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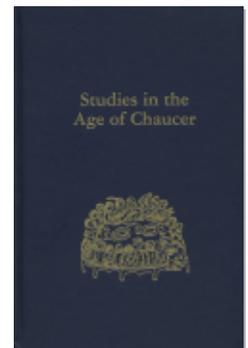
*Answerable Style: The Idea of the Literary in Medieval
England* ed. by Frank Grady and Andrew Galloway (review)

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This chapter was first published a decade ago in *SAC* (25 [2003]); it is here revised with one very significant addition: a new section, “Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Pynkhurst,” inserted to respond to Linne Mooney’s identification of Chaucer’s scribe as Adam Pinkhurst, and to draw in Fletcher’s own contention that another manuscript attributable to Pinkhurst may be Trinity College Dublin, MS 244: a volume of Lollard tracts. A final substantive chapter treats Malory’s *Morte Darthur* and argues that this is a text preoccupied with authority. Fletcher explores this preoccupation in terms of tropes and formulas, paying particular attention to Malory’s use of various tomb epitaphs.

Perhaps the most striking feature of this collection is its chronological range. Although the meatiest part of the volume is undoubtedly its analysis of the “big three” authors of late fourteenth-century England, Fletcher eschews the safer option of narrowly inhabiting the Ricardian period and is equally comfortable discussing texts from both the late thirteenth and the late fifteenth centuries. This generous chronological span ensures that all the major literary bases (debate, romance, dream-vision; Chaucerian and non-Chaucerian poetry; prose; secular and religious writing) find themselves covered in the collection. A strong linking thread is provided by Fletcher’s natural application of his considerable knowledge of sermons and medieval preaching, and it is this above all that unifies these interpretations of the major extant vernacular literary texts from late medieval England.

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FRANK GRADY and ANDREW GALLOWAY, eds. *Answerable Style: The Idea of the Literary in Medieval England*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2013. Pp. vii + 341. \$74.95 cloth, \$14.95 CD.

This volume in honor of Anne Middleton collects essays on a variety of approaches to medieval literary style, with an emphasis on the works of Chaucer and Langland. Written in the spirit of the *festschrift*, a number of the essays critically engage with both Middleton’s work and the practice of new formalism in medieval literary studies, offering a welcome contribution to the discipline. As the editors Frank Grady and Andrew

Galloway caution: medievalists began to turn their attention to the formal elements of style long before the movement of new formalism supposedly began. The volume nevertheless assembles a collection of essays with the goal of pursuing the literary as such.

The book is divided into two sections, with the first group of essays focusing on vernacular literary style as it employs and often departs from Latin literary style. The second half focuses more exclusively on English vernacular expressions of style. The volume has been published by Ohio State University Press as part of the series Interventions: New Studies in Medieval Culture, which includes theoretically inflected works on animal studies, gender, law, translation studies, and politics. The essays largely exercise, to borrow Levinson's phrase, a kind of activist formalism, carefully attuned to historical context but never dominated by it in the practice of literary analysis.

Rita Copeland's excellent discussion of the shift in the reception of Horace's *Ars poetica* from the Middle Ages to the early modern period inaugurates the collection. The *Ars poetica*, she argues, moved from the status of grammar school manual to universalizing classic of critical theory because of a shift in its use and therefore its perceived status. Once other style manuals, such as Geoffrey of Vinsauf's *Poetria nova*, became more frequently employed in the classroom, Horace's poem was dislodged from the practical and repetitive doldrums of schoolwork. For this reason, the *Ars poetica* could be "rediscovered" as a humanist classic in the sixteenth century since it was no longer connected to the lower status of grammar school composition manual. Copeland's essay, which builds on her earlier work on rhetoric and pedagogy, offers valuable insight into discussions of style by examining the reception of theories of style.

Ralph Hanna employs a similar methodology for thinking about genre in "*Speculum Vitae* and the Form of *Piers Plowman*" and also offers a compelling response to Nicholas Watson's influential theory of vernacular theology. While Watson had emphasized the growth of a culture of censorship at the hands of Archbishop Thomas Arundel after 1409 as the major factor in shaping English vernacular writings about theology, Hanna suggests that perhaps simply a change in tastes might be the factor that best explains why catechetical works such as the *Speculum vitae* fell out of favor with writers. These texts had exhausted the possibilities for writing about virtues and vices within the genre of catechetical writing and Hanna argues that writers like Langland sought new

forms for thinking about practical or applied religious issues. Hanna's approach offers readers a theory that should spark further debate on the genres of religious writing that emerged in England in the later Middle Ages.

