

CHAUCER, DESCHAMPS, AND LE ROMAN DE BRUT

In 1386 Eustache Deschamps sent to Chaucer, by way of their mutual friend Lewis Clifford, a complimentary *ballade* praising Chaucer as a “grant translateur” and soliciting further copies of his work.¹ The poem has long been recognized as an important historical document, since it provides virtually the only evidence available that Chaucer’s poetry was known in France prior to his death.² That Deschamps should refer to Chaucer as a translator, and apparently single out his translation of *Le Roman de la Rose* as the basis for his renown, has occasionally been viewed as a typical instance of Gallic arrogance. However, some allowance clearly has to be made for the probability that, in complete contrast to the modern commentators who take issue with his remarks, Deschamps knew all of Chaucer’s *Romaunt*, by repute if not at first hand, but knew nothing of either *Troilus and Criseyde* or *The Canterbury Tales*. Furthermore, had Deschamps been aware of Chaucer’s authorship of *The Book of the Duchess* he might well have considered it too a translation, although of contemporary French fashions in court poetry rather than of a specific text. Whatever questions are raised by the attitudes and judgments Deschamps’ *ballade* articulates, there seems no reason to question it as the expression of a spontaneous and sincere admiration for a fellow poet’s achievements.

If that much of the import of Deschamps’ poem is clear, much remains which is desperately obscure, and which has defied the efforts at elucidation of numerous commentators over the years.³ My concern in this paper is with the last half

- ¹ The date may be disputable. Those who wish to argue that Deschamps’ *ballade* reflects knowledge of Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde*, conventionally dated 1385, would obviously choose to have it later, but for the issues raised in this paper the specific date is not of crucial concern. For Deschamps’ friendship with Clifford see his *ballade* 536, which has the refrain “Demandez ent a l’amoureux Clifford”, in *Oeuvres complètes de Eustache Deschamps*, ed. A.H.E. Queux de Saint Hilaire and Gaston Raynaud, SATF (Paris, 1878-1903), III, 375-76. The text of Deschamps’ *ballade* to Chaucer is quoted from this edition (II, 138), and it is the source for all citations of other works of Deschamps.
- ² See Caroline F.E. Spurgeon, *Five Hundred Years of Chaucer Criticism and Allusion, 1357-1900* (Cambridge, 1925), III, 16ff. Spurgeon provides (Appendix B) a facsimile of the text of this *ballade*, which survives in only a single ms, and a diplomatic transcription with textual notes.
- ³ An attempt to unravel some of the difficulties was first made by Paget Toynbee, “The Ballade addressed by Eustache Deschamps to Geoffrey Chaucer”, *The Academy*, 40 (Nov. 14, 1891), 432-33. Toynbee’s text and annotations, without the English translation, are reprinted in his *Specimens of Old French* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1892), pp. 314-15; 482-84. A fuller, but generally less well regarded explication was offered by T. Atkinson Jenkins, “Deschamps’ Ballade to Chaucer”, *MLN*, 33 (1918), 268-78. See also, for interpretation of a single crux, Karl Young, “Chaucer and Aulus Gellius”, *MLN*, 52 (1937), 347-51. I have used Toynbee’s translation of Deschamps’ *ballade* as given in the *Academy* article.

of the first stanza, where, after a series of flattering comparisons associating Chaucer with several luminaries from classical antiquity, Deschamps says he is a poet:

qui par ta theorique
 Enlumines le regne d'eneas
 L'Isle aux geans ceuls de bruth et qui as
 Seme les fleurs et plante le rosier
 Aux ignorans de la langue pandras
 Grant translateur noble geffroy chaucier.

An idea originally proposed in 1950⁴ has recently been revived that Pandras in the penultimate line of this stanza is the name Pandarus, one of the major characters of Chaucer's romance *Troilus and Criseyde*, and that, by virtue of Pandarus' role in that poem as the procurer of his niece Criseyde for his friend Troilus – a rôle that bequeathed the word *pander* to the English lexicon – the line means “Go-between for those ignorant of the language”.⁵

There are a number of objections to such a reading, many of them acknowledged in Professor Mieszkowski's more recent exposition of the argument. The suggestion most difficult to accept is precisely that which has to carry the claims made for the contributiveness of the article to our understanding of the pertinent facts of literary history; that at the time he wrote this *ballade* Deschamps was sufficiently aware of the rôle of Pandarus in Chaucer's poem to respond to that figure, in Mieszkowski's words, “as a type not an individual, abstracting substance from accident in typical medieval fashion and identifying Pandarus with the rôle he played”. Deschamps must then be supposed to have employed the word in this metaphorical extension with sanguine expectation that the reference would be comprehensible at least to a “few initiates”. Since, furthermore, all the evidence we have indicates that Deschamps' knowledge of English was rudimentary in the extreme (a smattering of commonplace words and expressions picked up orally without understanding of their grammatical function), the French poet must also be seen as achieving his insight into the future common-noun status in English of the name Pandarus not from first-hand knowledge of the English poem but rather from familiarity with those works, *Il Filostrato* of Boccaccio, or, more feasibly, the French prose redaction of Boccaccio's poem, *Le Livre de Troilus*, recognized in some fashion by Deschamps to have been Chaucer's sources. Such a notion would certainly help account for Deschamps' references to Chaucer as a “grant translateur”, but it quite unrealistically assumes that Deschamps had access to the discoveries of a phantom school of comparative-literature studies, an assumption which, if valid, would make nonsense of Chaucer's apparently elaborate efforts to conceal the sources of *Troilus and Criseyde* in the text of that poem.

⁴ Eugen Lerch, “Zu einer Stelle bei Eustache Deschamps”, *Romanische Forschungen*, 62 (1950), 67–68.

⁵ Gretchen Mieszkowski, “Pandras' in Deschamps' Ballade for Chaucer”, *ChauR*, 9 (1975), 326–36.

Nor do the demands put upon the reader according to this interpretation stop there. References to the Kingdom of Aeneas, to the Isle of Giants, and to Felix Brutus establish a context associated with the history of the founding of the British Isles as presented originally in the *Historia Regum Britanniae* of Geoffrey of Monmouth, and more immediately and accessibly for Deschamps in the early sections of Wace's *Roman de Brut*, where a character called Pandras figures quite prominently. Reading *Pandarus* for *Pandras*, Mieszkowski cavalierly dismisses the references to the Geoffrey of Monmouth materials as "pointless euphuisms".

Finally, the proposed reading disrupts the sense of the rest of the passage. Mieszkowski translates her version of this section of the *ballade* as follows:

[W]ho through your philosophy illuminates the Kingdom of Aeneas,
the Island of the Giants – Brutus' giants – and who has sown flowers
there and planted the rosebush, a Pandarus for those ignorant of the
language.

Without some further piece of information – the "there" of Mieszkowski's translation is not justified in the text – the expression "sown flowers and planted the rosebush" seems quite void of meaning, so that connecting "sème" and "plante" with "aux ignorans ..." is required to complete the sense of the passage.

