

Zeitschrift: SPELL : Swiss papers in English language and literature
Herausgeber: Swiss Association of University Teachers of English
Band: 43 (2023)

Artikel: Introduction : medieval and early modern afterlives
Autor: Depledge, Emma / Rupp, Katrin
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-1047004>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 06.08.2025

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

EMMA DEPLEDGE AND KATRIN RUPP
UNIVERSITY OF NEUCHÂTEL

Introduction: Medieval and Early Modern Afterlives¹

This introductory essay engages with the content and argument of the volume's essays, reflects on the language, labels and period boundaries used to define medieval and early modern studies, and analyses the cover image to consider the *longue durée* of books and ways in which editors and the book trade have shaped textual and authorial afterlives.

Keywords: Medieval, Early Modern, Book History, Periodisation.

This volume explores the reception history of medieval and early modern authors, texts, characters and genres as well as medievalisms,² early modern historicisms,³ and ways in which we think and write about periodisation and the spaces in which dramatic performances take place. Important topics under analysis include tyranny, race, disability, gender, adaptation and commonplacing. In its engagement with medieval and early modern afterlives, the collection stresses the communicative nature of all texts

¹ The authors wish to warmly thank Douglas Clark, Indira Ghose and Honor Jackson for commenting on drafts of this essay.

² Some recent studies in the afterlives of medieval cultures and studies include: Alvestad and Houghton; Ashton and Elliott; Davis and Altschul; D'Arcens; Gayk; Heng; Heng and Ramey; Hsy; Karkov, Kłosowska, and van Gerven Oei; Lomuto; Matthews and Sanders; Rambaran-Olm; Rodrigues Da Silva; Turda; Vernon; and Whitaker and Gabriele. Specialist journals addressing the topic include *Studies in Medievalism*, currently edited by Karl Fugelso, and *postmedieval*, currently edited by Shazia Jagot, Julie Orlemanski, and Sara Ritchey; and websites include Heng and Noakes.

³ In 2019, Marina Gerzic and Aidan Norrie coined the term “early-modernism” as an equivalent of medievalism, i.e. to refer to “the reception, interpretation, or recreation of the early modern period in post-early modern cultures” (4), but the label has gained little traction. Work on early modern afterlives from the last few years includes Aebischer; Britton and Walter; Craig; Depledge, Garrison and Nicosia; Garrison and Stanivukovic; Kingsley-Smith; Loewenstein and Stevens; Starks, and Treharne and Walker.

(broadly understood): authors trace the varied appearances of texts across space and time and analyse how “their meanings (and other, noncognitive, effects)” speak differently at each moment of their genesis.⁴ The essays offer insight into different cultural milieus spanning the classical period to the present day as contributors interrogate linear narratives and identify continuity and discontinuity across the medieval and early modern periods.

The image that prefaces this collection raises important questions about ways in which the past is imagined, fashioned, and fictionalised. It is a woodcut border that frames the title page of the 1550 second edition of Edward Hall’s *The Vnion of the Two Noble and Illustrate Famelies of Lancastre & Yorke*. The “Tree of Jesse” frame depicts the union of the red and white Tudor roses that is said to have taken place as a result of Henry VII’s marriage to Elizabeth of York. The head and torso of their son, Henry VIII, occupies the most prominent position in the image: he appears top centre, above the hand-holding couple, his presence enacting spatially the “Vnion” of the two families into one body. Henry is flanked by what one assumes to be the roses of Lancaster and York but the division the two emblems (usually red and white) represent is likewise removed as it is a colourless image. Henry, at that point in time recently deceased, sits proud, staring the reader full in the face, in diametrical opposition to his sleeping ancestors in the bottom left and right of the image: John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster and Edmund Duke of York, respectively. The image thus depicts both the apparent resolution of a key moment in English history and individual historical figures who have served as the inspiration behind fictional characters in multiple literary works.

For David Matthews, the author of the first essay in this volume, the image is “contradictorily doubled.” It is unable, incapable even, of displaying straight forward lineage as “for all its attempts to lead the viewer upwards and *away* from the medieval past, the rosebush image is inescapably medieval in its iconography,” and the lineage cannot be continued as there is simply no space or additional paper extending beyond Henry. Indeed, it might try to depict unity, but it in effect portrays “a tangled mass of genealogical possibility, out of which ultimately emerge what appear to be Yorkist and Lancastrian claims to the throne which are exactly parallel.” The temporal hybridity and polychronicity hinted at by this “rosebush that puts out tendrils, extending itself in all directions and occasionally re-rooting itself in the soil it had previously left” is, Mat-

⁴ Adapted from Willis; also see Littau, and Sontag.

thews argues, an apt representation of the hybrid nature of early modern discourse about the medieval past; and polychronicity is precisely the model he proposes scholars of medieval and early modern studies use when approaching periodisation.

