The center panel contains a portrait of Christ the King, looking very Semitic (rather than north Italian or Roman) in Oriental robes. The panel just below, *Adoration of the Lamb*, is the point of focus for all of the activity in the other panels. The lamb as a symbol for Christ is an ancient one which was almost never used by van Eyck's time. The side panels of Adam and Eve contain absolutely nothing of the classically inspired idealized nude. The van Eyck nudes are more accurately depictions of naked, self-conscious burghers. Every single detail in the paintings is clearly rendered with great care.

The most fascinating example of a highly imaginative use of the genre style is found in Jan van Eyck's famous *Arnolfini Marriage*, commissioned by a wealthy Venetian importer residing in Bruges in the year 1434. Despite its appearance as a mere illustration of an intimate event, one to which van Eyck apparently served as a witness, the picture contains several iconographic symbols. The presence of God is acknowledged with a burning candle although the ceremony seems to be a civil one. The inscription just above the mirror with its beautifully lettered signature reads: "Jan van Eyck was here" (as a witness).

Other contemporaries of van Eyck included the famous Master of Flemalle, who is now generally thought to be Robert Campin (c. 1406-1444) and Rogier van der Weyden (1400-1464). The second generation, overlapping the first, included Petrus Christus (a student of Van Eyck), Hugo van der Goes, Dirk Bouts, Hans Memling, and Gerard David. Although differences existed among them, generally it can be said that their basic objective as painters was the same--to render the visible aspects of the natural world in human (if not humanistic) terms, with unbelievable patience, skill, and craftsmanship.

Certainly the most unusual painter, not at all typical of his forerunners or contemporaries, was Hieronymus Bosch, who actually worked more in France and Austria than in Flanders. The wild fantasies of Bosch have a great deal in common with modern surrealism and are, for the most part, sermons on human folly in which many strange, cryptic symbols are used. Not a great deal of factual information on Bosch's life exists, and there is even more controversy and varying interpretations concerning his work. We cannot be certain whether Bosch, in expressing the most terrible things, intended to frighten the viewer or merely present a fantasy. In any case, the moral lessons seem clear--a human being is his own worst enemy. The *Garden of Delights*, in three panels, is his best known work (in the Prado of Madrid).

German art is more nearly an extension of traditional Late Gothic forms, displaying strong elements of linear tracery and passion for decorative detail. Such painters as Stephen Lochner (1420-1481), Conrad Witz (1400-1447), and Martin Schongauer (1430-1491), a fine copper engraver as well as painter and teacher of Albrecht Durer, are the principal figures in early German art. Because of the interest in printmaking and the invention of the movable type printing press, Germany became the center for manufacturing books in the fifteenth century. Book manufacture,

in turn, provided work for a host of artists during the period, and Germans became the best engravers in Europe.

Of the artists whose lives overlapped the first years of the sixteenth century, the two most important were Matthias Grunewald (1470-1528) and Albrecht Durer (1471-1528). As the Reformation began and the destructive wars which followed caught artists in their wake, a powerful expressionism in art developed. Grunewald's *Isenheim Altarpiece* is a highly charged emotional work that illustrates this development. The best known panel is the very brutal *Crucifixion*. Christ's body, with limbs dislocated, is beaten and distorted, torn by the thorns and bleeding from the open wound in his side. The icy tones of the colors enhance the rough, tortured drawing. It is as if Grunewald had concentrated on the horrible brutality of the event itself rather than on the significance and promise of its meaning. Grunewald's *Crucifixion* is about as far from the sunny piety of the Italians as one can imagine.

Durer was the only German of his time to have some understanding of the Italian Renaissance and to try to assimilate its ideals. Yet at the same time he was not foolish enough to attempt to superimpose Italian mannerisms and styles on his native intuition and early training in the Gothic manner. Durer is the closest figure to the ideal "Renaissance man" in the north. He was, in addition to being a superb artist, a botanist, a zoologist, a theoretical geometrist and mathematician, an art and esthetics theorist, and an ardent student of humanistic learning. He was a friend of Martin Luther and Luther influenced him greatly, but at the same time he totally refused to accept Luther's rejection of art as a proper expression of religion. This rejection of visual forms of expression prevailed in most of Protestant Germany and so artists were deprived of Church patronage. Nowhere else in Europe did the artist find himself condemned to such a low station. For lack of patronage and a real understanding of the arts, Durer and his wife were forced to hawk his magnificent copper engravings for not much more than pennies in street fairs. After his sojourn in Italy, the contrast between the Venetian artist's position and that of the German artist rankled him for the rest of his life. He even lectured a group of merchants in Amsterdam on the subject when he was in Holland.