So implausible indeed does this reading of Deschamps' poem seem that it would probably not have received serious attention but for the fact that equally strenuous objections can be raised against the only alternative previously offered. The character Pandras who appears in *Le Roman de Brut* is described as "le rei de Grece", and clearly Wace's pseudo-history implies that "la langue Pandras" was Greek. Mieszkowski rightly rejects Toynbee's rather desperate suggestion that since Brutus and Pandras were enemies in Wace, and England and France were enemies when Deschamps wrote, he equated "la langue Pandras" with the language of England's enemies, the French. Two factors militate against such a possibility. The first is the way Pandras is portrayed in Wace. Blessed with strong forces and abundant riches, he is on two occasions humiliatingly defeated by the numerically inferior band of Trojan renegades, and coerced, as the price of his reinstatement to royal rank and power, into offering Brutus his daughter Innogent in marriage, and furnishing ships and supplies for the Trojans' expedition to the western isles. The second factor is Deschamps' impassioned prejudice against the English nation, apparent from numerous scathing references in his poetry to the perfidy of his nation's adversary in an intolerable war, and from equally frequent expressions of hope that he might live to witness England humbled or destroyed. That Deschamps should go out of his way to suggest that the France he knew stood in similar relationship to England as the Greek king Pandras stood to Brutus is unacceptable. There seems no profit in foisting on Deschamps a statement he would under no circumstances have wished to make, so this removes from con-

tion the possibility that the language of Pandras is to be equated with French on the basis of this argument. Does this mean that, despite the details appropriated from *Le Roman de Brut*, we must discount the idea that *Pandras* refers to the character cited in that work? I think that a re-examination of the evidence will sanction the obvious reading *Pandras*, the character from Wace, as the figure referred to in Deschamps' *ballade*, without involving us with the genuine difficulties of Toynbee's explication, and will allow us to perceive Deschamps' allusions to the early history of Britain in *Le Roman de Brut*, not as "pointless euphuisms" but as part of a deliberate strategy perfectly consonant with the tenor of the poem as a whole and with what we know of Deschamps' temperament and attitudes. So viewed the poem will in fact provide an insight into broader French attitudes towards the English nation during a period of bitter dispute.

I

The first point I wish to argue is that Deschamps followed Geoffrey of Monmouth and Wace in believing "la langue Pandras", i.e., Greek, to be the common tongue of both Greeks and Trojans, so that it is to be understood as the language of Brutus and his followers as well as of the Greek king who is holding a group of Trojans in enslavement. Evidence that this is so is implicit rather than explicit in Wace, who nowhere in the text of his poem repeats Geoffrey of Monmouth's statement to the effect that Brutus and his followers spoke 'broken Greek'. But nowhere in the course of any of the encounters between Brutus, Pandras, and their respective followers (encounters which include a letter from Brutus to Pandras petitioning for the release of the Trojan slaves, an elaborate conspiracy between Brutus and a Greek captive to infiltrate Pandras' encampment, negotiations for the cessation of hostilities, arrangement for the provisioning of the Trojan forces, and the marriage of Brutus to Innogent) is there any suggestion that the two groups do not employ a mutually intelligible language.⁶

If Deschamps believed that "la langue Pandras" might be used to designate the language of the legendary Trojan founders of the British nation, as well as of the Greeks – an impression he would get from reading Wace, and an idea reinforced by independent legends with which he was evidently familiar – then an

6 The same essentially negative evidence would mandate similar conclusions as to the mutual intelligibility between the Trojans and two tribes, *Poitevins* and *Franceis*, which Brutus and his followers encounter in an expedition up the Loire valley when en route to the British Isles. But this too is perfectly feasible, and in accordance with what we can apprehend of late-medieval assumptions about early cultural-linguistic history. Deschamps himself in a Latin poem (*Oeuvres*, VII, 94) refers to a Trojan hero Francus as the eponymous founder of the Frankish nation, a myth which had received authoritative support in the late thirteenth century from the account of the Trojan descent of the French in *Les Grandes Chroniques de France*, from a hero there identified as Francion. See the edition by Jules Viard (Paris: Société de l'Histoire de France, 1920), I, 9-15. The editor traces the legend back through Aimon, *De Gestis regum Francorum*, to the *Liber historiae Francorum*, and mentions its appearance in the *Gesta Francorum* of Roricon, and in the *Historia Daretis Frigii de origine Francorum*, ed. Gaston Paris, *Romania* 3 (1874), 129-44.

interesting possibility emerges for the meaning of those “ignorans de la langue Pandras”. All commentators not committed to the idea that Pandras is Pandarus have assumed that “la langue Pandras” meant French, and that those ignorant of the language must be understood to be the contemporary beneficiaries of the translating activity of the author complimented in the poem. However, Deschamps’ use of the non-finite verb for *ignorans* permits the translation “those who were ...” as well as “those who are ignorant of the language of Pandras”, and I would argue that he wanted the phrase to have the former signification, and to designate specifically the Saxons, referred to in the second stanza of his poem to Chaucer:

Tu es d’amour mondains Dieux en Albie;
Et de la Rose, en la terre Angelique,
Qui d’Angela Saxonne, est puis flourie
Angleterre, d’elle ce nom s’applique
Le derrenier en l’ethimologique,
En bon angles le livre translatas.

[Thou are in Albion the god of wordly love; and into good English thou didst translate the Book of the Rose, in the Angelic land which from the Saxon Angela did afterwards blossom as “Angleland” (in the etymology this name, the last, is taken from her).]

Deschamps’ derivation of the name England from a Saxon Angela, referred to again in another *ballade*, “Sur les divers noms de l’Angleterre”(Oeuvres, VI, 87-88) as “fille a un duc puissant de Saxoine” seems to be original with him. The idea is most probably derived, however, from his reading of a crucial passage in Wace which suggests that the powerful Saxon duke is to be identified as Gormond. The passage in question recapitulates the linguistic history of the British Isles:

Le language qu’il ainz parloent
Que il Troïen apeloent,
Unt entr’els Bretun apelé.
Mais Engleis l’unt puis remué;
La parole e li nuns dura
Tant que Gormund i ariva;
Gormund en chaça les Bretuns
Si la livra a uns Saissuns
Qui d’Angle Angeleis apelé erent,
Ki Engleterre l’apelerent.⁷

⁷ *Le Roman de Brut de Wace*, ed. Ivor Arnold, SATF (Paris, 1938), I, 67, vv. 1189-98. All quotations of Wace are from this edition, and hereafter identified simply by verse numbers following the quote in the text. It is in the corresponding passage that Geoffrey of Monmouth remarks: “Whence afterward the country speech, which was aforetime called Trojan or crooked Greek, was called British”. I have used the English translation of Wace from *Wace and Layamon: Arthurian Chronicles*, trans. Eugenc Mason, Everyman’s Library 578 (London: Dent, 1912).

[The language which they spoke formerly, and which they called Trojan, they now called Breton among themselves. But later English replaced it; the speech and the name lasted up until Gormond arrived; Gormond chased out the Britons and gave the land over to the Saxons, who from Angle were called Angleis, and who called it Engleterre.]

What is important about Wace's account here is the simple dichotomy he presents between Trojan (renamed *Bretun* but clearly thought of as the same language), and English, the language of the Saxons, which replaced it at the end of the period of the Germanic migrations. Consciousness of linguistic-cultural distinctions is certainly most forcefully reflected in Wace's text in his account of the conflict between Britons and Saxons, and this consciousness is quite pervasive once it has been established.

Wace's description of the arrival of the brothers Hengist and Horsa with their three ships at a port in Kent is accompanied by the observation that they were "d'une estrange paroleüre" (V. 6710). The foreignness of their speech is borne out particularly in two striking anecdotes related by Wace, both of which are unusually elaborated with incidental detail and extensive use of dialogue, quote phrases in English, and bear witness to the cunning, perfidy, and brutality often attributed to the English by the French in the fourteenth century.