Matthews' essay explores how Tudor writers – such as the conservative Thomas More in the first part of his *Confutation of Tyndale's Answer* (1532) and the reformer John Foxe in his *Acts and Monuments* (1563, 1570, 1576, 1583) – reflect upon writings from the late medieval past. In an attempt to retrieve a time in Christian history when religious debates seemed less virulent, More suggests that his audience resort to readily available medieval texts such as Walter Hilton's *Scale of Perfection* (c. 1343) for their orthodox erudition, thus underlining textual continuation rather than supersession across period boundaries. At the same time, this sense of continuation is also hybrid as More is aware that a past without heresy cannot be restored (and probably never existed) and that he cannot combat heresy without also invoking, and thus perpetuating it. For Matthews, More is thus aware that “incompatible things exist, polychronically, alongside one another.” Like More, Foxe too participates in a polychronic narrative. His recourse, via William Tyndale's version, to the allegedly autobiographical testimony of the Lollard William Thorpe about his interrogation by Archbishop Arundel in 1407 is meant to underline the importance, and indeed modernity, of Lollardy to reformers in the sixteenth century. At the same time, Foxe's emphasis on Thorpe's use of “old” English firmly roots the latter in the medieval past. It thus appears that Foxe, as Matthews postulates, “needs the past and present to intermingle,” that is, to exist alongside each other.

In their work on Medievalism,⁵ Matthews and others encourage scholars to rethink received notions of literary transmission and the labels used to describe, define, segment and segregate our field, misconceptions and

⁵ The term “medievalism” was introduced in the nineteenth century. For definitions, see D'Arcens (1) and Perry (2). The adjectives “medieval” and “early modern,” used in the title of the present volume simply refer to time periods but we recognize the fact that, as D'Arcens reminds us, the three main period distinctions “classical,” “medieval” and “modern” do not make much sense beyond Europe and are limiting even within Europe itself (*World Medievalism* 10). Nevertheless, as Heng and Ramey point out, “alternative names for the past ultimately prove impractical” (391). On the need to reject “Anglo-Saxon” in favour of “Early Medieval,” see Vuille's essay in this volume and Rambaran-Olm 2019 and 2021.

negative connotations of the word medieval in contemporary parlance,⁶ as well as ways in which distorted accounts of the past have been and continue to be weaponised.⁷ The need to examine and deconstruct “the deliberate adoption, re-invention, and implementation of the tropes the creator imagines to be ‘medieval’” has become yet more urgent in the climate of rising white supremacy (Perry 2). As the RaceB4Race network community has rightly insisted, the ways in which scholars of premodern literature, history and culture teach and talk about the past has an impact that goes beyond academic circles. Sierra Lomuto writes that

when we refuse to see race in the Middle Ages, the stakes are much greater than etymology or linguistics; we are refusing to see how hierarchical structures of difference operate in all of their nuanced complexities, including within multicultural and transnational contexts. We are allowing the Middle Ages to be seen as a pre-racial space where whiteness can locate its ethnic heritage. (2016)

This is not, however, to suggest that a long history of black or anti-racist medievalisms does not also exist. Indeed, the work of Jonathan Hsy, Matthew X. Vernon, and others highlights how “people of color who do not (exclusively) trace their ancestry to Europe can claim and transform divergent racial, social, and intellectual relationships to the Middle Ages” (Hsy 5). In his study, for example, Vernon “reads against the grain of the predominant narrative of medievalism – as a uniform and clearly-defined means of consolidating white identity” to produce an “anti-genealogy” charting how the Middle Ages were “used among African American writers in conversation with white writers” (Vernon 29).

The power of language, labelling, and appropriation is also a central concern in David Loewenstein’s essay. Loewenstein analyses how

⁶ The valence of the words “medieval” and “early modern” does not appear to be the same. The term “medieval” is often associated in contemporary parlance with violence, cruelty, and backwardness, but “(early) modern” invariably stands for the state of the art. See *OED* “medieval,” 3a and 3b. US President Joe Biden gave us a topical example of the term’s negative sense when he said that “brave law enforcement officers were subject to medieval hell for three hours” during the attack on the US Capitol on 6th January 2021. As Matthews so pointedly remarks, torture and the burning of witches are always medieval, no matter that torture was illegal for much of the Middle Ages and that witch hunts were mainly a feature of the Tudor period (*Medievalism* 13–14).

⁷ See, for example, Livingston; Rambaran-Olm and Gabriele; and essays such as Diebold’s in A. Albin, et al. eds.

tyranny has been represented across time, noting both change and continuity. In a detailed account of the afterlife of classical, biblical and humanist theories and discourses of tyranny, Loewenstein explores how it was represented in John Milton's writings, particularly in his revolutionary prose and in his early modern epic, *Paradise Lost*. He argues that, in his polemical writings on tyranny, "Milton draws upon and reshapes the discourses [...] he inherits so that tyranny becomes a more multifaceted concept including not only regal tyranny and tyranny of ecclesiastical institutions, but also tyranny over the private realm, especially over consciences and freedom of thought, with the latter comprising intellectual and mental tyranny." *Paradise Lost*, he writes, encourages readers to "remain alert" to ways in which the label had been weaponised, "to the unstable language that can support the accusation of tyranny and the ambiguous or contradictory political behaviour that reinforces it." Pejorative but without fixed meaning, tyranny was – and continues to be – used (indiscriminately) to demonise or invalidate the views or arguments of those with whom one disagrees.

