

Andrew King and Matthew Woodcock (eds), *Medieval into Renaissance: Essays for Helen Cooper*. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2016. 296pp. £70.00. ISBN 978-1-84384-432-7

This volume presents twelve articles on medieval and Renaissance literature following the pioneering, wide-ranging and stimulating work of Professor Helen Cooper to whom it is dedicated. As well as celebrating the dedicatee by picking up on many of the themes explored by Professor Cooper over her illustrious career, the book includes a comprehensive list of her publications which remain essential reading for anyone interested in English literature in the medieval or early modern period. The title of this essay collection pays homage to Cooper's first book *Pastoral: Medieval into Renaissance* (1977) and hints at a key ambition of this volume, evident through much of Cooper's own research, that of challenging the fault line often set between the middle ages and the beginning of what the editors call the Renaissance period. The editors' introduction deftly draws attention to the way such periodisation can affect the writing of literary history and how Professor Cooper's work, as well as many of the chapters in this collection, contribute to this discussion. The contributions examine a wide range of medieval and Renaissance literature in Britain (with one contribution on Ireland), exploring connections between these periods, and paying particular attention to the use and reception of earlier material. All contributors to the festschrift are former students of Helen Cooper at Oxford or Cambridge, and many allude to the way their work and these chapters are indebted to their former mentor.

The chapters are arranged chronologically based on their subject matter, and the potential value of conducting research across the medieval and Renaissance periods as well as the linguistic divide is clearly evident. Many of the essays address the question of how medieval or Renaissance literature engages with tradition and authority, be it generic or authorial. Bridging this gap is not always easy as Mary C. Flannery reveals in her study of a conservative poet sitting uncomfortably on the cusp of the

medieval and early modern divide in 'The English Laureate in Time: John Skelton's Garland of Laurel'. Later scholars, for whom he is a marginal figure, frequently struggle to claim him for either the medieval or Renaissance period. The poet looks consistently to the past and Flannery explores how his 1490s poem (printed in 1523), *The Garland of Laurel*, reflects on the nature of poetry and the work of a poet as well as on time and memory. She interrogates how this is linked to a poetic justification and memorialisation of Skelton himself as poet laureate. In an important point on reception, she also pays attention to the short *envoys* and verses in Latin and English which follow the poem in the two early print editions and reflect on the perception of Skelton as a poet laureate of Britain.

Alexandra Gillespie's contribution, 'Unknowe, unknow, Vncovthe, uncouth: From Chaucer and Gower to Spenser and Milton', explores the deliberate way that literary history could be shaped by medieval authors and a hierarchical understanding of authorial authority in the early modern period. Gillespie interrogates allusions, glosses and word-choice to explore ways of understanding how words and phrases and each 'song-making swain' are influenced by their predecessors. The chapter traces terms used by Cicero in the classical period, in the middle ages by Chaucer, Gower and the apocryphal Chaucerian *Plowman's Tale*, as well as in the Renaissance period in Spenser's *Shepherd's Calendar*, concluding with an examination of the poet Milton's later tribute to his medieval forebears. Gillespie's contribution emphasises that to understand much of this complex literature one has to follow the lines of communication not just between other contemporary texts, but through time, uncovering an everchanging understanding of authority and identity.

This line of inquiry is picked up by Jason Powell's chapter which explores the reception of authoritative advice manuals and how that context can aid a reading of the father-son advice found in William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. In 'Fathers, Sons and Surrogates: Fatherly Advice in Hamlet', Powell marshals a range of historical and contextual evidence

of fatherly instruction to offer a new way to understand the actions of Hamlet, 'English literature's favourite prodigal' (185). The study picks up on Professor Cooper's comments about the inclusion of instruction in prose romances and the curious commonplace instruction offered by Polonius to provide a considered analysis of how medieval and early modern advice literature supports the renderings of instruction and duty on the stage. In the course of the discussion, Powell points to many sources of instruction literature drawn on by late Tudor and Elizabethan readers, examining, for instance, the marginalia found in manuscripts of Peter Idley's popular vernacular poetic work, *Instructions to his Son* (c.1450), which reflect a keen interest in the theme of fatherly advice found in *Hamlet*. This essay is particularly concerned with interrogating responses to surrogate fathers, false fathers and those with questionable motives, and Powell suggests that three moments of fatherly instruction should be considered together: Polonius to Laertes; the admonitions of the ghost; Claudius to Hamlet. Examining the many competing fathers in *Hamlet*, he argues that it reflects the play's contemporary anxiety over the potential reuse and abuse of such advice by surrogates.