The first of these is the famous "Wassail-Drinkhail" story of Vortigern's first encounter with Ronwen, the seductively beautiful daughter of Hengist, whose father uses her as a willing accessory in his scheme to gain control over the immediately besotted British leader:

Devant le rei s'agenuilla,
 Mult humlement li enclina
 E a sa lei le salua:
 "Laverd King, Wesheil!" tant li dist;
 Li reis demanda e enquist,
 Ki le language ne saveit,
 Que la meschine li diseit.
 Keredic respundi premiers,
 Brez ert, si ert bons latimiers,
 Ço fu li premiers des Bretuns
 Ki sout le language as Saissuns.

(vv. 6950-60)

[She kneeled before the king very simply, and saluted him courteously after the fashion of her land, saying, "Washael, lord king". The king, who knew nothing of her language, sought the meaning of the maiden's words. This was made plain to him by Redic, the Breton, a

fair scholar, who – as it is related – was the first to become apt in the Saxon tongue.]

This episode is followed within a few lines by the story of the massacre of the British nobles at the peace conference summoned by Hengist:

Henguist, ki out le quer felun,
Manda al rei par traïsun
Que pais e trives lur dunassent
E entretant a els parlissent.

.....
Henguist ot tuz ses compainuns
Bien enseinniez e bien sumuns
Qu'en lur chaucés cultels portassent
Tels ki de ambes parz trenchassent.
Quant il as Bretuns parlereient
E tuit entremellé serreient,
"Nim eure sexes!" criereit,
Que nuls des Bretuns n'entendreit;
Chescuns dunc sun cultel preïst
E sun procain Bretun ferist.

(vv. 7207-40)

[Hengist was cunning and false of heart. He sent false messages to the king, praying for a truce and love-day to be granted, that they might speak together as friend with friend ... Hengist had taught his comrades, and warned them privily, that they should come each with a sharp, two-edged knife hidden in his hose. He bade them to sit in this parliament, and hearken to the talk; but when he cried "Nim eure sexes" – which none of the Britons would understand – they were to snatch out their daggers and slay the Briton next to them.]

To the evidence for Wace's awareness of the linguistic differences between the Germanic invaders and the victims of their incursions provided by these stories may be added his report of the explanation given by Hengist of the derivation of the names for the days of the week, Wednesday and Friday, from the Norse god Woden and goddess Frea (vv. 6771-92), and the concern shown throughout to give Germanic versions of place names with their non-Germanic equivalents.

Finally, two episodes in which successive British kings, the brothers Aurelius and Uther, are poisoned by Saxons who exploit their skill in a foreign tongue to effect their evil purposes, contribute to that body of material in Wace associat-

ing differences between the Breton and Saxon languages with treachery and murder. Of Appas, who disguised himself as a monk and claimed to be a physician to get close to the hapless Uther, we are told:

Paiens ert, de Saixonie nez,
 Ki mult esteit enlochonez;
 De mescines se faiseit sage
 Si saveit parler maint langage,
 Fel esteit e de male fei.

(vv. 8235-39)

[He was a pagan, born in Saxony, who was apt in many parts; he had made himself wise by the instruction of maidens, and he knew how to speak many languages, but he was a felon, and kept bad faith.]

The Saxon slayers of Uther, “Ki parler sorent maint langage” [who knew how to speak many languages], learn from the king’s retainers with whom this skill allows them to mingle that the king drinks only the water from a particular spring, which they subsequently poison.

While the Saxons are the first cultural group speaking a language whose differences from the language spoken by the descendents of Brutus are dwelt on at length in *Le Roman de Brut*, Wace in that work, and Deschamps following him, are not to be thought of as believing that the inhabitants of the British Isles spoke Greek at the time of the Germanic invasions. Although Wace reminds his readers of the Trojan ancestry of the Britons as late in his story as King Arthur, attributing to a practice preserved from Troy the Arthurian custom whereby the king and his knights ate separately from the queen and her ladies on feast days (vv. 10445-58), he is clearly aware of the fact that the language he refers to as *Bretunz*, like the other languages of western Europe he supposed derived from a common Greek source, had been subject over the centuries to changes that concealed the fact of common ancestry. This process is signalled from as early as the account of the Roman invasion under Claudius, in an episode which anticipates those dealing with the deaths of Aurelius and Uther. There the story is told of a Roman called Haym, who, dressed in the arms of a dead British warrior, was enabled by his skill in languages to get close enough to the British king Wider to slay him treacherously:

Ensemble od les Bretuns alout,
 Ensemble od les Bretuns parlout.
 Tuz les deceveit l’armeüre,
 E il saveit lur parleüre,

Kar a Rome entre les ostages
 Aveit apris plusurs languages.
 Haym saveit bien bretun parler
 E des Bretuns plusurs nomer.

(vv. 4941-48)

[He walked with the Britons, and he talked with the Britons.
 The assumed arms deceived them all, and he knew their language,
 because he had learned several languages at Rome among the
 hostages. Haym well knew how to speak *Bretun*, and knew
 several Britons by their names.]

Deschamps, I believe, used “la langue Pandras” as a generic term which to him signified something akin to what a modern comparative linguist would designate the Hellenic, Italic, and Celtic branches of Indo-European. Such knowledge as Deschamps could have gleaned about early European cultural and linguistic history from his reading of such sources as Wace and other chroniclers would have led him to suppose that within the period of recorded history going back only as far as the Trojan war these three branches of Indo-European were in fact one tongue. The Germanic invaders of the British Isles, by contrast with the peoples whose languages were ultimately traceable back to this source, could not claim descent from the heroes of Troy, came from an area of the world remote from the cradle of civilization of the eastern Mediterranean, and were ignorant of the languages there generated. Deschamps probably considered that ignorance symptomatic of more profound cultural differences which were ultimately to make the Anglo-Saxons the scourge of Europe, responsible through their recalcitrant untrustworthiness and bellicosity for most of the social ills of his time.

That Deschamps could interpret in this fashion a work based on Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia Regum Britanniae* is not surprising, given the fact that Geoffrey is conventionally understood to have been motivated in the writing of his history by a desire to flatter the Norman conquerors at the expense of their recently defeated Anglo-Saxon adversaries. Nor is it difficult to see why Deschamps should have introduced into his *ballade* addressed to Chaucer these materials from Wace. Faced with the wish to write a friendly and flattering verse letter to the most renowned poet of a country he detested, Deschamps solves his problem by dividing the inhabitants of that country into two groups, vicious Saxons and virtuous non-Saxons, and by placing Chaucer, whom he addresses as Geffroy Chaucier in a fully-Gallicised form of his name, among the second group. Chaucer is thus pictured acting as a sort of missionary to bring culture in the form of his translation of a masterpiece of medieval French literature to a people whose language he writes with consummate skill but with whom he is not ethnically to be identified. Rather than “pointless euphuisms”, therefore, the references to Wace form

part of a carefully calculated strategy by Deschamps which allows him to compliment an English poet without compromising his censure of the English nation evident elsewhere throughout his work.

II

Some support for the idea that Deschamps is making the kind of distinction proposed here is to be found in the fact that similar attitudes towards the English nation are discernible in the writings of many of his French contemporaries.

