativism morality of the pagans." The good Christian turns out to be utterly faithless while Troilus waits at the walls of Troy for her return. In the end Troilus laughs at the hypocrisy of human foibles as exhibited in the courtly ideal. Chaucer has presented the courtly code to perfection and duplicated it through his own perfection. To laugh at Troilus is in all honesty, as unfair to us but his fated failure is a thing cruel and not to be. The knight learns to look out of himself for full satisfaction which is worthy of a knight but his true friend and knight does it out of "gentillesse, as fraunchise, and felawshipe, and trouthe."[2]

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[1]Alan Gaylord, op. cit., Troilus Tale, lin. 1768-92.

[2]A good overall use of this type of critical tool which may be found in David W. Robertson, Guide to the Literature Pagan Learning Chaucer and Medieval Times (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Noble, Co., 1961), pp. 202-208.

Again in the Knight's Tale Chaucer criticizes upper class morality sarcastically. Palamon and Arcite extend a lifelong friendship for the love of a rather simple girl. While Arcite is free but banished and Palamon is still in prison we are treated to a rather ludicrous courtly debate on whether it is worse agony to be free yet banished from the sight of his beloved or to have that sight from prison where he can do nothing about it. Later in the story Theseus finds the knights once again at each other's throats and chastises sadly:

> For lokestow, is nat thy berd an heigh folye?
> Thou wyl be a fool, but if he love?
> Biheeld, for Goddes sake that sit above,
> Se how they bleede! be they noght wel arrayed?[43]

Love and heroism are mocked by Chaucer and are viewed from the distant perspective of Theseus' gaze---a gaze which reduces them to trivia.

Chaucer views nobility or "gentillesse" as being dependent upon virtue and not on lineage or birth. This is what makes the heroine of the Wife of Bath's Tale equal to and worthy of the knight whose "arrogance is nat worth an hen." The Clerk tells of a common girl who was worthy of a lord because of her virtue.

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[43]Chaucer, op. cit., Knight's Tale, lls. 1799-1801.

Chaucer's satirical handling of upper class ideals is far more destructive than that of the other authors I have dealt with here. Langland looks at any sort of social mobility such as Chaucer describes in the Clerk's Tale as sin in itself.[44] Throughout the poem he lauds the poor man for his poverty which is an indirect criticism of the upper classes since the poor are, in his mind, more representative of the life which Christ led. Private property is allowed in Langland's context but its use must be common; and it is only this common use which justifies private property.[45] The abuse of this justification is what causes Langland to level criticism at the upper classes but he does so in much the same way that Gower does. He merely wants to point up and have rectified, the evils of society.

While each of these authors espouses the common good at some point, there are some basic differences. All four assert that nobility is due to virtue rather than birth. Wycliffe, however, supports the ruling classes, whether through conviction or necessity. His theological views seem to liberate the lower classes and

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[44] Langland, op. cit., "The Author's Apology For His Life," lls. 75-79.

[45] M. F. Dunning, Piers Plowman: An Interpretation of the A-Text (Dublin: Talbot Press, Ltd., 1937), p. 55.

to narrow the gulf between the classes. Both Wycliffe and Langland were interested in spiritual regeneration of the individual and not in political solutions. Thus their criticism tends to remain an ideal. While England always had in mind Wycliffe's vision of the state of the Church he does not set out to destroy it, only to correct the state of sin which it and the rest of the world have fallen into.

If England felt that the troubles of the age were due to the state of the Church, Gower follows his thinking closely by attributing the troubles to the state of the law. Gower's outlook seems to be the main precursor to the medieval and travelling which brings men from the "medieval" to the "modern" frame of mind. Though he probably did not intend it so, Gower strengthens the obligation of all classes to the law with each class having a specific function to perform. The king's real nobility are both subjects and guardians of the law. Lack finds that Gower in the author part idealizes the new trend towards obeying the civil ordinances of a civil for very class. The concept of the law for all classes "is the basic idea that binds the whole world from the medieval."[46]

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[46]Edmund Lack, op. cit., p. 147.

[illegible]

to tradition each also exhibits a new brand of realism which is sympathetic of man's struggles of his world. The use of English as the language of transmission and the public embodied in the radio thus also came to draw the lower classes into the movement of the age. The literature no longer deals in abstracts but in real and understandable personalities. It is an intimate type of writing.