The reception of older texts is also of interest to James Wade who also deals with the complicating factor of religion. In 'Penitential Romance after the Reformation' he examines the reactions of religious humanists such as Roger Ascham and John Foxe to the medieval Romance genre. Ascham, he tells us, fears that 'sinne and fleshlines bring forth sects and heresies' (93), and Wade explores why romances which retained religious elements, with a particular focus on penance and individual struggle, may not have concerned all Protestant reformers but continued to flourish in the 1550s in prose (*Guy of Warwick*, *Sir Isumbras*, *Sir Gowther*) and in dramatised versions for the stage (*King Lear*).

Other chapters focus on how literature has adapted and reformulated source material to produce new works. For some, this involves adapting a genre (R.W. Maslen), for others, relocating traditions

from Spain to Ireland (Joyce Boro and Aisling Byrne). Professor Cooper has examined magic that does not work and, taking this as a cue, Maslen switches the focus to explore the failure of armour in an enjoyable chapter entitled: 'Armour that doesn't work: An Anti-meme in Medieval and Renaissance Romance'. Maslen examines various ways authors play with the functional and symbolic role of this key component of the knightly arsenal which is intended to make a knight indestructible. In Romance literature, successful armour is less useful as a plot device than that which does not function, but can reveal important character traits: the good but boring 'armour-bearing machine' Sir Galahad and the rather soulless yet efficient 'allegorical machine' Talus are hampered by a lack of humanity or emotion. Pointedly, Maslen draws attention to this link in later works where armour does not function, for instance, Italo Calvino's rule-abiding body-harness in *The Non-existent Knight*. Here, interactions with the world teach the aspiring knight that being a better knight is about more than following the rules and not failing. Knights are more interesting if they can be defeated when their armour fails, and particular attention is paid here to portrayals of armour or lack thereof in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, a narrative which is complicated by supernatural elements. The chapter concludes with 'the most sophisticated post-medieval treatment of this anti-meme' (50), exploring the role of armour in projecting identities and revealing or hiding physical and moral weaknesses in Shakespeare's Trojan play, *Troilus and Cressida*.

Two chapters deal with connections with texts beyond Britain. Joyce Boro presents another study of the early modern English stage, this time exploring the afterlife and the cross-cultural transmission of Romance in "To visit the sick court": Misogyny as Disease in *Swetnam the Woman-Hater*. This is a study concerned with sources and the re-crafting of a narrative for specific purposes. It examines the reliance of the play, *Swetnam the Woman-Hater* (first performed in 1617–19 and published in 1620), on sources such as Juan de Flores's fifteenth-century Spanish

Romance, *Grisel y Mirabella*. This is important because, Boro argues, early modern Spanish fiction was more likely than that of England to deal with the topics addressed in the play. Boro examines the use of medical and political theory in the play to understand the socio-political implications of a character's melancholy, and how, by fictionalising a notorious antifeminist (Joseph Swetnam), the play meditates about women, gendered behaviours and misogyny in Jacobean society. In a different approach, Aisling Byrne's contribution deals with medieval literature in a broad insular context. Her chapter, 'Writing Westwards: Medieval English Romances and their Early Modern Irish Audiences', offers an examination of the reception and publication history of medieval Romance in Irish in Ireland from the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries, many of which only survive in later copies. This study crosses many boundaries, both temporal and geographic, and demonstrates the circulation of non-native vernacular writing in late medieval Ireland, including fifteenth-century copies of Irish language translations by Uilliam Mac an Leagha of *Guy of Warwick* and *Bevis of Hampton* as well as copies of William Caxton's *The Recuyell of the Historyes of Troie* and *Fierabras* found in Trinity College Dublin MS 1298, as well as later evidence for circulation of romance. Byrne's chapter also suggests ways that Irish 'romance tales' might be understood and explored within the wider category of European Romance.