Around the middle of the fifteenth century the Burgundian historian Jean Waurin appropriated, for his *Croniques et anchiennes istories de la Grant Bretagne, a present nomme Engleterre*, a version of Wace's account of the British dynasty which dates from Deschamps' own time, as early perhaps as 1390, and certainly no later than the first quarter of the fifteenth century.⁸ In this treatment the inability of Britons and Saxons to communicate is adverted to somewhat more frequently than in Wace. To the episode of the betrayal and massacre of the British nobles at the peace conference, for example, Waurin's source adds the detail that when Vortigern, himself protected from physical harm only through Hengist's intervention on his behalf, cries out in regret and self-castigation, his tormentors, "qui pas n'entendoyent son langage" (p. 218), threaten to cut him to pieces unless he cedes his country to them. More striking and significant is the fact that authorial criticism of the Saxon invaders, which in Wace is in the main a matter of inference from their behaviour, becomes pervasive and strident. From the first appearance of Hengist and Horsa, the author remarks of Vortigern:

[I] ne vouloit oïr ... chose qui feust au contraire des traitres Saxons, ains amoit ce maleureux roy la dampnable compaignie de ces maudis Saxons mieulx que celle de ces leaulx catholicques barons et citoiens. (p. 205)

[This miserable king would listen to no criticism of the Saxon traitors, but enjoyed the damnable company of the cursed Saxons more than that of the loyal catholic nobles and people.]

Thereafter the word *Saxon* is rarely used without qualification by some pejorative adjective. "Traître" and "maudis" remain favourites, but to them are added "païen", "maulvais", "tyrans", "parjurés", "parvers" and "cruelz", rising to a high pitch of animus in "les tirans loupz enragies Saxons" [the despotic, mad-wolf Saxons]. At other points in the course of this history, references are made to "la detestable iniquite de ces Saxons", and "la perfidie et mutabilite des Saxons", and they are stigmatised as "gent ydollatre ennemis de Dieu", and "gens muables et non acoustumez de tenir quelconcque foy ne traittie" [a shifty people unaccustomed to keep any faith or honour any treaty].

⁸ Ed. William Hardy, Rolls Series (London: Longman, 1864).

The author clearly has several axes to grind here, religious, political, and moral. The suspicion that antipathy arising from the exercise of historical imagination would hardly explain this bitter and hysterical censure were it not coloured by the author's own experiences and emotional predispositions is confirmed when he is at pains to point out, on more than one occasion, that from these same Saxons are descended the English of his own time, whom he assumes to have inherited all of their ancestors' evil qualities:

De ces Saxons sont descendus les Anglois ... et ce nest pas grant merveille silz scentent la nature de leurs ancestres qui conquisterent lisle de la Grant Bretagne par la trayteuse maniere devant ditte, et nous meysmes avons veues leurs traysons et veons journelement, car oncques ne tindrent loyaute ne verite, ne chose quilz eussent promis ne ne feront jamais. (pp. 219-20)

[From these Saxons are descended the English ... and it is no great wonder if they reflect the nature of their ancestors who conquered the British Isles by the treacherous means discussed earlier, and we ourselves have witnessed their treachery, and witness it daily, for they never keep faith or observe the truth, and those things which they have promised they never carry out.]

Behind the political and moral censure lie presumably experiences associated with the hundred years war, and perhaps with the great schism.⁹ Clearly at the time when this author was writing, the account of the Germanic invasions and ultimate conquest of the British Isles, for which Geoffrey of Monmouth and Wace provided the most important sources, was very much a live issue, capable of being invoked to explain the atavistic behaviour of the English whose persistent aggressiveness was a constant cause of complaint for foreign observers.

As late as 1447, in *Le Débat des Herauts d'Armes de France et d'Angleterre*, the distinction between Britons and Saxons, and the historical circumstances whereby the latter appropriated, "par aucuns soubtilz moyens", the land originally settled by the former, could still provide ammunition to dispute contemporary English claims to a tradition of martial greatness:

[L]e herault d'Angleterre ... veult attribuer l'onneur des chevaliers dessus nommez, lesquelz furent de la nacion de Bretagne, a la nacion de Saxonne, qui a present se nomme Angleterre.¹⁰

⁹ The peace treaty drawn up during negotiations for the marriage of Richard and Isabella stipulated cessation of all hostilities, "sive occasione scismatis Ecclesie vel alias". See the *Chronique du Religieux de Saint-Denys*, ed. and trans. M.L. Bellaguet, Collection de documents inédits, 1ère série: Histoire politique (Paris: Crapelet, 1834-52), II, 369.

¹⁰ Ed. Léopold Pannier and Paul Meyer (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1877), p. 11.

But the events which provoked the most extensive comments by French observers of the English scene in the late fourteenth century, and which provided occasion for the expression of their most deep-seated and long-standing prejudices, were those leading up to the deposition and death of Richard II. If Richard of Bordeaux's domestic policies had, by the end of his reign, so totally alienated his people that they were eager to embrace Henry of Lancaster as saviour of the realm, his foreign policies, and his marriage in 1396 to the daughter of the king of France, had given the French such hope for a final resolution to the war that they were ready to attribute to his adversaries all those qualities of perfidiousness and bellicosity which they thought bequeathed to the English nation from their Saxon ancestors.¹¹ The situation in England at the close of the fourteenth century was such, that is to say, as to encourage French commentators to see it in terms of a myth formulated from their understanding of earlier English history, and their presentation of the circumstances of Richard's downfall often appears dictated more by the desire to substantiate this myth than to respect the historical reality of the situation they were depicting as that reality can be determined from other sources.

Of the French chroniclers who reported on the deposition of Richard II, Jean Froissart is of course the best known, but the length of his attachment to the English court, and the affection and admiration with which he came to regard the English and their activities, kept him from assuming the cultural prejudice which characterises the mindset of some of his contemporaries, and so make him a less valuable commentator for our purposes. That prejudice is blatantly obvious in four other interrelated narratives by which a more typically continental view of the deposition of Richard is conveyed to us. They are the Latin *Chronique du religieux de Saint Denis*, covering the period 1380-1422; two French prose texts, the *Chronique de Richard II* by Jean le Beau for the period 1377-1399,¹² and the anonymous *Chronicque de la traïson et mort de Richart Deux Roy Dengleterre* for the period 1397-1400;¹³ and finally the verse chronicle by Jean Créton, *Histoire du roy d'Angleterre Richard*, which purports to give an eye-witness account of the events

¹¹ A twenty-eight year truce with France was negotiated in 1396. In the following year Richard spoke to parliament of the "tres grandes meschiefs & destructions de Guerre intolerable entre les deux Roialmes" [*Rotuli Parliamentorum*, iii, 338, quoted in May McKisack, *The Fourteenth Century, 1307-1399*, Oxford History of England (Oxford, 1959), p. 475n.]. Philippe de Mezières, whose ambition to have England and France unite to conduct one more great crusade obviously colours his views, noted in May 1395 that since Richard's accession relationships between the two realms were better than at any time during the preceding sixty years. See his *Letter to King Richard II*, ed. and trans. G.W. Coopland (Liverpool: U of Liverpool P, 1975), pp. 12 and 84. In the same author's *Le Songe du Vieil Pelerin*, ed. G.W. Coopland (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1969), I, 402-03, opposition to Richard's policies is attributed chiefly to "ung conte d'Arondel". A recent account of Richard's foreign policy is given by J.J.N. Palmer "English Foreign Policy 1388-99", in *The Reign of Richard II: Essays in Honour of May McKisack*, ed. F.R.H. Du Boulay and Caroline M. Barron (London: Athlone P, 1971), pp. 75-107.