Katherine Zieman's essay, "Escaping the Whirling Wicker: Ricardian Poetics and Narrative Voice in *The Canterbury Tales*," in addition to advancing excellent analyses for those who work in the field, also gives an overview of scholarly debate on character and narrative voice in Chaucer that would be especially useful to graduate students. She responds to Middleton's idea of "public poetry" in Ricardian literature, focusing on the rhetorical strategies Chaucer employs to create an impression of a fully realized character. *The Man of Law's Tale* offers moments of narrative interruption that call attention to the narrator, and in doing so, create a sense of character. These moments of interruption, however, should also be examined as an effect that creates the impression of truth or authenticity. Direct address that interrupts the flow of narrative is one such strategy that can leave us with the impression of truth. Thinking about rhetorical effect can in turn allow for greater reflection on how an audience's sense of the intentions and desires of individual characters and narrators is formally achieved. Zieman unifies older forms of scholarship on subjectivity with the renewed interest in formalism in her engaging essay.

Steven Justice offers a similar approach to style and effect in "Chaucer's History-Effect." How does Chaucer create a sense of a Criseyde who seems "real" in the *Troilus*? He begins his essay with a joke from the *Troilus* that elicits laughter from Criseyde and Pandarus, but that is likely to cause confusion for readers. Justice argues that our isolation from the joke is in fact what gives Criseyde and Pandarus an air of "realness." An inside joke suggests a shared history, a sense of experience that lies outside the reader's own experience and even outside the world of the poem. The *Troilus*, as work that emphasizes the reader's far-reaching knowledge of the characters and their predicaments before the plot even begins to unfold, nevertheless offers "imprecisions that Chaucer cultivates," gaps in the reader's knowledge that together formally create a "subjectivity-effect." Such lacunae generate uncertainty about any given character's intentions, which in turn create a more fully "felt" character. These approaches to a character's individual history correspond to the way that the poem evokes the historical difference of ancient Troy. Like Zieman's, Justice's essay on the *Troilus* offers useful

formalist approaches to the question of character and subjectivity that have been explored by Lee Patterson and others.

The space of this review unfortunately does not allow for a fair treatment of all of the essays in this strong volume. David Lawton in "Voice and Public Interiorities" calls for scholars to consider in greater formal and historical depth voice as a literary tool, offering an excellent close reading of *The Book of the Duchess* and its relationship to questions of voice and the figure of Orpheus. Lee Patterson reconsiders the definition of "tragedy" as it applies to the *Troilus* in "*Troilus and Criseyde*: Genre and Source." Andrew Galloway's unexpected reading of the Petrarchan and Chaucerian versions of *The Clerk's Tale* aims to connect Griselda's emotional self-mastery to a poetics of renunciation. Chaucer critiques the sadism of Petrarch's tale, Galloway argues, by offering a narrator who "seems to simmer with resistance" to the story he tells. Moreover, Chaucer's narrator reacts to the aesthetic excesses of the Petrarchan version, thus evincing a control of form in his own narrative that corresponds to Griselda's masterfully controlled presentation of self.

What does new formalism mean to medieval studies? Does it simply become a history of aesthetics? How can medievalists navigate the need for understanding the context of an often alien social or political environment without running into the biases that new historicism can produce? This volume invites debate on the role of the new formalist movement in medieval studies. The editors ultimately suggest that rather than marking a departure, the return to form builds on the work of a generation of scholars like Anne Middleton. As a celebration of form, the essays offer enriching readings that will be useful in scholarly debate and in the classroom. As an inquiry into literary style and genre, the essays advance discussions about the changes that literary expression underwent in late medieval England.

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JONATHAN HSY. *Trading Tongues: Merchants, Multilingualism, and Medieval Literature*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2013. Pp. xii, 237. \$59.95.

This book makes a solid contribution to the increasingly crowded discussion of language contact and conflict in the later Middle Ages, and