All literature is a product of its time, but some of the essays deal more specifically with how literature and reworking or circulation of medieval literature is affected by a writer's contemporary context, how they understand history, their contemporary world, or how literature can serve to project visions of the future, either real or imagined. Megan G. Leitch offers a rare examination of fifteenth-century Middle English prose romances, arguing that they can be read as a response to more conventional romances in "Of his ffader spak he nothing": Family Resemblance and Anxiety of Influence in Fifteenth-Century Prose Romance'. Arguing for a need to focus on form as well as content of these

prose romances as a sub-genre, she points out that the more flexible format of prose can subvert perceived notions of Romance. Moreover, in situating these prose romances in their political context in the aftermath of the War of the Roses, she suggests their dark arcs and representations of familial destruction were ways to ‘ruminate’ as such issues came into focus in Tudor society. Again, taking her lead from Helen Cooper’s pioneering research, Leitch explores familial anxieties of inherited characteristics (which can be both positive and negative) as well as identity, tradition and virtuous conduct by those other than knights.

Staying with the theme of literature written by authors concerned with their contemporary world, Andrew King, one of the editors, explores aspects of sixteenth-century Romance in ‘The Monument of Uncertainty: Sovereign and Literary Authority in Samuel Sheppard’s *The Faerie King*’. This contribution examines Sheppard’s complex unfinished poem, *The Faerie King*, and his post-regicide portrayal of Charles I, embodied in the character of Prince Ariodant. Written while Sheppard was imprisoned, King draws attention to how the poem serves as a mirror for the both the historical context and the personal context of Sheppard. The chapter is concerned with examining authority, legitimacy and continuity in the poet’s work as he grapples with his royalist political leanings in the wake of the regicide and the English Civil War (c.1648–54) as well as his own complex poetic legitimacy within the Spenserian tradition. King examines Sheppard’s engagement with Edmund Spenser, calling the title of his poem ‘an act of inheritance’ (211), and deftly exploring further literary analogies with Spenser’s *Faerie Queen*, an engagement which seems particularly strong in moments when Sheppard seeks to analyse Ariodant’s failings.

In the chapter ‘Thomas Churchyard and the Medieval Complaint Tradition’, the other editor, Matthew Woodcock, explores the role of poetry in encouraging social change in England in the Edwardian period. Focusing primarily on Churchyard’s earliest work, *Davy Dycars Dreame* (1551), which presents a metrical list of societal reforms intended to shape

contemporary society and the future, it examines Churchyard's debt to the medieval *complaint* tradition as well as the medieval satirical, commonwealth and plowman tradition of social commentary, which continue into the mid sixteenth century. Exploring the personal and social motivations which infuse complaint literature, Woodcock traces how Churchyard develops and adapts the rhetoric of social commentary and the complaint tradition against the backdrop of contemporary political factional struggles to suggest the possibility of achieving reform and returning to a better world.

Two chapters deal with aspects of Arcadia, that vision of mythical pastoral harmony which was a hugely popular motif in the Renaissance. Nandini Das's contribution, 'Placing Arcadia', explores why Arcadia was understood as such a viable exemplary locus of idyllic rural retreat in fictional and pastoral literature in the Renaissance. Tracing the development of the idea, Das argues that the association of Arcadia with memory, geography, and time allowed it to serve as a fertile site of imagination for authors seeking to fashion new visions of Arcadia in classical and early modern pastoral literature. Helen Vincent's chapter examines how adaptations of the story of Argalus and Parthenia, which first appears in Sidney's revised pastoral romance, *Arcadia*, are influenced by contemporary seventeenth- and eighteenth-century ideas about courtship and marriage. 'Mopsa's Arcadia: Choice Flowers Gathered out of Sir Philip Sidney's Rare Garden into Eighteenth-Century Chapbooks' reveals how this story of 'virtuous constancy' is extracted from Sidney's narrative and repacked for later audiences in verse and on stage. In this detailed study, Vincent addresses questions about the circulation of fiction in the context of the rise of popular print and the chapbook, and traces how various versions of these chapbooks present and alter the sixteenth-century narrative.

The contributors to this festschrift offer revealing insights into the adaptation, circulation and reception of a wide range of genres and works

from the classical to the early modern period. The chronological sweep and range are useful, and present a valuable contribution on questions of identity, periodisation and tradition. The chapters are linked through their engagement with Helen Cooper's work and focus on many of the themes she has explored through her scholarship. Appropriately, the Romance genre is particularly well-served.

The volume helps illuminate connections which can and should be made between authorial ambitions, their audiences and their sources, and it has helped untangle the web of influences which inform and shape medieval and Renaissance literature. Crucially, many of the contributions demonstrate the value in exploring intertextual conversations which stretch across modern periodisation. Presenting a useful combined bibliography and a helpful index, this collection will no doubt generate much fruitful debate and discussion.

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