Durer's painting leaves something to be desired. Although his figures are often solid as volumes lighted in space, his color is garish. Durer's real genius emerged in the arts of woodcut and copper engraving. Durer is to engraving what Rembrandt is to etching. Durer's emotions and imagination are given full play is such brilliant prints as *Knight, Death, and Devil* and *Melancholia*. One could say that the former is an almost perfect example of Protestant theology. The knight, as a Christian soldier, armed with faith (the dog), prepared to defend absolutely his faith with his lance, rides through life resolutely and unswervingly. He is attacked by the devil's creatures and stalked by the monstrous devil himself. It is truly a brilliant handling of the theme and is, technically, wonderfully conceived. *Melancholia* is based on a purely Greek theme, to which many Italians subscribed, of human personality signs. Melancholia is the sign of the artist, condemned to a life of restlessness and unresolved tensions.

There seems little doubt that the dreadful Thirty Years' War, with death, pestilence, and famine, was a powerful influence on many artists, and Durer was no exception. Many of his print portfolios contain depictions of the Apocalypse and the Four Horsemen. The series of wars and political struggle had cut off the flowering of German art by the mid-sixteenth century. The Austrian German Hans Holbein the Younger (1497-1543) left the tormented world of the Rhineland for the greener pastures of England to become chief painter to Henry VIII and a part of the English Renaissance.

R.W.N.
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LITERATURE

Unlike the history of art or music, philosophy or political events, the history of literature in the period from 1350 to 1520 is ill-defined and presents no clear-cut outline. On the one hand, the age was marked by controversy, religious and political; the shift from the old social patterns of the late Middle Ages began in the last half of the fourteenth century, mainly as a result of the shift from agrarian to a money economy, but partly as the consequence of disillusionment with the established Church. Patronage of the Church continued, but the stresses in ideological matters affected literature more than the other arts. It was an older age ending, a newer age waiting to be born in some parts of Europe. In Italy, where symptoms of renascence had already appeared early in the fourteenth century, the age was marked by conflict between Church and secular rulers, between Church and reformers, between allegiance to medieval theology and disgust with the Church's dissolute hierarchy.

Since the events of this age and the philosophical consequence are treated elsewhere, we can only note the major writers and how they reflected their times. The vast body of Latin writings continued to be produced, and dissemination of them was accelerated by the invention of printing in the middle of the fifteenth century. Most of the incunabula ("from the cradle"--that is, printed books dated before the end of the century) contains Latin writings, as we might expect, but a significant body of both poetry and prose in the major European languages other than Latin, as well as a considerable output of Greek and Hebrew, mainly from earlier manuscripts long buried in medieval libraries, now reached printed form and wider audiences.

MIDDLE ENGLISH LITERATURE

In the last quarter of the fourteenth century, English writers finally emerged as the peers of their continental contemporaries. William Langland, the reputed author of *Piers Plowman* (the earliest, or "A" version, may be as early as 1362 or 1363), was certainly one of the most popular authors of the age: his poem survives in more than fifty manuscripts. It is essentially a topical poem, using allegory as a medium for satire and relying chiefly on ecclesiastical tradition for its basic form. According to one modern scholar, the poet was

> *. . . a powerful writer, at once a mystic and a realist, sometimes a see-er of visions, sometimes a merciless critic of the*

> *social injustice of his time, the spokesman for the humble and the masses, tireless defender of constitutional liberty; a man profoundly sincere and religious, he aspires to a reform of society, the Church, religion, but not to revolution. . . . Not so great as Dante, more truly English than Chaucer, he is the most attractive literary figure of the fourteenth century in his country.*[1]

Another superb poet, still anonymous, produced the unique manuscript containing *The Pearl, Patience,* and *Cleanness,* all religious poems of exceptional quality, and the finest English romance, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight.* All matters concerning this poet are still subject to conjecture, bitterly disputed, and one authority seems often to cancel another. Yet the poems themselves rank with the best literature of their age--or any other.

While *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is a poem extolling Christian virtues, it is also an expression of the pagan tradition in its subject matter. It is impossible not to recognize evidence of the solar king in the beheading of the Green Knight, in the yearly cycle, and in the various aspects of celebration accompanying the events. On another level, a delightful view of the romantic games played by knights and their ladies is shown in the temptation of Gawain by the lady of the castle and his subsequent embarrassment. These humorous and sophisticated scenes run parallel to brilliantly realistic accounts of the hunt, led by the lady's husband. Throughout, the descriptions of seasons, of countryside, and of courtly life are remarkable in their dramatic quality, and the hero, Gawain, though not entirely without stain, emerges as the epitome of the courteous knight.

