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Contemporary Chaucer across the centuries
Helen M. Hickey, Anne McKendry, and Melissa Raine (eds)
Published in print: 2019 Published Online: May 2019
Publisher: Manchester University Press
Item type: book

For 700 years, Geoffrey Chaucer has spoken to scholars and amateurs alike. How does his work speak to us in the twenty-first century? This volume provides a unique vantage point for responding to this question, furnished by the pioneering scholar of medieval literary studies, Stephanie Trigg: the symptomatic long history. While Trigg's signature methodological framework acts as a springboard for the vibrant conversation that characterises this collection, each chapter offers an inspiring extension of her scholarly insights. The varied perspectives of the outstanding contributors attest to the vibrancy and the advancement of debates in Chaucer studies: thus, formerly rigid demarcations surrounding medieval literary studies, particularly those concerned with Chaucer, yield in these essays to a fluid interplay between Chaucer within his medieval context; medievalism and ‘reception’; the rigours of scholarly research and the recognition of amateur engagement with the past; the significance of the history of emotions; and the relationship of textuality with subjectivity according to their social and ecological context. Each chapter produces a distinctive and often startling interpretation of Chaucer that broadens our understanding of the dynamic relationship between the medieval past and its ongoing re-evaluation. The inventive strategies and methodologies employed in this volume by leading thinkers in medieval literary criticism will stimulate exciting and timely insights for researchers and students of Chaucer, medievalism, medieval studies, and the history of emotions, especially those interested in the relationship between medieval literature, the intervening centuries and contemporary cultural change.

Aspects of knowledge
Marilina Cesario and Hugh Magennis (eds)
Published in print: 2018 Published Online: January 2019
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This edited collection explores how knowledge was preserved and reinvented in the Middle Ages. Unlike previous publications, which are predominantly focused either on a specific historical period or on precise cultural and historical events, this volume, which includes essays spanning from the eighth to the fifteenth centuries, is intended to eschew traditional categorisations of periodisation and disciplines and to enable the establishment of connections and cross-sections between different departments of knowledge, including the history of science (computus, prognostication), the history of art, literature, theology (homilies, prayers, hagiography, contemplative texts), music, historiography and geography. As suggested by its title, the collection does not pretend to aim at inclusiveness or comprehensiveness but is intended to highlight suggestive strands of what is a very wide topic. The chapters in this volume are grouped into four sections: I, Anthologies of Knowledge; II Transmission of Christian Traditions; III, Past and Present; and IV, Knowledge and Materiality, which are intended to provide the reader with a further thematic framework for approaching aspects of knowledge. Aspects of knowledge is mainly aimed to an academic readership, including advanced undergraduate and postgraduate students, and specialists of medieval literature, history of science, history of knowledge, history, geography, theology, music, philosophy, intellectual history, history of the language and material culture.

Introduction
Helen M. Hickey, Anne McKendry, and Melissa Raine

in Contemporary Chaucer across the centuries

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This chapter surveys current research, methodologies and debates in Chaucer criticism and medievalism studies as they appear in this volume, and discusses their relationship with the scholarship of Stephanie Trigg.

Identifying, and identifying with, Chaucer
Paul Strohm

in Contemporary Chaucer across the centuries

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Paul Strohm, both a biographer of Chaucer and a Chaucerian literary critic, meditates on what Chaucer might come to mean for those engaged with his life and poetic works. In a personal reflection on writing about this medieval clerk and poet, Strohm explores the identification or transference that can occur during an intense study of an author, generating new insights into how our emotional investments are implicated in our ‘relationship’ with an author.

First encounter: ‘snail-horn perception’ in Chaucer’s Troilus and Criseyde

Elizabeth Robertson

in Contemporary Chaucer across the centuries

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Elizabeth Robertson brings together Keats’s ‘snail-horn perception’ with medieval theory of the senses, especially optics, and medieval theology, to analyse the first tenuous encounters between Troilus and Criseyde. During their sensually-charged optical exchanges, both physiological and psychological processes are at work to create great emotional force in the text and impact on the text’s readers.

‘Have ye nat seyn somtyme a pale face?’