As in each, the content of this writing gives us such clues as to the changes which were taking place. There was a trend, as seen in Chaucer and Gower, of fatalism which pervaded especially the upper classes. It is this group which was seeing its basis for existence as a class cut from beneath it and yet could see nothing better in the future.

To the other classes of society there was not the same hopelessness. The future could quite possibly be better for them. Here, we also find, in this literature, a strong trend of levelling which reflects the overturning of the traditional relationships between classes. The differences of wealth and function which had been the basis for the medieval system were losing their importance and found that they could fight equally, and even often

to reduce the gulf between the classes. Both Wycliffe and Langland were interested in spiritual regeneration of the individual and not in political solutions. Thus their criticism tends to remain moral. While England shares much of Wycliffe's view of the state of the Church he does not set out to destroy it, only to correct the state of sin which it and the rest of the world have fallen into.

If England felt that the troubles of the age were due to the state of the Church, Gower follows his thinking closely by attributing the troubles to the state of the law. Gower's outlook seems to be the main barrier to the radical and levelling ideas which bring us from the "medieval" to the "modern" frame of mind. Though he probably did not intend it so, Gower structures the objectives of all classes to the law with each having a specific function to perform. The king's ability lies in both subjects and guardians of the law. Lucas feels that Gower in the author's depiction of the ideal ruler "would turned down" the old medieval system of rule for many years. The concept of the law for all classes "is the single line that links the Tudor world for the medieval."[46]

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[46]Edward Lucas, op. cit., p. 147.

Chaucer [illegible] to take a light [illegible] in his writing. He shows no inclination to any political solutions but he does show the sympathy of the [illegible] of Gower. He carries this author's thought even further in his sympathy with the complexity of the [illegible]. Gower [illegible] to see the trouble through the eyes of the upper class while Chaucer is able to see them through the eyes of those who they affect most. [illegible] outlook [illegible] with a knowledge of the [illegible] and the [illegible] of the upper class [illegible] of their class [illegible] to be [illegible] failing. His very [illegible] is the factor which makes his writing, his criticism, so much more telling than those of the [illegible] English and the [illegible] Gower.

Despite his generally light and satirical [illegible] it is Chaucer who best illustrates the [illegible] and [illegible] which was affecting the upper classes. [illegible], [illegible], to have been the most sympathetic.

The hardships and [illegible] which [illegible] of [illegible] English [illegible] to point out the failures of the medieval system. The world was beginning to change for them. While each of the authors [illegible] felt with [illegible] able [illegible]

to tradition and also exhibit a new trend of writing which is cryptic of man's struggle with his world. The use of English as the language of the narration and the principal behind the rude Irish chiefs all serve to draw the lower classes into the current of the age. The literature no longer deals in abstracts but is real and under tangible personalities. It is an intimate type of writing.

As in art, the content of this writing gives us some clues as to the changes which were taking place. There was a trend, as seen in Chaucer and Gower, of writing which pleased mostly the upper classes. It is this group which was seeing its basis for existence as a class cut from beneath it and yet could see nothing better in the future.

To the other classes of society there was not the same hopelessness. The future could still possibly be better for them. We can, we also find, in this literature, a strong trend of moralizing which points the overturning of the traditional relationships between classes. The differences of wealth and function which had been the basis for the medieval system were by this time questioned and we find that they could light-heartedly, and more often

of great wealth, or at least that they were closer to gain in wealth and position.

Society was undergoing a change, a transition, to the structure and ideals of the modern period. To Englishmen of the late fourteenth century differences of wealth and consumption were of little importance since there is no difference in matters of vice and virtue--that is, men lived on class and birth. The lower classes were beginning to rise while the nobility declined. A revolution in the ideology of the Middle Ages was taking place which is attested to by the art and literature of the period. The upper classes could not seem to see this despite such warnings as the Revolt of 1381. Not even the defeat of the Revolt could stop the disintegration of the medieval structure as indicated by this late fourteenth century poet with its stern note of warning.

> And yet not long ago/ her grandsons or two,
> That quite yet lyven knowe/ to you, to you, and to me--
> Right lyves for to regne/ This dyrelighe entent
> Of covitise conversyte./ From Caus'and into Kent
> This pestelens was lyegeant;/ And fro the Este Dyamt
> Unto Seynet Mychelles Mount/ This pestelence dyd surmount
> Abrode to all mens enmes/ And to your graces grevaunce,--
> That from piller unto post/ The pestelence he hath sent;
> I meane the labouring man,/ I meane the husbandman,/
> I meane the ploughman,/I mean the pilgrim true and fast."[47]

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[47]As quoted by Owst, op. cit., p. 397.

CONCLUSION

The first sixty years of the fourteenth century are characterized by catastrophic events which pointed up the inadequacies of the old medieval system. The resurgence of the eleventh century had stalled during the thirteenth and the catastrophies of the fourteenth century indicate, not only that the medieval system, the medieval unity, was failing, but also that this system was unable to comprehend or adjust to such changes.

In a sense the art and literature of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries show the general and essential tendency of the expiring Middle Ages: that of accentuating every detail and developing every thought and every image to the end. Every concept of the mind is given some concrete form. By looking at these media and recognizing this tendency the student of history may discover new strains running through this period.

Both media indicate the discouragement of this period with the ideals of the Middle Ages. The complicated symbolism which medieval art used as a method of expression is replaced by an attempt to portray

individual characteristics. The 'courtly writing' which went to the psychic of the personality and an emphasis on formality and interpretation is replaced by a type of art which does not require any deep interpretation. The personality of the portrait becomes important as does the material veracity.

A parallel development in literature de-emphasized the complicated allegory in favor of the more easily understood story-telling of Chaucer and Gower. In the literature of the late fourteenth century we are confronted with full-bodied scenes and fully realized characters possessing strong personalities of their own. They are not meant as symbols without personality as were the characters of medieval allegories. Gower, for example, describes for us meetings of the city lords at the wine-shops and the various devices of the shop keepers to entice and cheat their customers. Chaucer, similarly, describes real people in everyday situations.

In both art and literature, then, we see a trend toward realism in form and presentation. In content, too, there is a reaction to the medieval. In fourteenth century tombs stress the morbid aspects of death. The concentration is no longer on the soul of the defunct but upon the body and the process of decay which is taking

place. There is no general concept of the soul or of death. The object of the artist is to sculpt death in a particular and realistic manner to those still alive. The reality of pain and death which medieval artists attempt to depict is entirely absent in the later fourteenth century. The prospect of death and suffering was much more immediate and much more terrible to men of this period and it is this preoccupation which the artist is trying to put across.

Another aspect of this development in tomb sculpture is brought out very clearly by the literature of the age. The horrible and often shocking portrayal of the subject of death represents a glorification of future evil, a direct, if not, willful force is not a new one to most art and literature of the medieval period had explored her as such. The Boethian solution--which is the solution adopted by medieval man--see Mind Man or, and Nature and allowed Boethius to transcend Fortuna. In the later fourteenth century, however, we find that Fortuna conquers all regardless of Harmony and a Boethian understanding of Natura, perhaps because Harmony never have existed almost non-existent and Natura had become a harsh enemy rather than a benevolent friend.

Langland is skilled in the use of this device to picture Fortune as another aid of God's humble will accepting its highest criticism. Chaucer and Gower look upon Fortune in very different attitude, however. Fortune seems to control all and to be a horrible force which causes all the evil of the world. The Man of Law's Tale portrays Fortune as a horrible force leading to death. And in the Knight's Tale and in Troilus and Criseyde, Fortune is the force responsible for all the suffering of the lovers. Gower, though professing to disbelieve in Fortune, continues to describe her as she is thought of by most people. She is two-faced: one face beautiful and smiling and the other lowly and evil. She is heavier than stone, lighter than air; sharper than thorns and softer than roses. At times she is bright daylight and at others she is dark night filled with horror. She is more changeable than water, wind and even the moods of the sea.[1]

The idea of Fortune seems to have left the original position as an instrument of God's will and seems to represent, especially in Gower's pessimistic outlook, that will itself. The ballade of Poverty and

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[1]Gower, Vox Clamantis, o. cit., bk II, chap. 4, ll. 179-201.

Nature is better, the Tooth-in-cheek and others Fortune to be all important. As the tomb of the period indicates, nothing can be salvaged from this all-powerful force, not even man's own personal dignity and pride. Man is not seen as a handsome, living youth but an old, mortified body devoid of both pride and dignity. Perhaps to make the point even more clearly, the artist places the figure of the deceased on top of the tomb as he appeared at his best in life and in the bottom as he appeared at his worst contracting the ogriceon of Fortune.[2]

Fortune has become, not one of several aspects of God's plan for the world, but a force almost as powerful as God himself--a sort of goddess. Fortune has become identified with death and destruction which indicates, I think, that the world was more troubled and that men were conscious of these troubles. In the medieval view, Fortune was responsible for both the good and the bad but now she seems to be identified only with death which is now regarded,not as noble and even good in some respects,but rather as an unmitigated evil.

