

explanation which is also reflected in manuscript illuminations. It is also to be regretted that, given the compilation of important scholarship represented by this collection, an index was not provided.

Apart from these minor considerations, this anthology is not only a fitting tribute to Professor McGalliard, but a welcome addition to the critical canon of Anglo-Saxon poetry.

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From Memory to Written Record: England, 1066-1307, by M. T. Clanchy.
Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979. Pp. xiii, 330. \$18.50.

Until recently, accounts of oral cultures and of the borderlines between oral and writing cultures have commonly been chirographically and typographically biased. With other literates, scholars had so deeply interiorized writing that they could not imagine the state of mind of oral cultures except as a variant of their own literate state of mind. The present book is a landmark in its freedom from chirographic and typographic bias.

Working meticulously and judiciously from abundant sources, Dr. Clanchy, Senior Lecturer in Medieval History at the University of Glasgow, here shows how by the end of the thirteenth century England had made the transit from a society which, despite some literacy, was functionally oral to a society in which written records could compete with and would soon outrank oral testimony as evidence of what was so and what was not so. Clanchy is not concerned with the movement from skilled oral art forms (such as epic narrative) into literature or with the movement from oral lore and wisdom into philosophy and science (both totally dependent on the interiorization of writing, as Eric Havelock has shown in his *Preface to Plato*). He restricts himself to the development of written records and the ways in which written records supplanted orally grounded memory for economic or administrative or other practical purposes.

A present-day literate usually assumes that statements in writing are more trustworthy than spoken words. Pre-fourteenth-century England assumed quite the opposite. Marginally literate societies have commonly followed the practice of oral societies in verifying past events and what derives from the past, such as rights and duties, by the testimony of witnesses rather than by reference to a text. Witnesses were alive and credible because they could defend their statements. A text might always be a forgery. Writing was dead marks on a dead surface, unable to clarify itself if it proved unclear or to defend itself against objections. (Socrates urges exactly these deficiencies, with many others, in his attack on writing in Plato's *Phaedrus*.)

Like oral witnesses, symbolic objects and gestures were also more trustworthy in marginally literate England than were written statements. Thomas de Muschamps around A.D. 1130 conveyed his estate to the monks at Durham by offering his sword on the altar (p. 25). A symbolic object such as a sword was still a normal sign of conveyance or of other agreement. It could be exhibited as proof in court, as later a written document could be. In early times, indeed, a written record itself was thought of as a symbolic object rather than as a document in the present-day understanding of this term (p. 206).

Writing was inconsequential or suspect because the governing framework of thought and of social exchange normally remained resolutely oral for generations after writing first impinged on a given culture. Methods of assuring authen-

tication of written documents evolved slowly in England, which never developed the Italian notarial system for common law. Charters conveying land were originally not even dated (pp. 236-241). They were thought of as symbolic objects and/or as living witnesses, voices that speak out now, whenever queried. Forged charters were common: of 163 charters attributed to Edward the Confessor, 27 percent are surely forgeries, only 39 percent surely genuine, the rest doubtful (p. 249, citing P. H. Sawyer). Indeed, as Clanchy observes (p. 249), forged charters were even necessary. Since an authentic old charter might be rejected by a court of law because it did not correspond to the current (orally sustained) idea of what an old charter should be, you forged one that did correspond. Only you did not think of your product as a forgery, since its present relevance was what mattered and the fact that it professed a relationship to the past contrary to fact was inconsequential. (This exemplifies the deep meaning of the lack of a "sense of history" and of Lorenzo Valla's exposure of the Donations of Constantine.)

Literacy was embedded in a sound world. Consulting a document normally meant not looking at it but having it read to you. You felt that you could better understand it that way. Clanchy notes that we still speak of "auditing" account books because originally these were checked by a hearer, not by the one who simply eyed the script (pp. 183, 218, 227). Composition of a text was commonly done orally, by dictation. Composition in writing, which we take for granted, was rare and done in a psychological setting so oral that we find it hard to imagine. Eadmer, when he composed in writing, felt that he was dictating to himself (p. 218).

All this and far more fascinating detail is marshalled by Clanchy to show how the shift to an economy of written record affected and was affected by innumerable intellectual and social institutions, secular and religious. Writing, as he states (p. 149), is a unique technology that restructures the mind and the entire human lifeworld.

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Chaucer at Oxford and Cambridge, by J. A. W. Bennett. Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1974. Pp. 131. \$7.50.

This series of four studies, representing the Alexander Lectures delivered by Professor Bennett at the University of Toronto in 1970, explores manuscript records and rolls, along with early and later printed antiquarian sources, to recreate the milieu of Oxford and Cambridge, as reflected in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* and especially those of the Miller and Reeve. It is indeed good to have the insights of this learned, urbane Chaucerian scholar, supplemented by his incursions into the medieval world of these two leading English university towns. For what in the hands of a less expert medievalist might have resulted in a collection of minutiae and statistics is translated into an innovative and illuminating discourse on Chaucer's calculated contemporaneity, or "pleasure of particularity," and artistry, evinced not only by these fabliaux but also in his other writings.

In reconstructing the milieu of these fictional narratives, Bennett wisely avoids two of the major traps besetting such endeavors: