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Chaucer and the City (review)

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century essays in vernacular life-writing influenced later work in English. Equally striking, given the historical and contextual thrust of the book, is the omission of any reference to the Peasants' Revolt, especially given Steven Justice's convincing claims for how the rebellion challenged attitudes about writing, texts, labor, and social order. Finally, it would be interesting to know whether the new masculinities being developed by writers in and about post-Plague London had counterparts in other major European cities of the period, for example Paris and Florence. These criticisms and questions aside, Isabel Davis has written a stimulating book, one that is likely to spur yet more nuanced accounts of life-writing and masculinity in later medieval England.

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CHAUCER AND THE CITY. Edited by Ardis Butterfield. Chaucer Studies XXXVII. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2006. Pp. xiv + 231. \$80.

The dozen essays of this attractive collection offer scholarship of critical substance and originality that deserves to be considered and responded to by students of Chaucer and his times. In her Introduction to the book, "Chaucer and the Detritus of the City," Ardis Butterfield calls our attention immediately and repeatedly to the sounds, more than the sights, of London. The essays that follow, she says, call particular attention to the "aural and linguistic, material and historic" (pp. 4, 12) and not "merely material" (p. 5) perspectives on "the reading of the city in Chaucer" (p. 6). Opening with an account of the sounds and materials in two exhibits at the Tate Modern, she leads us, in a very few pages, from thinking about the differences and connections between detritus and evidence, to headier regions inhabited by Walter Benjamin and Michel de Certeau. They and Henri Lefebvre (or should it be LeFebvre, as on pp. 4[n.5], 33?), along with Caroline Barron and the book's dedicatee David Wallace, are the influential *genii loci* for a number of the book's contributors. The city, along with the "City," plays its part in the essays: the idea of the city as much as the historical London (and environs) makes this a book that non-Chaucerians may also wish to consult. Chaucerians, on the other hand, will find in it new contexts for and reinvigorated perspectives on Chaucer's London.

Grouped into four categories (Locations, Communities, Institutions, Afterlives), the eleven essays offer varied, if fragmentary, glimpses of largely discontinuous matters: "the spatial extent of the city" (p. 13); "how city communities are created through language, and conversely how poetry is produced and received among city communities" (pp. 16–17); aspects of the "institutional life" of London's few "relatively stable institutions" (p. 18); and "two moments where Chaucer's relationship with the city has a particularly resonant meaning for later London writers and readers," the "long eighteenth century and the nineteenth" (p. 19). In a review like this, it is impossible to do full justice to all the essays. A number of the essays illuminate Chaucer's texts from archival evidence; some offer fresh attention to particular texts in Chaucer's *oeuvre*. Many of the essays open, or refine, useful conversations between Chaucer's works and a variety of contemporary texts and documents, as well as with theorists of the city, ancient, medieval, and modern.

In "Greater London," Marion Turner raises a recurrent theme of the collection, and an instructive qualification of David Wallace's "absent city," by arguing that Chaucer's London is not a "contained, culturally unified city" but a "more complicated and expansive location . . . a place of fluctuating, unfixed bound-

aries" that define the "fractured and porous nature of London in the 1380s and 1390s" (p. 25). Suggesting that "*Troilus and Criseyde* is a bourgeois, urban poem as well as an aristocratic, courtly production" (p. 32), and drawing on Chaucer's Melibee and the tales of the Cook and Canon's Yeoman (as well as the contemporary Latin "Stores of the Cities") she shows that the "strength of Chaucer's depiction of London resides in the fractured, antagonistic character of the city, portrayed as a place of competing power structures and multiple agendas" (p. 40).

Barbara Nolan's "Chaucer's Poetics of Dwelling in *Troilus and Criseyde*" is a richly detailed and suggestive study of the poem that deserves to be on every Chaucerian's reading list. Beginning with a fresh comparison of Boccaccio's "architectural mnemonic" (p. 59) and Chaucer's, she demonstrates how Chaucer achieves "larger political, social, and poetic ambitions than his predecessor" (p. 59). Examining the local settings, public and domestic, in the poem, and their variously gendered conditions, Nolan offers fresh insights about the notion of "dwelling," which Chaucer employs in *Troilus* "not in its usual modern English stative sense, but rather as a subtly dynamic verb, embracing its Old English senses of seducing, wandering, erring, deluding" (p. 62). This finely nuanced essay moves from town to tent, from considering a "world dangerous to all humankind, but especially to a woman alone" (p. 74) to concluding that the "tactical, contingent poetry Chaucer, like his heroine, conceives simultaneously covers over and reveals the fragility of the places themselves as well as the fiction-making by which men and women make their (always temporary) dwellings seem permanent" (p. 74).

