



## Chaucer: A European Writer?

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Chaucer's "life story is a European story, everywhere dependent on the *translation*—the carrying across—of ideas, texts, and things" argues Turner in her biography of the poet (2019: 9). As evidence, she adduces his travels across the Channel, marriage to a Continental wife, and engagement with the works of European authors. Nevertheless, her idea of Europeanness relies more on the present ideals of the EU than on an inductive attempt to reconstruct what Europe as an entity meant to Chaucer, if he attached much importance to it beyond his involvement with the inhabitants of discrete and often rival political units. Can Chaucer, then, be characterized as a European writer? In what sense is he European?

To address these questions, I start by examining Chaucer's three references to "Europe" in the *House of Fame* (1339), *Troilus and Criseyde* (3.722), which conjures up the myth of Jupiter and Europa, and the *Man of Law's Tale* (2.161); in addition, I analyze mentions of Europe in John Gower's *Confessio Amantis* (5.7340, 7.533, 7.579) and other works contemporary with Chaucer or known to him. On the basis of this corpus, I distinguish two models of Europeanness: one united by its Western Christian identity or classical heritage and existing in conflict with Muslims and Jews versus another defined in relation to and by exchange with Asia, Africa, and minorities within Europe. I then follow trajectories of medieval *translatio* in his works and raise the question whether they imagine a pan-European republic of letters or vie with other European nations. Finally, I conclude that rather than conveying a single idea of what Europe is (or should be), his works conceive of Europeanness in multiple, at times conflicting ways that permit reflection on the continent's troubled legacy and the dilemmas it faces today.

## References

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