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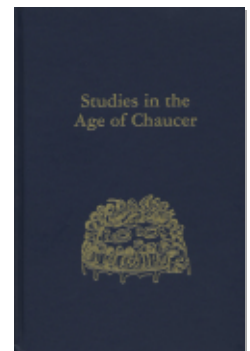
How Soon Is Now? Medieval Texts, Amateur Readers, and the Queerness of Time by Carolyn Dinshaw (review)

Brantley L. Bryant

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horse in chivalry. Especially illuminating here is Crane's observation that the embodied interaction between knight and horse, as exemplified by Bevis's relationship with his beloved mount Arondel, "carries the knight into a zone of consciousness and an ethical awareness that are not exclusively human" (167). Also perceptive is Crane's analysis of the "horsly" qualities, sexed status, and vivacity of *The Squire's Tale's* steed of brass, which, she argues, captures something of the enlivened physicality of the chivalric horse. Such examples demonstrate how traces of the "living animal" can be found in unexpected places in medieval literature, even in contexts where the animal referent has seemingly been displaced by a machine-like analogue.

Animal Encounters blazes a trail for a new kind of literary analysis centered on animals, in which the "furry" vehicle of the animal trope becomes the star attraction rather than its human tenor. Anthropomorphism itself is shown, by Crane, to be more than simply a means of reinforcing animal difference: animal and human are revealed as unsettled, mutually defining categories. In closing, I would simply like to observe, in this connection, that the living beings most frequently disregarded in literary analysis are critters of the non-furry variety, animals such as insects and invertebrates. To date, these life forms have not inspired the same levels of critical reflection as Derrida's cat or Marie de France's werewolf, but if, as Crane suggests, there is no thinking that can entirely "forget" the living creature, then these animals, too, may be deserving of scholarly attention in the future.

ROBERT MILLS
University College London

CAROLYN DINSHAW. *How Soon Is Now? Medieval Texts, Amateur Readers, and the Queerness of Time*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2012. Pp. 272. \$84.95 cloth; \$23.95 paper.

In the preface of *How Soon Is Now?*, a New York Medieval Festival attendee's awkward bathrobe costume catches Carolyn Dinshaw's eye. Dinshaw reads the bathrobe not as a goofy mistake but as a strangely touching "medievalist act" that shows the interweavings of past, present, and future in the bathrobe's accidental similarity to medieval

designs (xii). A few pages later, Dinshaw interprets the 1984 song “How Soon Is Now?” by The Smiths as an investigation of the “temporal conundrum” of the fleeting present (2). With a start like this, readers can expect a book that artfully jumps the tracks of the usual monograph, and they are not disappointed.

How Soon Is Now? offers a provocative mix of analyses of medieval texts, examinations of their reception by amateur readers, theoretical investigations, autobiographical reflections, and calls for change in the academy. These elements are united by the central project of “claim[ing] the possibility of a fuller, denser, more crowded *now*” (4). On the one hand, the book identifies moments in medieval texts that depict the experience of living in a complex and multiple “now.” On the other, the book examines the personal engagements of amateur medievalists who have found comfort or distress in medieval literature’s odd temporalities. Dinshaw observes that both medieval texts and their later readers embrace “forms of desirous, embodied being . . . out of sync with the ordinarily linear measurements of everyday life” (4). Professional scholars, the book movingly asserts, have much to gain from affirming such queerly amateur experiences in their own work.

True to the book’s open-ended spirit, Dinshaw shapes her chapters not as “definitive models” but as “provocations” (5). Following the preface’s bathrobe anecdote, the introduction surveys theories of time’s multiplicity, analyzing the difficult nature of the present in the titular Smiths song alongside Aristotle’s *Physics* and Augustine’s *Confessions*. Dinshaw also notes the book’s debts to recent scholarship on temporality, queerness, and historicity. Dipesh Chakrabarty’s work stands out as an especially notable influence in the introduction and in subsequent chapters. Playfully reminding readers of the forgotten importance of the amateur, the introduction also discusses the founding figure of contemporary Chaucer studies, Frederick James Furnivall. Furnivall, Dinshaw observes, was himself regarded with suspicion by established scholars, and his many editorial projects were motivated by a desire to reach an audience of passionate amateurs.

Chapter 1 develops Dinshaw’s claim that medieval texts and their amateur readers can provide us with “a more capacious and positive sense” of the present (41). It dwells on “asynchrony stories,” medieval narratives whose present is malleable or plural. In particular, Dinshaw examines a monk’s slip into the future in the *Northern Homily Cycle*, the century-crossing Seven Sleepers of Ephesus from Caxton’s version of the

Golden Legend, and the temporally adrift army of King Herla from Walter Map's *De nugis curialium*. The chapter's conclusion then points out a similar asynchrony in Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's adaptation of the story of the monk in his verse drama *The Golden Legend*, showing how "Longfellow enters into a temporally complex *now* through medieval poetry and prose" (68).