¹² Ed. Jean-Alexandre-C Buchon, in *Collection des chroniques nationales françaises, écrites en langue vulgaire du XIII^e au XVI^e siècle* (Paris: Verdier, 1826-28), XXV, Supplément II, pp. 1-79.

¹³ Ed. Benjamin Williams (London, 1846).

from the Irish expedition to the capture of Richard in 1399, and a first-hand report of the later deposition proceedings.¹⁴ None of the French chroniclers draws a specific analogy between the events of the *Brut* and those he is recording, but Froissart, Créton, and the author of the *Traïson et mort* all indicate their familiarity with the work and make it part of the ethos they describe by their references to the prophesies of Merlin, which were supposed to have foretold Richard's downfall. If the events described in the *Brut* are not cited, however, what the work has to say about the character of the Anglo-Saxons, particularly in such later redactions as the anonymous source for Jean Waurin's *Croniques*, seems to exert a consistent influence on the portrait of the figures involved in the baronial opposition to Richard.

Henry of Lancaster and his supporters are assimilated to the Saxon tradition by reference to their use of trickery and deceit in the pursuit of their aims, and their commitment to the cause of armed conflict with France.¹⁵ Jean le Beau, reporting that opposition to Richard's rule festered among those who "avoient ap-rins de trouver en France les grands proufits durant les guerres" (p. 3) [had learned how to win great profit in France during the wars], quotes Henry after his coronation as declaring himself eager to resume the foreign campaigning of Edward of Carnarvon, the Black Prince, and the French chronicler takes the opportunity to comment on what he sees as a characteristic English trait:

"Et saïchez que monseigneur mon oncle n'alla oncques tant avant en fait de guerre, que je ne voise plus loin, ou je mourrai en la peine." Là crioit chascun: "Dieu doint bonne vie au roi Henry!" Ces gens ne disent point comme nous en leurs prières: *Da pacem, domine, in diebus nostris*; car ils ne sont aises, s'ils n'ont la guerre en la main. (p. 53)

["And be assured that however far my revered uncle went in respect of waging war, I shall go further, or die in the attempt." Then everyone cried: "God bless king Henry!" These people never say, as we do, in

¹⁴ Ed. Buchon, in *Collection des chroniques nationales*, XXIV, pp. 321-466. A translation of Créton's work, with annotations, was published by John Webb in *Archéologie Anglaise*, Vol. 20, but this text has not been accessible to me. See also Evan J. Jones, "An Examination of the Authorship of *The Deposition and Death of Richard II* Attributed to Créton", *Speculum*, 15 (1940), 461-65.

¹⁵ The author of the *Traïson et mort* (pp. 46-47) quotes at length the faked letter of Richard requiring surrender of strongholds in Guienne and Gascony sent by Lancaster to London and other cities, and the letter by Lancaster himself defending his actions as necessary to avert a series of threats the same document made against the freedom of the citizens. The matter is also discussed in detail by the Religieux de Saint-Denys (p. 708), who here *et passim* ascribes the duke's behaviour to *anglicana usus astucia*. Froissart reports an effort by Gloucester to have control of the country placed in the hands of four governors (himself, Lancaster, York, and Arundel), and attributes it to the desire to find "voie raisonnable comment la guerre seroit renouuelee entre France et Angleterre". Elsewhere he quotes Gloucester urging war with France as the natural means of restoring national fortunes on the wane since his nephew's accession. See *Oeuvres de Froissart*, ed. Kervyn de Lettenhove (Brussels: Devaux, 1872), XVI: *Chroniques, 1397-1400*, p. 4.

their prayers: *Da pacem, domine, in diebus nostris*; for they are never happy unless they have a war on their hands.]

Later the citizens of London, celebrating Henry's victory over those seeking to return Richard to power, speculate happily on the prospect of future military campaigns: "Dieu garde le roi Henry! Or vueille faire guerre à tous fors aux Flamans!" (p. 61) [God save king Henry! Now he will want to make war on everyone except the Flemings.] That another people speaking a Germanic language are the only ones exempted from these dreams of conquest is probably a significant observation by the chronicler in this particular context.

The deplorable characteristics attributed to the anti-Richardian forces are not unique to the occasion of their rebellion, not the nonce manifestation of a specific response to a specific set of circumstances, but rather the inherited traits of a people cursed in their "generation":

Car ilz sont en mal si enté,
En faulceté et en oultrage,
En fait, en dit et en lengage,
Que certes je croy fermement
Qu'il n'a dessoubz le firmament
Génération, qui ressemble
A la leur, si comme il me semble;
Voire considéré leurs fais,
Qui ne sont loyaux ne parfaits,
Selon droit, raison et justice.¹⁶

[For they are so steeped in evil, in falsity and violence, in word, in deed, and in speech, that I firmly believe there is not another ethnic group like theirs under the sun, or so it seems to me; particularly when one considers their actions, which are neither trustworthy nor dependable, according to what is right, reasonable, and just.]

The terms of abuse have a familiar ring, and the influence of Wace in creating the myth which this author is promulgating can hardly be doubted. Behind the various personalities united in their opposition to Richard's rule, French observers,

¹⁶ Créton, pp. 420-21. Another French writer complains that Edward III invaded France, "non ayant regart a droit raison et justice, et en venant directement contre ses foy sermens et promesses", but says this should have occasioned no surprise in light of the English national character, about which a fellow-countryman, Bede, wrote:

Anglicus Angelus est cui nunquam credere fas est
Dum tibi dicit ave tamquam ab hoste cave.

See *La vraie Cronique d'Ecoce and Prétensions des Anglois à la Couronne de France*, ed. Robert Anstruther, Roxburghe Club (London: William Nicol, 1847), p. 28.

in that radical simplification of a complex historical situation which we associate with the influence of a mythicized frame of reference, saw lurking the shadowy figure of the unregenerate Saxon, intractably alien to and perennially threatening their own culture.

As the French chroniclers depict this cultural clash, it also has a linguistic dimension. The well-known and often quoted observation by Jean Froissart, made on the occasion of his presenting Richard with a book of verse, that the king browsed through it with pleasure, “because he understood French very well” (*Oeuvres*, ed. Lettenhove, XV, 140–42), is usually taken to imply surprise on Froissart’s behalf that such should be the case, and consequently to reflect his cognizance of the preferred status of English as the language of the court. Whether such a view of the significance of Froissart’s remark is valid or not, the French chroniclers certainly seem to assume a French-speaking court circle, while making English the language of the baronial opposition to Richard’s rule. This perception that the cultural split in the nation was delineated linguistically as well as socially and politically appears in an exchange between some followers of the Duke of Lancaster who have made their way into Flint castle, and the king’s retainers who are still at dinner inside:

Et entra plusieurs des gens du duc dedens le chastel pour veoir le Roy, et disoient aux gens de Roy et des autres seigneurs en leur langaige: “Mengiez fort et menez bonne feste. Car par Saint George¹⁷ vous arez tantost trestous copees les testes!” (*Traïson et mort*, pp. 58–59)

[And then several of the Duke’s people entered the castle to get a look at the king, and they said in their own language to the people of the king and of the other lords: “Eat up and enjoy yourselves, for by Saint George all of you will soon lose your heads!”]

