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Review Essay: Karla Taylor, *Chaucer Reads "The Divine Comedy"*

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be a part of the problem" (106) and that a new, more "flexible and humane" alternative to "outworn social structure" is necessary (108). The *Parson's Tale*, by contrast, attempts a refeudalization and resacralization of the "natural and varied world," but unresolved voices in the preceding tales "resist closure, denying to any one pilgrim the finality of utterance to which the voice of the Parson would aspire" (180).

The perceived strength of these last chapters (and the book generally) will depend entirely on the reader's presuppositions about Chaucer's art. Such is the irony of social and literary perspectives on work so rich and, as *Social Chaucer* demonstrates, so susceptible to multiple readings.

Charles R. Smith
Colorado State University

Karla Taylor, *Chaucer Reads "The Divine Comedy,"* Stanford University Press, 1989, vi, 289 pp., biblio., index, \$29.50.

The title, *Chaucer Reads "The Divine Comedy,"* is an apt beginning for this reconsideration of Chaucer's appropriation of Dante's text. This is not a book concerned with how Dante "influenced" Chaucer; that has been done before. Rather, this book explores the key theoretical differences between these two major medieval poets on the subject of the authority of reading and writing: it examines their assumptions about the domain of fiction, what human language can and cannot do, how one reads and what one apprehends from language, regardless of authorial intention. The *House of Fame* and *Troilus and Creseyde* are, for Karla Taylor, Chaucer's "critique of Dante's poem and its poetic typology" (171), a critique that implicitly defines the limits of human language. As she argues, "*Troilus and Creseyde* is, among other things, a sustained dialogue with Dante on the circumscription of human fictions" (209).

Taylor introduces her argument by providing the linguistic model from which she will analyze how the two writers create "authenticity" (10). She presents the grammatical and verbal structures that enable the two poets to create *histoire* (objective narration) and *discours* (subjective narration). Following this clear explanation of methodology, the first chapter describes Chaucer's view of "tidings" and fame by considering the *House of Fame* as an "antitypological vision of history as mere stories, recorded in literature, which, like fame, has no secure relation to truth" (40)—the antithesis of Dante's "vision" in the *Divine Comedy*.

Chapters two and four demonstrate how Dante authenticates his text through figurative language, thereby legitimizing the authority and objectivity of his vision

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and conversion. By way of contrast, we see how Chaucer uses allusions to the *Divine Comedy* and figurative language, in particular to proverbs, to challenge Dante's assumption that poets can "escape the deceptions of human language" (201). For Chaucer, language must inevitably share the instability and mutability of earthly existence.

This is a provocative and incisive study of Chaucer's reading of Dante. The notes are thorough, the references and index helpful, and the book itself handsomely bound and sewn. In all ways, this is a valuable text.

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Peter Nicholson, *An Annotated Index to the Commentary on Gower's Confessio amantis*, Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies 62, State University of New York, 1989, 593 pp., \$35.00.

This annotated bibliographic index lists each "significant" reference, with a short summary, of twentieth-century commentary to lines and passages in G. C. Macaulay's 1900–1901 edition of Gower's *Confessio amantis*. The *Index* covers criticism through 1986 and a few items published early in 1987; it does not cover linguistic or textual studies, unpublished dissertations, or studies published in Japanese. Nicholson includes much material on the relationship between Gower and Chaucer, especially when such material aids in the study of the *Confessio*. As far as Gower's influence on other writers is concerned, Nicholson limits commentary to those items that contribute directly to an understanding of Gower's poem. In compiling the *Index*, Nicholson used approximately 330 books and articles, more than 100 of which are recorded here for the first time.

The entries are arranged according to book and line number as they appear chronologically in the *Confessio*; thus it is possible to locate instantly all the significant commentary on a particular line or passage, including the Latin verses. Cross-references in the entries direct readers to related passages in the *Confessio* and to other pertinent literary works. The *Index* also covers significant topics and figures not directly related to specific passages (for example, Amans, Venus, Genius, the Confession frame, and Pride).

The *Index* complements but does not replace Robert F. Yeager's *John Gower Materials: A Bibliography through 1979* (New York: Garland, 1981), which contains close to 800 entries and is therefore more comprehensive, but which does not refer to specific lines. The *Index* does, however, replace Macaulay's notes, now nearly a century old. The valuable 28-page Introduction to the *Index* provides