Time and politics cross paths in the second chapter, which dwells on the temporalities of empire and colony. Dinshaw tracks the role of time in *The Book of John Mandeville*, examining that text's discussions of the Fountain of Youth and of Eden as examples of "curiosity and longing to experience another kind of time" (76). The second part of the chapter considers adaptations of Mandeville by nineteenth-century British bureaucrat-amateurs who riffed on "Sir John" to consider their own "eastern" moments. Andrew Lang, for example, wrote a faux-Middle-English letter to John Mandeville, correcting Sir John's errors and informing him about the progress of the British Empire. In this "amateur medievalist" letter, Dinshaw sees Lang using the medieval past to express his own affective engagement with imperialism (95). M. R. James is also treated here. Dinshaw examines both James's creation of a parodic lost fragment of Mandeville and his famous ghost stories as examples of how "the colonial, the philological, and the amateur" connect with queer experiences of time (99). Dinshaw concludes this chapter by meditating on her own experience of postcolonial "not-quite-white queerness," exploring the links between contemporary medieval studies and colonial legacies (104). The autobiographical material, here and throughout, is especially powerful. It puts into practice the book's call for affective "amateur" engagement on the part of scholars and it reveals the rich interconnections of the personal and professional.

In the third chapter, Dinshaw turns to *The Book of Margery Kempe* to unravel its discussion of the present. Beginning with Margery's exclamation that the death of Christ "is as fresch to me as he had deyed this same day," Dinshaw argues that Margery's "multiple temporalities" can provide new "temporal avenues" for readers (106, 108). The rest of the chapter examines the experiences of two such readers caught up with Margery: Hope Emily Allen, the independent scholar and amateur who was Margery's first editor, and Dinshaw herself. Here, Dinshaw considers the different times experienced by amateurs. While professionals labor within measured deadlines, Dinshaw claims, expert but amateur

scholars like Allen can luxuriate (or drown) in “multiplicity and open-endedness” (22).

The fourth and final chapter weaves together “asynchrony stories” that cross centuries. It starts with Dinshaw’s encounter with a gravestone knocked out of place (and time) by a Catskill flood, then moves along briskly from Washington Irving’s “Rip Van Winkle” to the medieval pursuits of Irving’s persona Geoffrey Crayon, the narrator of Irving’s *Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.* Geoffrey Crayon’s pilgrimage-like visit to the chambers where James I of Scotland was imprisoned then leads to an examination of Boethian time in James’s *Kingis Quair*. The effect of this chapter is kaleidoscopic, demonstrating time’s queerly circuitous ways of connecting texts and events. One last amateur appears in the book’s epilogue, to match with the preface’s “bathrobe guy.” Dinshaw champions the invitation to “other ways of world making” exemplified by the character Thomas Colpeper, the embarrassingly (and adhesively) enthusiastic amateur historian of the 1944 Powell and Pressburger film *A Canterbury Tale* (170).

Allying itself with recent work on the ties between professional study and popular enthusiasm, Dinshaw’s book encourages scholars to reaffirm the personal commitments often concealed beneath an expert persona. The insights of *How Soon Is Now?* could be expanded productively by comparing them to the Chaucer enthusiasts documented in Candace Barrington’s *American Chaucers* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007). Dinshaw’s amateurs align well with a figure such as Kathrine Gordon Sanger Brinley, who, as Barrington recounts (126–42), recited Chaucer to largely female audiences in the 1920s with the erudition of a scholar and the zeal (and medieval garb) of an amateur.

As several online discussions have already noted, Dinshaw’s categories of amateur and professional blur when applied to some of the realities of our contemporary crisis of employment. Faculty at non-research institutions are only nominally rewarded for their publications, and so undertake their projects in the time of amateurs, while, for the precariat, the promise of the rationally rewarded time of a professional seems as distant as Mandeville’s earthly paradise.¹ Such elaborations attest to the

¹ I owe my thoughts on this topic to these discussions: Karl Steel, “SMITHS NERD,” *In the Middle*, March 29, 2013, <http://www.inthemedievalmiddle.com/2013/03/smiths-nerd.html>; and Rick Godden, “Nerds, Love, Amateurs: Reflections on *How Soon Is Now?*,” *Modern Medieval*, March 29, 2013, <http://modernmedieval.blogspot.com/2013/03/nerds-love-amateurs-reflections-on-how.html>.

power of the book's central idea. *How Soon Is Now?* provokes an important debate about how scholars might redefine the relationship of their work to the *love* that, as Dinshaw reminds us throughout the book, gives us the word "amateur."

How Soon Is Now? makes a valuable argument about the presence of asynchrony in medieval literature, and, more crucially, dares medievalists to examine the relationship between time, personal commitment, and the centuries-old texts that we teach. Fittingly, the book is lovingly capacious in its outreach to multiple audiences. Non-medievalists looking for work on temporality studies will find the book accessible because of its reader-friendly summaries and translations. Medievalists, on the other hand, will discover a revealing mirror of their own engagements. The book would be perfect to teach in an introductory graduate seminar since its combination of accessibility and provocation would inspire wide-ranging discussion about the future of the field. With its question-mark title and its as-yet unrealized dreams of a different kind of scholarly life, *How Soon Is Now?* issues a call. Readers may find themselves moved to affirm this call with some more lines from The Smiths about strange loves, queer interests, and the amateur pursuit of the past: *A dreaded sunny day, so let's go where we're happy and I meet you at the cemetery gates.*

BRANTLEY L. BRYANT
Sonoma State University

GEORGIANA DONAVIN. *Scribit Mater: Mary and the Language Arts in the Literature of Medieval England*. Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2012. Pp. xii, 315. \$69.95 cloth.

As Georgiana Donavin points out in her introduction to *Scribit Mater*, Marian studies have undergone some notable changes in the course of the past half-century, with many postmodern critics treating the emphasis on Mary's virginity as signal evidence of patriarchal misogyny, its determination to encourage women's passivity, and the repression of female sexuality. More recent scholarship has aimed to reconsider and to recuperate Mary's authority within the Christian tradition, and has relied on a wide range of medieval Marian literature. This scholarship