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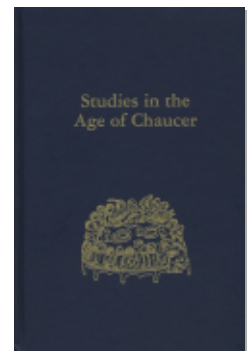
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*Continental England: Form, Translation, and Chaucer in the  
Hundred Years' War* by Elizaveta Strakhov (review)

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back to before the *Preface to Lyrical Ballads*, where Wordsworth asserted that there is no “contradistinction of Poetry and Prose [“when prose is well written,” he adds], instead of the more philosophical one of Poetry and Matter of Fact, or Science.” Steiner asks a harder question that goes back to Aristotle—namely, that if prose and poetry are alike in what Wordsworth calls their “vital juices,” and “the same human blood circulates through the veins of them both,” then how are they different from history, “Matter of Fact,” and science? Her reading of Trevisa suggests that English prose arises out of a certain collapse in the distinction.

Emily Steiner has been working on Trevisa and encyclopedias for some time, and part of Chapter 3 and a little of the other material in *John Trevisa's Information Age* is reworked from essays. The volume includes some twenty-five black-and-white images. Steiner's point is well made: Trevisa's prose—to borrow from his translation of Bartholomaeus's observations about creation and the earth—contains “liif, felynge, and resoun” (152).

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ELIZAVETA STRAKHOV. *Continental England: Form, Translation, and Chaucer in the Hundred Years' War*. Interventions: New Studies in Medieval Culture. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2022. Pp. ix, 252. \$99.95 cloth; \$49.95 e-book.

Elizaveta Strakhov's ambitious new study is a welcome addition to the burgeoning scholarship on England's continental connections that follows upon Ardis Butterfield's *Familiar Enemy* (2009). One of the achievements of that book was to raise into suspension a set of arguments that previous writers had chosen between—for example, that French was either for the French (continental French) or the English (Anglo-Norman). In contrast, *Continental England* sets out to prove a thesis. Strakhov argues that while the Hundred Years War threatened to tear apart the northwest corner of Europe, a group of poets was intent on repairing the damage wrought by fostering a shared repertory of poetic forms, the *formes fixes* lyrics. This focus on form, as opposed to language, allows Strakhov to trace a series of relationships running between England and the Continent long after the adoption of English by Chaucer and the poets writing in his wake. The

resulting arguments are extensive in their geographical as well as their chronological scope, taking in texts written in France, England, and Italy. Strakhov treads this ground with confidence in a book that impresses as much by the optimism of its outlook as by its philological acumen and the originality of its readings.

Strakhov develops her argument over five chapters. Chapter 1 sets the scene by highlighting the community-forming function of lyric exchange as well as the interest in the minute codification of the *formes fixes* that is expressed in manuscript anthologies and poetic treatises. Chapter 2 affords special attention to debates regarding the uses of the classical past in a broader discussion of the integrity of the francophone cultural arena. In a set of poems that will be familiar to Butterfield's readers, Strakhov shows that Philippe de Vitry warns against a breakdown in communications as the result of diversions from standard mythography, whereas Jean de le Mote presents creative engagement with this inheritance as the condition of its survival. Strakhov's focus on classical reception in a book about form is licensed by the attention devoted to mythological elements in the repertoires of *formes fixes* lyrics discussed in Chapter 1.

The book's remaining chapters focus on writing within England. Chapter 3 addresses the propensity of Chaucer's poetry to repair connections between England and the Continent by continuing continental traditions in English. Strakhov argues that this is the hope underpinning both Deschamps's famous ballade to Chaucer and the F-Prologue to *The Legend of Good Women*. Chapter 4 contrasts the strategies of lyric compilation deployed by Gower and Hoccleve. Whereas Gower's retellings of popular myth in his *Traitié pour essampler les amantz marietz* constitutes a lesson on the slippery relations between French and Latin and text and gloss, in his holograph paratexts, Hoccleve aligns his mastery of French forms with Henry V's progressive mastery of France. Finally, Chapter 5 considers the French atmosphere of Chaucer's reception in the fifteenth century. Special attention is afforded to Shirley's deliberate presentation of the poet via paratexts as a French translator; Lydgate's French debts also come in for consideration as Strakhov demonstrates the role of French as the intermediary language giving the monk of Bury access to Italian humanist thought.