Stephanie Downes

in Contemporary Chaucer across the centuries

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The face is a vital site of embodied emotional display. By examining descriptions of facial pallor in a range of Chaucer’s works, Downes explores the poet’s representation of the face as an affective text, which launches an interpretative challenge to both the medieval and the modern reader of fiction, as well as deepening our understanding of cultural expressions of feeling in the pre-modern era.
David Matthews explores how Caxton’s awareness of linguistic change informed his editing methods. Caxton’s editing of Trevisa's translation of Higden’s Polychronicon, for example, shows a distinct diachronic consciousness and a desire to forge something new out of Trevisa's ‘old’ English. This stands in contrast to his more deferential treatment of Chaucer. Matthews thus differentiates between philology as a tool for understanding another language and as an editorial practice focused on rendering texts transparent.

‘In remembrance of his persone’: transhistorical empathy and the Chaucerian face

Louise D’Arcens

From the earliest manuscript images through to cinematic depictions, Chaucer’s ‘persone’, that is his face and body, has been a key focus in the pursuit of transhistorical intimacy with the author. Chaucer’s physical self has been portrayed repeatedly across subsequent centuries in an array of media. Drawing upon the hermeneutic concept of Einfühlung (‘feeling into’) to examine the long ‘empathetic afterlife’ enjoyed by Chaucer’s ‘persone’, D’Arcens explores what Chaucer’s face and body have come to mean to post-medieval audiences; she traces how these differences intersect with the constantly changing nature of Chaucer’s legacy, especially as he and his work have been deemed to reflect national literary and comic traditions.
Textual face: cognition as recognition
James Simpson

in Contemporary Chaucer across the centuries
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James Simpson’s central hermeneutic perception for knowledge in the Humanities is that cognition is re-cognition. Before we can know, we must already have known. He examines this paradox with reference to literary examples of facial recognition from, in particular, Chaucer and his reception in the early modern period. Linking literary face to textual face – the whole text as a kind of face – he applies the lessons learnt from facial recognition to textual recognition; and answers some possible objections to the paradox of knowing being dependent on having already known.

Introduction
Marilina Cesario and Hugh Magennis

in Aspects of knowledge: Preserving and reinventing traditions of learning in the Middle Ages
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The Introduction begins by placing the present volume in the context of previous and current work on the subject of medieval knowledge. It goes on to give an outline of medieval perspectives on the meaning, value and transmission of knowledge, noting the influence of classical authors and tracing the development of ideas about knowledge through the writings of key Christian thinkers. Isidore of Seville is identified as the key influence of the medieval encyclopaedic tradition and particular attention is paid to the authoritative work of Augustine, Bede and Aquinas. The introduction relates aspects of these medieval perspectives to specific chapters of the book and also highlights the relationship between religious and secular traditions. It ends with a succinct outline of each chapter.
In the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, medieval thinkers disagreed about what they called “marvels,” that is, phenomena in the natural world that cannot be understood according to the laws of Nature, and about Merlin, the preeminent performer of marvels. Rationalists denied the existence of marvels because they denied that anything natural was beyond human comprehension. They argued that, because Merlin was not a saint, enacting miracles with divine aid, he must have been a limb of the devil, enacting magic with demonic assistance. Contemplatives affirmed the existence of marvels because they affirmed the irreducible mysteriousness of God’s existence. They maintained that Merlin possessed a natural power, neither divine nor demonic, to predict the future. In Geoffrey of Monmouth’s Life of Merlin and History of the Kings of Britain and Robert de Boron’s Merlin, Merlin demonstrates that time is not a linear sequence of points but a web of correspondences, where marvelous portents (like dragons) anticipate the future and marvelous memorials (like Stonehenge) recall the past. One should respond to a marvel, these texts suggest, not by trying to understand it, but by delighting in it, as one responds to romance.

Inventing Magna Carta
Jennifer Jahner

Having begun as a short-lived peace treaty in 1215, Magna Carta grew to acquire a quasi-sacral status over the course of the thirteenth century. This chapter traces the development of the “Great Charter,” arguing that literary modes of invention contributed vitally to its elevation as a symbol for the rule of law. It looks to three sites for the production of the “idea” of Magna Carta: in the chronicling traditions of St. Albans Abbey, in the legal historiography of London, and in the Latin, Anglo-French, and Middle English verse ephemera that proliferated in the margins of law books and histories. In all of these instances, literary forms of invention
and historical modes of finding precedent converge, with the result that Magna Carta comes to embody both “old law” and the prospect of future reform.