Christopher Cannon's "Chaucer and the Language of London" illuminates "how deeply the noise of London could impress anyone who wrote there" (p. 79). From the "displacement of London life into a farmyard in the *Nun's Priest's Tale*" (p. 80) to "London's cacophony" and craft "rivalry" and "personal conflict" (p. 81), he inventories the "exceedingly rare" (p. 88) words of the Canon's Yeoman's Prologue and Tale (though he actually lists more than the "thirty-three" or "thirty-eight" in his count) to support his claim that while the "use of new and nonce words was basic to Chaucer's linguistic practice" (p. 88), the "craft sounds" and "distinctive vocabularies" were found rather than invented, "imitations" of a "distinctly *urban attribute*" (p. 89).

Derek Pearsall, in "The *Canterbury Tales* and London Culture," objects to Walter Ong's claim that "The Writer's Audience is Always a Fiction," and argues that Chaucer's collection, "whatever the subject-matter and settings of its tales, is pre-eminently a London poem with a London audience" (p. 97). This is an audience distinct from that of all his earlier poems: there was "clearly a break in the continuity of Chaucer's poetic career between 1386 and 1389," when (though he had "never been a court-poet") he "distance[d] himself from the court-faction" (p. 97). We should recognize, instead, his "recurrent appeal to a 'clubby' kind of male coterie audience," which we may see in the "idiosyncrasy" of his narrators (e.g., Franklin, Merchant, Knight, Man of Law) and in the "[e]xamples of scepticism about the high idealism . . . of love, [and] of wearily cynical understanding of the thinness of that veneer of idealism" (p. 99). Pearsall surveys the "cronies" and "usual suspects" of Chaucer's "circle" (pp. 103-4) and speculates about the possible existence of a "sort of late Ricardian equivalent of the *Puy*" (like the one known to have existed in London during the late thirteenth and early fourteenth century), "with the difference that the idealised praise of women is now the main joke and not the main business" (p. 104). He recuperates (to some extent, perhaps) Chaucer's courtly reputation, by suggesting that his address to this "clubby

male audience," though "sharing in their pleasure in the jokes, . . . was also educating them through the special powers of poetic fiction in understanding more than their ignorance and prejudice seemed to allow" (p. 108).

A number of Pearsall's points are given additional substance in Helen Cooper's "London and Southwark Poetic Companies: 'Si tost c'amis' and the *Canterbury Tales*." She draws stylistic connections between Chaucer's *Womanly Noblesse* and his two *Complaints* and the poem of Renaud de Hoilande, "the one song . . . that seems to derive from the London *Puy*" (pp. 114–15), for which she offers an edition and translation (and a gray-scale facsimile of the PRO document). Like Pearsall, Cooper sees contrasts with the style of the poetic contest in the *Canterbury Tales*: "When the pilgrim Chaucer rode out of the city to join Harry Bailey and the company of pilgrims in the inn at Southwark, he was turning his back on a certain kind of civic performance as well as on the poetry of princely courts" (p. 117).

David Benson, in a fine essay on "Literary Contests and London Records in the *Canterbury Tales*," focuses our attention, as Turner did earlier, on the Cook's and Canon's Yeoman's tales: two narratives with no clear literary sources, and the "only two tales set in London" (p. 129). Benson plausibly argues that we should look to records of municipal trials as a "context" for the kinds of "contesting voices" (p. 139) that define the *Canterbury Tales*; these two texts dramatize scenes and narratives depicting an "underworld of immorality, fraud, misrule, and other threats to decency and the good order of the city" (p. 129). He instances further the craft rivalries mentioned earlier by Cannon. Comparing the jurors in such trials to Chaucer's readers, he happily notes that "[o]ne advantage that literary critics have over jurors is that they do not have to arrive at a single, fixed conclusion and ultimately choose between the stark polarities of guilt or innocence" (p. 140).

Elliot Kendall's "The Great Household in the City: the *Shipman's Tale*" illuminates the "dialectic between urban and great household economic modes" (p. 150) and the intersection of a cash-exchange economy of mercantile commerce and the gift or largesse economy that marks the world of the aristocratic (or monastic) great household. Kendall shows how the Shipman's monk reveals himself as "adept in commercial and opportunistic behaviour," while the merchant more fully embodies "the great household's idealised values of enduring, non-commercially organised relationship" (p. 154). By adding a careful look at the motives and values of the merchant's wife, this essay enriches our reading of the tale's ending, which "comes closer to a conflation of largesse and commerce than a suppression of one by the other" (p. 159).

