



A Crisis of Truth: Literature and Law in Ricardian England (The Middle Ages Series)

Richard Firth Green

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In the late fourteenth century the complex Middle English word "trouthe," which had earlier meant something like "integrity" or "dependability," began to take on its modern sense of "conformity to fact." At the same time, the meaning of its antonym, "tresoun," began to move from "personal betrayal" to "a crime against the state." In *A Crisis of Truth*, Richard Firth Green contends that these alterations in meaning were closely linked to a growing emphasis on the written over the spoken and to the simultaneous reshaping of legal thought and practice.

According to Green, the rapid spread of vernacular literacy in the England of Richard II was driven in large part by the bureaucratic and legal demands of an increasingly authoritarian central government. The change brought with it a fundamental shift toward the attitudes we still hold about the nature of evidence and proof—a move from a truth that resides almost exclusively in people to one that relies heavily on documents.

Green's magisterial study presents law and literature as two parallel discourses that have, at times, converged and influenced each other. Ranging deeply and widely over a huge body of legal and literary materials, from Anglo-Saxon England to twentieth-century Africa, it will provide a rich source of information for literary, legal, and historical scholars.

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