Much more is going on in *Continental England* than these summaries can capture. The arguments that subtend the book's thesis are wide-ranging and introduce readers to connections between multiple texts and

languages. Vitry critiques de le Mote in terms that Petrarch uses to critique Vitry (in Chapter 2) and Deschamps praises Chaucer in terms that Deschamps also uses for Machaut, while Chaucer praises Petrarch in the terms that Deschamps had used to praise the English poet (in Chapter 3). There are also skillful renditions of overlooked backgrounds to later medieval English literature that subsequent researchers will find suggestive. The work on fifteenth-century England's dual language policy (in Chapter 4) and on francophone book culture (in Chapter 5) stands out in this regard.

Strakhov's claims are most compelling where they are most concrete. The analysis of Hoccleve's and Shirley's paratexts sheds new light both on these writers' interests in matters French and on their strategies of reputation management, for example. The careful delineation of the disjunctions between the text and gloss of Gower's *Traitié* is likewise striking and original. Elsewhere, some readers may wonder whether a-priori decisions regarding authorial motives have overdetermined the outcome. The argument that *Continental England* announces in its introduction is that French and English poets might attempt to mend the real damages of war by rejuvenating a cultural good that the French and English shared. But a point that Strakhov only really grapples with in her conclusion is that the circulation of her corpus is narrow ("If judged solely by the number of texts found within these pages . . . this conversation about reparative translation is undoubtedly limited"; 223). The lessons of Brexit will perhaps tempt some readers to view Strakhov's materials more cynically as a series of bids for status amongst an inward-looking and self-serving cultural elite.

In particular, the topic of language choice would have benefited from a more even-handed approach. Strakhov's master stroke is to redefine the cross-Channel cultural experience as an effect not of French but of form—form capaciously understood here as including a particular repertoire of mythological allusion. But something important is irredeemably lost when English poets stop writing in French. If cross-Channel culture is to be perpetuated, it must be reciprocal. Literary exchanges are facilitated by French as well as Latin quite late into the Middle Ages, with England not only receiving texts from the Continent but also dispatching works *outré Manche*. Witness, for example, the fortunes of the Anglo-Norman *Man-deville's Travels* (1356), which quickly made its way from England into France and beyond. When Chaucer writes in English, he excludes an

audience beyond the Channel. Even Deschamps, who writes a *balade* in his praise, seems not to have actually read his work.

Consideration of language history could have helped the argument here: did the Black Death deliver the deathblow to the French of England, as Richard Ingham has suggested? If Chaucer *couldn't* have written his poetry in French—here it is assumed he could, i.e., that facility in administrative French translates easily into an ability to write poetry in the language—then the old claim that Chaucer and his followers deliberately sought a break with their French predecessors loses its force. Greater attention to English facility in and access to French would have been welcome throughout. How did Machaut, Froissart, Grandson, and Deschamps circulate in England? Who amongst the audiences of late Middle English literature could appreciate the dense networks of association that Strakhov traces, which include not only French and English writers but also the Italian humanists?

If one of the take-home points from *Continental England* is that Butterfield was right to adopt an uncommitted approach to the Anglo-French cultural archive, this does not invalidate the individual readings that Strakhov presents. Many of these detail alternatives to the reparative mode of translation that the book identifies as its primary focus. Thus for all his interest in French texts and forms, Strakhov's Hoccleve tacks his hopes for posterity to the coattails of the emphatically anglophile Henry V. Strakhov shows too how, in a move distressingly similar to Boris Johnson's drafting of articles for and against European Union membership, Chaucer hedges his bets across the two redactions of his Prologue to *The Legend of Good Women*: whereas the F-Prologue makes a bid for Chaucer's integration into the francophone tradition, in the G-text, the poet develops a more staunchly English persona.

*Continental England* is fully alive to the complex ambivalence of Anglo-French literary relations during the Hundred Years War. Strakhov charts an optimistic track through the tangle of surviving materials without losing sight of the alternatives to her preferred argument. This stimulating and well-researched study will be required reading for a broad spectrum of medievalists, including those interested in translation studies, comparative literature, and war studies, as well as Middle English and Middle French literature.

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