The giant of the fourteenth century English--and cosmopolitan--literary scene was Geoffrey Chaucer (c. 1340-1400). Poetry was his avocation; his vocation was that of servant to members of the royal family, conducting diplomatic missions and holding a series of appointments to manage public affairs for the crown. He had little time in a busy career to write, yet he left several masterpieces. He was an admirer and imitator of his French contemporaries, and just when his own career as a poet was ripening, he discovered the Italian writers of the earlier part of the fourteenth century. He may have been aware of the flourishing school of northern and west midland poets who were using the Old English alliterative verse patterns for poems in their own dialects, but we have no evidence that he knew of either Langland or the *Pearl* poet, or any other English contemporaries whose work has survived. Chaucer was well acquainted, however, with the tradition of Latin, French, and Italian letters; he wrote notable translations and imitations of the works he admired.

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[1]Fernand Mosse, *A Handbook of Middle English*, tr. by J. A. Walker (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1952), pp. 258-59.

The genres attempted by Chaucer range over the whole field of literature in his time. *The Book of the Duchess* and his translation of part of the thirteenth-century French poem *Roman de la Rose* were warm-up exercises in the romance style. The allegorical tradition informed his *The House of Fame*, while in *The Parliament of Fowls* Chaucer employed the medieval love debate. His use of birds as the rival suitors permitted mild satire, perhaps disguising a commentary on the political events during the early reign of Richard II. An exercise in philosophical scholarship was his prose translation of Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*, which had been Dante's model for *The New Life* (c. 1292). While Chaucer labored to translate his *Boece*, he was also working on *Troilus and Criseyde*, drawn mainly from Boccaccio's *Il Filostrato*. In *The Legend of Good Women*, Chaucer wrote his "retraction" for his portrayal of Criseyde, traditionally the woman who can't say no. He says he was condemned by the god of love for his attacks on women; thus, as penance, he wrote the *Legends*--or saint's lives--of women who were faithful to the religion of love. Meanwhile, he occupied himself for the last decades of his life in composing his greatest work, the unfinished *Canterbury Tales*.

The Canterbury Tales is a collection of short stories, a few in prose, but mainly in diverse patterns of poetry. The unifying device, or frame tale, was the story of a pilgrimage to the famous shrine of "the holy blisful martir" Becket, murdered at the altar of his cathedral in 1170. Thus Chaucer, joining the pilgrims, meets a fascinating group of English people, a composite of the society of his time. These fourteenth-century portraits are sketched with love and candor in the "prologue," and each is individualized further in the story he tells to the company of pilgrims. As they ride, each tells a story to amuse the rest.

For these narratives, Chaucer drew on a vast body of story material from all ages. The tales are carefully fitted to the characters who tell them, even though they are clearly borrowed from traditional sources. The pilgrims include a number of common folk--a miller, a cook, a carpenter, and several servants--as well as several bourgeois types. The shipman is a sharp-trading merchant-sailor; the franklin is a famous householder and a great host; the merchant of Flanders is wealthy and sophisticated; the sergeant of the law is a discreet and dignified justice. And Chaucer's company also includes a reeve, or sheriff, a summoner for ecclesiastical courts, a doctor of physic, and a scholar, the clerk of Oxford.

The pilgrims in orders or connected in some way with the Church include a prioress and her chaplain, and a retinue of three priests, a very jolly monk, who loves hunting, an equally merry friar (the "limitour"), a holy parish priest--of whom Chaucer approves--and the curious Pardoner, who is little better than a confidence man. Besides the Knight and his son, the Squire, and a Yeoman, representing their class of society, there is the much-married wife of Bath, the parson's brother, a humble plowman, and even the host of the Tabard Inn in Southwark, who decides to join the company. And Chaucer himself is called upon to tell a tale--a hilarious parody of the knightly romance long past its pristine beauty.