By specifying that the duke’s men spoke *en leur langaige*, the chronicler suggests that their language, English, was not the language of those whom they addressed, which must, in consequence, be understood to have been French. The same per-

¹⁷ Swearing by Saint George is one method by which the French chroniclers consistently distinguish the followers of Henry of Lancaster from those of Richard, who conventionally swear by Saint John the Baptist, a favourite saint of the king depicted with him in the famous Wilton diptych. The practice of swearing by Saint George has been identified as one of the devices (together with various conventional perversions of phonetics and grammar) by which French writers attempted to reproduce what they apprehended to be the nature of French speech in the mouths of Englishmen. For a survey of these materials see J.E. Matzke, “Some examples of French as spoken by Englishmen in Old French Literature”, *MP*, 3 (1905–06), 47–61. That the habit is meant to characterise the ‘ugly Englishman’ in his most brutish and bullying manifestations is apparent from its occurrence throughout *Le Mystère de Saint Louis*, ed. Francisque Michel (London: Roxburghe Club, 1871), pp. 55–70 *passim*, but see especially the speech by the duke of York, p. 59. See also P. Rickard, *Britain in Medieval French Literature, 1100–1500* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1956).

ception influences the report of an exchange between Richard and the Duke of Northumberland's herald, seeking safe conduct to Conway castle for his treacherous and perjured master: "Lors au messaige / Dist tout en hault le roy en son langaige: / 'De très bon cuer ottroye le passaige / Au conte de Northomberlant.'" (Jean Créton, p. 388) [Then the king in a loud voice said to the messenger in his language: "I gladly grant passage to the count of Northumberland".]

The French commentators recognize, certainly, that differences between the language practices of Richard and those of his challengers for the throne depend on the linguistic competence of the community with which the major protagonists are habitually engaged in discourse, not that of the protagonists themselves. If the ability to compose verse in French, a fact reported by Jean Créton (p. 351) concerning his patron John Montagu, earl of Salisbury, one of Richard's most devoted adherents, is a noteworthy achievement for a non-clerical Englishman, fluency in the language was not, and when Créton and his companion, taken at Flint castle with Richard and in fear of their lives, appealed for clemency to Henry of Lancaster, he was perfectly able, having heard their situation explained by his herald "en langage englesche", to reassure them himself "en françoiz" that he would guarantee their safety (p. 411). But it is a reflection of Richard's fateful isolation that, in the last months of his reign at least, he is portrayed as speaking French with the small circle of noblemen who were loyal to his cause, shared his views, and ultimately suffered his fate, and that he speaks English (a sufficient divergence from his normal practice to provoke comment) only when obliged to converse with the representatives of those rebellious forces seeking his overthrow. Henry, on the other hand, speaks French only when prompted by magnanimity to pardon in person the offences of some of Richard's French retinue. He is routinely heard speaking English to the troops under his command, or to a group of London citizens, people who support his policies and share his language. The one direct confrontation between Richard and Henry reported by the French chroniclers is conducted, significantly, in English, probably from their point of view a symbolic indication of Henry's control of the situation and the triumph of his ambitions:

Et sachiez de certain que ce sont les propres paroles qu'ilz dirent
eulx deux ensemble, sans y riens prendre ne adjouster. Car je les oy
et entendi assex bien; et si les me recorda le conte de Salsebery en
Françoiz. (p. 412)

[And be assured that these are the actual words which they spoke to
one another, without anything having been cut or altered. Because I
heard and understood them well enough, and furthermore the count of
Salisbury repeated them for me in French.]

Although in legal and governmental use English had established itself in preference to French well before the end of the fourteenth century, Créton is at pains to establish that the deposition proceedings were conducted exclusively in Latin

and English. The archbishop of Canterbury is reported recapitulating in English the theme of his Latin sermon on the text *Habuit Jacob benedictionem a patre suo*, and explaining its relevance to the instrument of abdication, prior to conducting the election of a new king. The languages of Henry's speech accepting the crown are similarly identified:

Après, comme très sages homs,
Parla à tous en general;
Aux prélas par espécial,
Et aux plus grans seig[n]eurs après,
En latin langage et englès.
(pp. 433-34)

[Afterwards, in the manner of a very wise man, he spoke in general to everyone, especially to the prelates, and afterwards to the greatest nobles, in Latin and in English.]

And the proceedings conclude with a final statement by the archbishop of Canterbury, again, we are expressly informed, in Latin and English. Frequent and what seems gratuitous stress on the language of the proceedings associates Henry's political ascendancy with the emergence of English to linguistic dominance, and for the French reporter the total abandonment of French seems to signal something sinister. The sentiments are the reverse of those articulated by the English chancellor Sir Robert Sadington in the 1340's in response to rumours of an invasion threat by the French:

Et si est il en ferme purpos a ce que nostre seigneur le Roi et son conseil ont entendu en certeyn, a destruire la langue Engleys et de occuper la terre d'Engleterre.¹⁸

[And furthermore, according to what our lord the king and his council have heard authoritatively reported, they are firmly committed to the purpose of destroying the English language and occupying the country.]

They undoubtedly spring from the same source of national paranoia. As far as the French chroniclers are concerned, those responsible for the overthrow of Richard are engaged in a purge, not only of a French-leaning king, but also of those vestiges of non-Germanic culture which the royal court nurtured and sustained, chief among which was the continued use of the French language. What is seen as a re-imposition of Anglo-Saxon hegemony calls to mind such records as that provided by Wace of the legendary conquest of Britain by the ancestral

¹⁸ *Rotuli Parliamentorum*, ii, 147, quoted in Elizabeth Salter, "Chaucer and Internationalism", *SAC*, 2 (1980), 71-79.

Germanic tribes in the period of the great migrations, and the qualities of an unruly, barbarous, warrior society are perceived persisting in that society's descendants.

Except for *Les Chroniques* of Jean Froissart, which is quite abberational, by comparison with the other French chroniclers cited, in the selection and presentation of materials relating to the last years of Richard's rule, and particularly in the extent and nature of authorial commentary on the events described, the frame of reference invoked to give order and meaning to the flux of historical events is not abstract, morally-oriented, international chivalry. It is, in fact, more emphatically and theoretically historical, and more narrowly national in its assumptions that ethnic identity persists as a relatively immutable force in the affairs of men, that its nature can be ascertained from familiarity with earlier or legendary accounts which document its manifestations in recorded action, and that it provides a means for understanding contemporary and predicting the course of future events. *Le Roman de Brut* provided just such a record for French historians struggling to comprehend the social and political upheavals of the British Isles at the end of the fourteenth century, and it exerts a pervasive influence over the way those events are interpreted.