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[2]See especially plates XIV-XVII. The Tomb of Louis II is a very good example of this point though, unfortunately, it doesn't show up in these illustrations.

It is not illogical that man should realize that death takes all men equally regardless of class, wealth, or virtue. This realization not only adds to the terror of death found in the art and literature but also injects a new note into my concept of the age. The Plague, among other things, had completely overturned the relations of the working classes with the rich and this new facet of medieval life begins to show up by the end of the fourteenth century.

Each of the authors I have dealt with reminds the reader that "Deth can drywyng after and al to dashte pasehte/ Kynges and knyghtes, cayseres and popes./ Lered ne leued ys lefte no man stande."[3] From the art we can only surmise that the depictions of the horror of death were meant as a warning to all. Literature, as we have seen, presents a vivid picture of Fortune or Death picking up all men regardless of station and turning them out as grinning skeletons--a theme which is developed more particularly in the art of this period.

Gower's political philosophy argues that all men must live within the same code of laws and protect those laws. The realism of form and the writing in the

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[3]England, op. cit., chap. XVI, lls. 50-59.

vernacular all tend to equalize the differences which had been so prominent in the previous centuries. The principal difference between this literature and the medieval begins with the concept that different classes have different codes and privileges, whereas this literature begins with the concept that all men have certain obligations in common. Three general attitudes are discernable in the attitudes toward the aristocracy in this period. Wycliffe, who supported a governing aristocracy; Langland and Chaucer, who found the aristocracy politically useless; and Gower who wanted to subject all society to the rule of law.

The period from 1362 to 1400 is not, as is often maintained, merely a hardening of the medieval forms. It is not a period of concentration on detail in the sense that it is a stagnation of the arts. On the contrary, this period represents a striving out to find methods of expression for a new world experience and world order. It is a reaction to the old medieval rules of expression and reflects the growing realization that the medieval unity of the world, the medieval solutions, were not sufficient to solve the problems of the fourteenth century.

The [illegible] of death and [illegible] by the [illegible] of the Middle Ages were [illegible]. The [illegible] produced a [illegible] realistic attitude in both the nobility and the lower class which related by the folly of the [illegible] of an [illegible]. This [illegible] was [illegible], and [illegible] sought to solve the problem of the age. This was [illegible] associated with [illegible] and [illegible], all [illegible] by the lower classes [illegible] living solely to the upper class.

The [illegible] by the [illegible] took the form of a [illegible] work of art both in form and content. The [illegible] from the [illegible] which both the [illegible] and literature of the period enjoy. The content, [illegible], was not striking but one which is interesting because of the direction which it took. I distinguish two types in the content of the poem with [illegible] and [illegible]. The first is the anti-religious [illegible] which came out in the conception of God and the [illegible], Fortune. Fortune [illegible], in this period, flourished with both old [illegible], and, therefore, a conception of God and the world which [illegible]. The fact that this could exist [illegible] the [illegible] of the [illegible] of the world as exhibited by the

[illegible] of Tri[illegible] and [illegible] mainly [illegible] dealing with the inevitable end of man.

The second trend is the leveller and social equality emphasis found in this period. The [illegible] evident [illegible] is that all [illegible] to the [illegible] equally and that Death takes all men without regard to social class or wealth. The literature of the period constantly reminds us that the upper classes are losing their political usefulness. Class distinctions, in fact, are of little validity since all men are descended from Adam.

The reality of the literature and the leveller trend seem to indicate the need of the lower classes for change. The plague and the wars of the period had upset the traditional balance between classes. The Peasants' Revolt and various revolts in France and the Netherlands indicate the growing need for social change which, if seen through the literature of the period, gives some idea of the degree to which the lack of respect for the upper classes had progressed.

The macabre aspects of the trends are symptomatic of upper class attitudes because it was the upper classes who could afford to patronize such works. There was, it seems, a considerable amount of nihilism among them

classes as indicated by the conspicuous wealth and [illegible] and the attitude of the literature of the fourteenth century England. The lack of class loyalties applied to the lower classes and their inability to cope with the changing world [illegible] gradual separation from the ideal of chivalry [illegible] only hit as strongly at that of the lower classes.