In "London and Money: Chaucer's *Complaint to his Purse*," John Scattergood succinctly inventories the literary reputation that London had for being a "morally dubious and very expensive place" (p. 171). Emphasizing the latter element particularly, he makes the case for redating Chaucer's *Complaint* to late 1399, before he took up the lease of a dwelling in the sanctuary of Westminster Abbey. The *Complaint* indicates that "October, November, and early December 1399 must have been worrying months for Chaucer, so much so that once again [as in 1386], though old and possibly ill, he had to contemplate leaving his native city, this time not primarily for political reasons but for economic ones" (p. 173). Chaucer's appeal bore positive results: "the system, such as it was, evidently picked him up and helped to take care of him" (p. 173), with "protected accommodation" at the Abbey, renewal of his grants and annuities, and further gifts and grants, all of which improved his situation during his last days.

The two essays in the final section, by Paul Davis and Helen Phillips, offer rich insights into the ways misattributed works (especially *The Flower and the Leaf*)

shaped the image of Chaucer, an image that still finds resonances even for those of us who have since “corrected” the misattribution. The historical shifts in Chaucer’s reputation remains a fruitful site of study, and these essays contribute substantially toward refining our understanding of the reception of his works—and their (and his) characterization—in the centuries that intervene between his city of London and ours.

Reading all the essays in this collection produces the cumulative effect of at once defamiliarizing the London we know and familiarizing us with features of Chaucer’s city. They also substantially inform our appreciation of his poetry, especially the *Canterbury Tales* and *Troilus*. We may have much still to learn about the implications of Chaucer’s urban context for our fuller understanding of his poems, and of his audiences, medieval and modern. This book will remain a useful set of signposts for such journeys.

The book is well produced, with few noticeable errors in the text: aside from the Lefebvre/LeFebvre discrepancy mentioned above, I spotted “L’écriture” and “L’Écriture” on p. 8; “statue” for “statute” (p. 50); and an extra (?) “as” on p. 88.

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MEDIEVAL GO-BETWEENS AND CHAUCER’S PANDARUS. By Gretchen Mieszkowski. The New Middle Ages. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006. Pp. xi + 218. \$69.95.

In the Fall 2007 issue of the *Medieval Academy News*, President Bernard McGinn reflected on how essential comparative inquiry is and will be to the future of Medieval Studies. Even though McGinn’s comments may be meant even more globally, I would argue that Gretchen Mieszkowski’s incisive book on Chaucer’s Pandarus and medieval go-between traditions proves that the future is already here, offering a rich and effective mix of source study, cultural context, and feminist as well as close readings. Her monograph focuses on “ethical issues raised by the actions of characters who bring people together for sex or love, as Chaucer’s Pandarus does” (p. 5). Drawing on three centuries of Latin comedies, fabliaux, romances, allegories, exempla, the *Roman de la rose*, *El Libro de buen amor*, and others, the work aims to “establish the ideas about go-betweens and their roles that Chaucer would have expected his audience to bring to *Troilus and Criseyde*, and the conceptions of going between within which Chaucer himself worked” without offering a “comprehensive reading” of the poem (pp. 5, 8). To that effect, the book is organized into an introduction and three parts: Part I, Choreographing Lust: Go-Betweens for Sexual Conquest; Part II, Choreographing Love: Idealized Go-Betweens; and Part III, Choreographing Lust and Love: Chaucer’s Pandarus, demonstrating that Pandarus is Chaucer’s unique amalgam of two distinct traditions.

In the section on choreographing lust, go-betweens “coax, inveigle, trick, or force” (p. 9) young women into having non-consensual sex. Gender concerns abound, as not only the victims but also the intermediaries are female: almost always predatory, old, poor, crone-like women—often peddlers or prostitutes—who feign piety while selling their insidious services to the highest bidder. The earliest medieval examples occur in five highly misogynistic eleventh- and twelfth-century Latin comedies—written in France like many of the other cases in the book—showing Ovidian influence and voyeuristic tendencies. Since these works were often used in classroom settings, for their audience of young boys they reinforced and perpetuated both the ingrained medieval stereotype of women as insatiable be-