III

If Deschamps could appropriate Chaucer for the non-Saxon segment of British society, where precisely would Chaucer have located himself had he been conscious of the possibility of any such division? His associations during Richard's reign seem certainly to have been with the court party, from whom he enjoyed the privileges of royal patronage, and it can be shown that Chaucer's employment and economic fortunes rose and fell in unison with those of the king. His position as controller of the customs in the port of London, confirmed by Richard on his accession in 1377, was discontinued in 1386, perhaps as part of the purge of the king's appointees instigated by Gloucester's faction in that year, and it was not until Richard reasserted his authority in 1389 that Chaucer was appointed to any comparably lucrative post. If, as seems probable, the reference in the envoy to the *ballade Fortune*:

Princes, I prey you, of your gentilesse,
 Lat nat this man on me thus crye and pleyne,
 And I shal quyte you your bisnesse
 At my requeste, as three of you or tweyne¹⁹

is to the 1390 ordinance that no grant or gift at the cost of the king should be authorized without the consent of the dukes of Lancaster, York, and Gloucester,

¹⁹ *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, ed. F.N. Robinson, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Houghton Mifflin, 1957), pp. 535-36.

or any two of them, then references to the poet's "beste frend", whom they are to petition for some preference, would refer to King Richard, and would certainly suggest that a quite cordial relationship existed between the poet and his royal patron. Unfortunately, the precise nature of Chaucer's associations with those enjoying power is very difficult to establish, by virtue of the lack of objective evidence and the poet's extraordinary reticence to discuss these matters in his own work.²⁰ Nevertheless, the assumption of a mutually respectful and generally congenial relationship seems sufficiently well established to have occasioned some surprise at Chaucer's apparently enthusiastic endorsement in 1399 of Henry of Lancaster's assumption of the throne as Richard's successor, and to have exposed Chaucer to suspicion of disloyalty.

The text responsible for this reaction, almost certainly the last thing the poet wrote, and a striking exception to the general lack of historical specificity in his work, is the envoy addressed to Henry IV at the conclusion of *The Complaint of Chaucer to His Purse*:

O conquerour of Brutes Albyon,
Which that by lyne and free eleccion
Been verray kyng, this song to yow I sende;
And ye, that mowen alle oure harmes amende,
Have mynde upon my supplicacion!

(Robinson, p. 540)

Before too much is made of what is said here, a number of factors have to be borne in mind. The charge against Chaucer of being a turncoat and making over-ready accommodation to the new regime is somewhat muted by evidence suggesting that Chaucer had been in the service of Henry Bolingbroke when he was earl of Derby as early as 1395-96, so that his loyalties may already have been divided before the events of 1399 forced his former masters into a struggle for supremacy. Furthermore, what Chaucer says of Henry of Lancaster in the lines quoted above follows in most of its details a propagandistic, official party line which may be found repeated in the works of other writers of the period, so there is some doubt as to the extent that it reflects the personal sentiments of the poet. Finally, for all of its witty indirection, the piece is a begging letter, and belongs to a genre where the suppression of any feelings prejudicial to the laudatory effect of the whole is dictated by economic expediency. Nevertheless, there are some individualizing touches to Chaucer's treatment of the subject matter of Henry IV's accession, and the materials looked at earlier in this paper can be of help in interpreting their significance.

²⁰ A fact remarked on by Richard H. Jones, *The Royal Policy of Richard II: Absolutism in the Later Middle Ages*, *Studies in Medieval History*, 10 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1968), p. 146: "[O]n high politics the poet [Chaucer] is a disappointing witness who left little definite record either of his opinion on the state of the monarchy or his reaction to controversies at the centres of power. It may only be assumed that he accepted the outlook of his friends and fellows".

That Chaucer chooses to limit himself to a recapitulation of the official line in his address to Henry IV may indicate that his endorsement of the change of leadership is somewhat perfunctory. Its conventionality is evident from the following lines of John Gower's *Cronica Tripartita*, for example, where the same three arguments in justification of Lancaster's actions are advanced in the same order of what was felt to be ascending theoretical importance:

Unde coronatur trino de iure probatur,
Regnum conquestat, que per hoc sibi ius manifestat;
Regno succedit heres, nec ab inde recedit;
Insuper eligitur a plebe.²¹

[His coronation was approved by law in three discrete ways: he conquered the realm, which was thus shown to be his by right; he did not hesitate to assert his hereditary claim to the throne; and above all he was elected by the people.]

Of these three arguments, Henry favoured the second, and would have chosen to found his case exclusively on his descent from Henry III and the seniority of Edmund Crouchback of Lancaster to his brother Edward I. This line of reasoning contained some evident pitfalls, however, not the least among them the fact that it illegitimized all three Edwards as well as Richard II, and Henry was persuaded by his advisors to downplay it. It is the only argument with which the French chroniclers do not take issue, possibly because the implausibility of the claim was thought to render it unworthy of comment. They do assail the other two arguments with ridicule and moral outrage, raising against their validity and against what they regard as a cynically partisan distortion of the real circumstances of Richard's deposition objections which must have been admitted by some of Henry's more avid domestic supporters, and which would certainly not have escaped the comparatively detached and disinterested observation of Chaucer.

The idea that Henry should be greeted as a conqueror on his entry into London by the citizens of that town is taken by the scornful Créton as evidence of their malevolence and stupidity:

[D]isoient l'un à l'autre que Dieux leur avoit monstré beau miracle quant il leur avoit envoyé le dit duc, et comment il avoit conquis tout le royaume d'Engleterre en moins d'un mois, et que bien devoit estre roy qui ainsi savoit conquérir. ... Encore disoient les foles et mauvaises et incrédules gens qu'il conquerroit une des plus grans parties du monde, et l'acomparoient desjà à Alexandre le grant. (pp. 416-17)

²¹ *Complete Works of John Gower*, ed. G.C. Macaulay (Oxford: Clarendon, 1902), IV, 338.

[They told one another that God had performed a great miracle for them when he sent them the said duke, and how he had conquered the whole kingdom of England in less than a month, and that someone who knew how to conquer that way well deserved to be king. ... And the foolish, wicked, and credulous people said furthermore that he would conquer one of the greatest parts of the world, and compared him already to Alexander the Great.]

But scepticism of Henry's claim to have won England by conquest is exceeded by that with which the French chroniclers received the claim that he achieved kingship by free election. Jean le Beau makes no overt comment on the nature of this election, but he describes the proceedings in such a way as to indicate that he regarded them as a travesty:

Thomas de Percy ... cria en hault: "Vecy Henry de Lancastre, roi d'Angleterre". Et adoncques crièrent tous les prélatz et autres, "Ouy, ouy, nous le voulons". Et sans autre élection ne raison dire ne oyr, le roi Henri s'assist en sa chaière royale de justice hors de coustumé et ainçois qu'il fut couronné. (pp. 30-31)

[Thomas Percy ... cried aloud: "I present to you Henry of Lancaster, king of England". And therewith all the prelates and others shouted, "Yes, yes, we want him." And without other election, or any justification spoken or heard, king Henry sat himself in the royal seat of justice, in violation of custom and prior to his having been crowned.]

The scandalized and somewhat more voluble Créton condemns the election proceedings with the statement that "oncques n'ouy homs tel oultrage" (p. 428) [such an outrage was never heard of before]. He begins his description by establishing that the coercive circumstances of the so-called election precluded any voices being raised in opposition to the will of those who were railroading it:

Ilz furent là juge et partie:
 Ce n'estoit pas chose partie
 Justement ne de loyal droit;
 Car il n'y avoit là endroit
 Homme pour le roy ancien
 Que trois ou quatre, qui pour rien
 N'éussent osé contredire
 Tout ce qu'ilz voudrent faire et dire.

(p. 429)

[One of the parties to the dispute was the judge: the affair was not

conducted according to any just or loyally right division; for there was present no spokesman for the old king except three or four who would not for anything have dared to oppose all that the others wished to say and do.]