The late fourteenth century also saw the beginnings of Biblical translation, especially under the sponsorship of reforming clergy such as John Wycliffe (c. 1324-1384). Like Langland--and Chaucer in some parts of his work--Wycliffe deplored the growing corruption of the Church and openly attacked the arrogance and greed of the higher clergy. When the Great Schism began (1378), Wycliffe renounced his allegiance to the papacy. By 1382 he had completed, with the help of other scholars, most of a translation of the Bible into English and had written a number of other tracts and sermons, both in English and Latin. Though the Middle English Bible attributed to him is not particularly graceful in style, it is more important as the earliest vernacular effort of its kind, clearly pointing toward the next century, when the Reformation made a cause of bringing the Bible to those who could not read Latin. Survival of 150 manuscripts, in spite of proscription, indicates that Wycliffe's mission met a need of his time.

These writers are only the most prominent of many Englishmen in the late fourteenth century. The century following was racked by constant war, and the conflict known as the Wars of the Roses, in which most of the nobility were eventually slain, left the country without patronage for writers or leisure to compose. When the Tudors finally restored some stability to the government under Henry VII, England was experiencing the beginnings of its own renaissance, nearly two centuries later than the pan-European rebirth in Italy.

LYRIC POETRY

The Provencal tradition that stimulated poets everywhere in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries continued to inspire quantities of verse, though the freshness of lyric poetry had staled somewhat. Here and there the authentic tone of the lyric poet, expressing his own feelings, his subjective vision of life and love (especially love) emerged and survived what had become a stultifying convention. For example, Francois Villon (1431-1463?), Parisian student, constantly in trouble and impoverished, used his reputation as a criminal and wastrel. His is the cry of a man at odds with his own society, living for the few moments of freedom, spontaneous and direct in his assessment of his own life as a man and a poet. Less individualistic perhaps were Eustache Deschamps (1346?-1406?) and Jean Froissart (c. 1337-c. 1405), better known as a historian and the writer of Arthurian romance. Both wrote in the French forms that had evolved out of the old troubadour poetry: the ballade with its envoi, the rondeau, the chant royal, and the virelai.

Although Italy could not boast a Dante or Petrarch in this age, its tradition of classical scholarship and love of form were still evident in the technical mastery of the Italian lyricists. Poets like Ariosto and Lorenzo de ' Medici (1449-1492), called Lorenzo the Magnificent, wrote excellent lyrics in the cultivated style, while Angelo Poliziano (1454-1494), one of the greatest scholar-humanists of his day, created joyous

lyrics of love and nature reminiscent of both the Roman Catullus and the later Renaissance poets.

Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475-1564), thought by some critics to be the greatest lyric poet of the Renaissance, was a sculptor by trade, a painter by edict, and an architect by demand. His sonnets add a remarkable dimension to our understanding of this most remarkable artist. He was concerned about everything: love, religion, the intimate life of the intellect. In an age when "man was the measure of all things," Michelangelo provides a gigantic dimension of humanity--and artistry. But his verse shows us the inner life of a man often tormented by the demands of his profession and the caprice of mankind. Though he obeyed his patrons--sometimes with reluctance--he clearly kept his own inner wellsprings of creativity pure. His sonnets rank with the best Italian poetry of the age and are given additional poignancy by our knowledge of his superb work as sculptor, painter, and architect.

In England, Chaucer, already discussed in Middle English literature, holds first place in almost every kind of poetry, and had he never written the *Canterbury Tales*, he would still be revered for bringing to English poetry the spirit and traditions of French, Latin, and Italian works. However, poetry does not depend upon learned writers only, and the fifteenth-century ballads and lyrics of England and Scotland, discussed in the next section, are unexcelled in their imagination and individuality.

POPULAR VERSE AND BALLADS

Though an increasing literacy throughout Europe is notable early in the fifteenth century, and accelerated remarkably after printed books began to be available, there was doubtless a vast underground of oral literature, comprising traditional songs, narrative verse, and folk tales. Some of this material reached manuscript or printed form for the first time in the later century, at about the same time the corpus of amateur dramatic material was also written down.

The languages, however, were undergoing rapid change, partly because of the increasing literacy and also in spite of it. Language is suspended, so to speak, or paralyzed, in a way, when it is written. In England particularly, the shift of sound that occurred during the fifteenth century, especially in the sound of the vowels, had the effect of making the late fourteenth century manuscripts almost unintelligible--and thus neglected--while the language that was first beginning to appear in print was composite, imprecise, and orthographically chaotic. There were at least five major dialects of Middle English, for example, and all of them were used for literary purposes in the late fourteenth century. Though speakers of one dialect could understand most of the words used by speakers of some of the other dialects, the sound and cadence of the languages were far different and certainly not easily understood. The language of Chaucer's London, mainly East Midland with Southern forms, was the one to