The part of literature of the fourteenth century that is direct parallel to the breaks of the Middle Ages. Medieval art and literature no longer expressed the world as it was, or better said, it no longer was the world in the pure light, all values, the old methods of expression were no longer useful to them. The artist thought to not to the individual rather than to general principles or ideals. It attempted to describe the world as it was rather than in terms of what it should, ideally, be. The horrors of war and pestilence had brought the thought of death very near and people were not interested in general concepts but wanted something through which they could understand the disasters of period in which they lived. They found this through the extreme realism of their art and literature. Art expressed the disillusionment of the age. It closed the vision and turned

life that he, too, would soon die and rot while others, the idea that there was no hope either here or in afterlife. A tendency to disbelieve in an afterlife made it seem only logical to fourteenth century man that he should and relate to his world. It was, perhaps, all he had to hope for.

Literature, too, exhibits this attempt to relate to the world, to comprehend the horror of death and the hopelessness of it all. The major emphasis, however, is not so much on this as it is on satirizing the old order. The content of literature is not so heavy and ferocious as the content of art and yet, it was certainly just as destructive of the old order. The horror exhibited by the upper class art illustrates the disgust and blackness of their world while the satire, the comedy of Chaucer illustrates the improved outlook of the lower classes whose position, after 1362, was beginning to improve despite hardship and the constant fear of death. As Coulton puts it, the world of art and literature "seems at times sullenly drowned in the pride of reckless, indecent laughter that betokens an inner bankruptcy and sadness of the soul."[4] The ideals of the Middle Ages had died and a new and often crude reality had risen from the ashes.

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[4]Coulton, op. cit., p. 233.

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I began this project by consulting the Cross bibliography of English history. While the volume was valuable for background material, it is extremely deficient in the fields of art and literature and is, for my purposes, somewhat dated. The best system for attacking the problem seems to be to build from bibliographies in other secondary sources and in this I am especially indebted to Huizinga's The Waning of the Middle Ages, Joan Evan's English Art, 1307-1461, s'Jacob's Immortality and Politics, Owst's Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England, and Patterson's Background to Medieval English Literature, all of which have excellent bibliographical essays.

For the first section of the study I am indebted to several authors. Paul Boissonnade and Sir Paul Vinogradoff have done extensive work in the economic and social conditions of the period. Much work has been done on chivalry in the Middle Ages, the most helpful being

Panofsky's Tomb Sculpture and Schapiro's Histoire de la Sculpture. Another good, general history of the period is Denys Hay's Europe in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries.

While Male has done several exceptional studies of medieval art which contain many useful insights and a great quantity of specific references, Emile Mâle's seductively titled book, Tombeaux, is, by far, the best book on the art of this age although it is not confined to the period. It also contains many fine illustrations, some of which I have used in this study.

The Robinson edition of Chaucer's works is not only the standard edition but the best in terms of organization and readability. It also has a fine introduction which was very helpful. Emile Staelton's translation of the Ars Chirurgia was invaluable to me as I could not have read the original Latin and its organization made a somewhat forbidding task considerably easier.

There are also some very fine secondary sources used in the literature portion of this work which deserve mention. Hoyt's Fleta, Bracton and Late Medieval Political Thought is perhaps the best work on England, and, in combination with Jefferson's Charges and the Formation

Philosophy, a researcher can get a very good idea of the relationship between medieval and Greek and Roman literature. Probably the best general work on the literature of the age is Curtis's Literature and Thought in Medieval England, a work which is indispensible for anyone wishing to come to any understanding of the period. Ker's Epic to Medieval Literature, Taylor's Mind of Medieval Man, and Gilson's Studies in Thomism and the Arabians are among the better literary sources for the period.

At the risk of being repetitive I think that I should mention that the best works I have seen in this area include Huizinga, The Waning of the Middle Ages, which is a very fine intellectual and social history of the late Middle Ages; d'Ancona, The Life and the Time, is a fine analysis of different trends in art from the early Middle Ages through the Renaissance; Panofsky, Early Netherlandish Painting, is one of the best analyses of the art although only a small portion of this work is directly related to this particular period; and finally, a must for any study of the intellectual climate of this age is C.H. Grant, The Autumn and Twilight of Medieval England.

A more complete listing of the works used in this study follows here.

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