His summary of the whole proceedings is unequivocal in its censure:

Fut défait le roi ancien,
 Sans droit, sans loy et sans moyen,
 Sans raison, sans vraie justice:
 A tousjours leur sera lait vice.

(p. 437)

[The old king was deposed, without right, without law, and without proper procedure, without reason, without true justice: it will always be an ugly blemish on them.]

Whether or not Chaucer shared or sympathized with these attitudes towards Henry's efforts to validate his usurpation, it is very unlikely that he would not have been aware of them, since even in retirement in Greenwich he maintained contact with friends who had stayed close to the seat of power, and it is hardly to be credited that even in his last years he should be restricted to the ruling group's partisan presentation of events. By choosing to recapitulate exactly what Henry's own apologists were saying, Chaucer is clearly walking an unexceptionably safe path, which at the same time exposes so little of his personal convictions and sentiments as not to preclude the possibility that he viewed the whole matter with amused and cynical detachment.

In one respect, however, Chaucer does make a change to the usual wording of statements about Henry's accession, and this apparently minor deviation may offer a hint as to his real feelings. References to Henry's conquest, if qualified at all, make vague mention of "the realm" (as in Gower's *Cronica Tripartita*: "Regnum conquestat"), or, as in Créton, or in a petition from the prisoners in Ludgate to Henry, they speak of him having "conquis tout le royaume d'Engleterre", and as being "le gracious conquerour d'Engleterre".²² What did Chaucer have in mind in making Henry the "conquerour of Brutes Albyoun"? Dominica Legge explains the unusual reference as a simple piece of emotive window-dressing on Chaucer's part, perfectly in keeping with the other sentiments expressed and serving indeed to validate their sincerity:

The saviour of his country had come from oversea, inevitably setting men's minds running on that story with which every popular chronicle

²² In M. Dominica Legge, *Anglo-Norman Letters and Petitions from All souls MS. 182*, Anglo-Norman Text Society 3 (1941), p. 31.

of the day began; the legend of Brutus the Trojan, who conquered the kingdom of Albion, and created that Empire of Britain whose glories they hoped to see revived.²³

Ms. Legge's statement is cautious, and the possibility that Chaucer intended to invoke a vague association of Henry with Brutus is perhaps not disprovable. But the terms of the analogy are inexact, and certainly permit a quite different meaning. Since Albyoun could hardly be thought of as *Brutes Albyoun* until after Brutus had occupied the land, the title "conquerour of Brutes Albyoun" would seem to conjure association not with Brutus but with the ruler who next established his control of the British Isles by force of arms, and forced the indigenous culture to yield place to his own. No single historical or pseudo-historical figure is available to fill this role, which would be a composite of the Germanic invaders from Hengist and Horsa to Gormond and Isembart, an abstract type of the Saxon such as I have proposed influences French attitudes towards England in the fourteenth century. The defeat by Brutus of the giants encountered on his landing in Britain is not likely to have been thought of as a conquest, but this term is regularly applied to the Germanic invasions from the time of the *De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae* of Gildas.

If Chaucer saw the overthrow of Richard and the emergence to power of Henry as a triumph for the Anglo-Saxon element in British society, he can hardly be supposed to have seen that development as particularly ominous or threatening, or to have been apprehensive that Henry would have resented the implication of the analogy if he perceived it. In linguistic-cultural terms Chaucer can be seen to have cast his lot with the emergence of English to a position of total dominance as the preferred literary language from very early in his career, since everything identifiable as Chaucer's work which survives to us is in English. Chaucer's championship of English in preference to French should certainly be seen, however, not in a context of bitter antagonism, but of friendly rivalry, and as stemming not from a feeling that a poet writing in English could produce something culturally unique but rather that, given an English molded and refined in ways that Chaucer's own contribution to the national literature was to a major degree instrumental in promoting, he could achieve in English exactly the same effects as could be attained in French. In this sense all of Chaucer's work can legitimately be regarded as translation, and the phrasing of Deschamps' praise of Chaucer, although founded on a narrow and unrepresentative sampling of his work, has an appropriateness to the essential thrust of his total literary output. Chaucer's poetry does not constitute a challenge to, or rejection of, the French culture which informs the work of those writers he admires, of Guillaume de Machaut, Oton de Graunson, Jean Froissart, and Eustache Deschamps himself among others, but rather an attempt to assimilate that culture and to give it expression in a new medium. Chaucer's use of English, as Elizabeth Salter in the article cited aptly remarked,

²³ "The Gracious Conqueror", *MLN*, 68 (1953), 18-21.

“is the triumph of internationalism”, not of narrow partisanship.

If Chaucer was apprehensive about a resurgence of ‘Englishness’ in the Anglo-Saxon tradition, he might have feared the possibility of it promoting a somewhat impermeable insularity which he would certainly have regarded as pernicious. As one of the “new men” of the late fourteenth century,²⁴ Chaucer had probably come to regard such insularity as most likely to be intensified by war and diminished by peaceful trade. John Gower, whose sympathy for the earl of Derby and antipathy for Richard were both of longer standing and more intensely felt than Chaucer’s, addressed a poem to Henry IV urging the preservation of peace, so the fear expressed by the French chroniclers that Henry’s triumph portended a resumption of hostilities between England and France was shared by some of the regime’s most ardent sympathisers. If Chaucer shared it too, his fears did not prompt him to offer any public admonition or advice to the perpetrators of the political coup he had witnessed. His silence may signal weary resignation,²⁵ but in such resignation can be found some wisdom.

Successive conquests, as the events described in *Le Roman de Brut* adequately attest, and as Wace himself on one occasion remarks, had been responsible for giving the British Isles their rich cultural and linguistic heritage:

Par remuemenz e par changes
Des languages as gens estranges,
Ki la terre unt sovent conquise,
Sovent perdue, sovent prise,
Sunt li nun des viles changed.
(vv. 3775-79)

[By substitutions and by changes of the languages of foreign peoples
who have often conquered the land, often lost and often won it, the
names of the towns have altered.]

Chaucer seems to have accepted the latest ‘conquest’ with some equanimity. His address to Henry as “conquerour of Brutes Albyoun” probably indicates that he regarded this episode in English history as culturally regressive in its potential to hamper and delay that appropriation of French culture through peaceful means which had been progressing so satisfactorily in the relative tranquility of England’s foreign relations during the period of Richard’s majority. But he was also aware

²⁴ For the social and political attitudes of this group, see Anne Middleton, “The Idea of Public Poetry in the Reign of Richard II”, *Speculum*, 53 (1978), 94-114.

²⁵ This is the view expressed by Derek S. Brewer, *Chaucer* 3rd ed. (London: Longman, 1973), p. 160: “It must have been a relief to serve a king more capable and less capricious than Richard, while Henry’s claim to be the true successor of Henry III together with the façade of legalism of Richard’s deposition were a sufficient sop to the conscience of most ... Chaucer, an old man as the times went, and with a lifelong association with the House of Lancaster, acquiesced in the change”.

that the pattern of English involvement with her continental neighbours was inevitably and irreversibly set by her past history, that no possible circumstances could make England an Ireland or an Iceland, and that the future history of England's continental relations would be determined by economic factors which the present power structure would have a dwindling ability to control, and would be responsive to the cultural needs of a community whose influence was only just beginning to be asserted. Properly apprehended from a late fourteenth-century perspective, that was the lesson that Wace's *Roman de Brut* had to teach.

Department of English
University of Oklahoma

Roy J. Percy