Juliette Vuille's essay instead focuses on a more complimentary label, the application of which tends to be limited. In her article on heroism in Old English poems, Vuille responds to a scholarly tradition that typically attributes heroic qualities to male (and specifically pagan) characters such as Beowulf. This attribution, she claims, is mainly inherited from a nineteenth- and twentieth-century scholarly tradition that defines heroism as Germanic/pagan/male, and thus excludes the possibility of a Christian hero or heroine. By focusing on Judith's heroic performance in the eponymous Old English poem, Vuille shows that it is Judith's Christianity rather than her gender that influences her heroism. Thus, Judith's performance blurs the gender boundaries defined by scholarly tradition (rather than by the texts themselves) to the extent that her gender becomes irrelevant or queer. Vuille therefore proposes a broader definition of heroism in Old English poetry, one that also includes Christian and female figures.

A specific heroic figure is the critical focus of Denis Renevey's chapter on the literary afterlife of the medieval Robin Hood in Anthony Munday's two plays, *The Downfall of Robert, Earle of Huntington* and *The Death of Robert, Earle of Huntington* (both written between 1597 and 1598). Renevey examines how Robin Hood, a "forester yeoman" in the medieval ballads, becomes a "gentleman in disguise" in Munday's plays. Despite this gentrification, however, Renevey explicates how Munday continues to uphold yeoman values such as a sense of community among

the foresters and independence from the protocols of court officials. These values, Renevey argues, serve as a foil to an increasingly competitive and merciless London society at the turn of the seventeenth century.

Read in conjunction, Vuille's and Renevey's articles remind us that the term "medieval" does not have quite the same connotation for literature produced in early medieval England as it does for texts from late medieval England. Indeed, the English Middle Ages are usually divided into the Old and Middle English, or pre- and post-Conquest period respectively. It is a matter of course that the arrival of the Normans in England in 1066 brought with it fundamental changes on a socio-cultural and linguistic plane. It therefore makes sense to consider that date as a turning point, a transitional moment that is perhaps as "deeply invested in the supersessionary," like Matthews observes of the period boundary between the medieval and the early modern. However, just as Foxe and More resort to the medieval past to emphasise its continued prevalence in their own time, the Normans cannot – and do not necessarily want to – supplant the English past of the land they have conquered without making recourse to it. Thus, Norman kings were keen to model themselves onto ideal English kings before them. Edward the Confessor, for example, was appropriated and sanctified by the Normans to legitimise their claim to the throne and to emphasise an allegedly divinely ordained (genealogical) continuity, or indeed polychronicity, with their English predecessor.⁸

Responses to royal figures and claims to the throne are also the topic of Honor Jackson's essay on John Dryden's redaction of the character of Eve found in John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Jackson examines the relationship between gender and religious politics of the late seventeenth century as she considers Dryden's Eve in his opera entitled *The State of Innocence and Fall of Man*. Jackson reminds us that although Milton's *Paradise Lost* is the better-known work today, Dryden's adaptation was a print bestseller during the Restoration period. It provides important insight into contemporary attitudes to women and Catholicism, with Dryden, as Jackson claims, transforming Eve into a "powerful and manipulative" figure in order to provide commentary on Mary of Modena, the new Catholic wife of the heir apparent, James, Duke of York, and the person to whom the piece was dedicated.

The afterlife of Shakespeare's "veteran" characters is the subject of Kyle Pivetti's chapter in which he analyses a 2012 autobiographical one-man show to demonstrate the important role characters like Richard III

⁸ For a discussion of the repercussions of the Norman Conquest, see Treharne.

and Coriolanus play in the construction of both an individual soldier's identity and national identity. Produced by Gulf War veteran Stephan Wolfert, *Cry Havoc!* contains "aural flashbacks" from Shakespeare plays that serve to link "traumatised veterans across historical eras." In the play, Wolfert wanders into a production of *Richard III* and identifies with the eponymous hero due to their shared experience of physical disability and military service. Drawing on the approaches of disability and trauma studies, Pivetti demonstrates ways in which Wolfert "weaves together his own biography with snippets of Shakespeare, as if the plays interrupt and intrude upon Wolfert's memories," whilst also aligning other real-life soldiers with Shakespearean veterans. For example, Wolfert's recollection of the nightmares he suffered in the wake of the Gulf War see him merge with Lady Hotspur as she voices her worries over her husband going to battle. Henry Lincoln Johnson, the 19-year-old African American who served in World War I and was the first American to win the French Cross of War, but who "died in America at 33, an alcoholic with a metal plate embedded in his foot, estranged from his family, and suffering Post-Traumatic Stress," is described in Wolfert's play as an American Coriolanus: celebrated for his renown on the battlefield but condemned for refusing to perform the role members of the public have prescribed for veterans. Shakespeare's characters are thus revived in Wolfert's play as a means to highlight the conditions of traumatised soldiers across time. These representations find echoes in extratextual afterlives of Shakespeare as, outside of the theatre, Wolfert works with a leading psychologist on a programme that "uses recitations of Shakespeare to treat trauma in veterans, finding that such performance can transform triggering thought patterns."

A crossover between fictional worlds and lived experience is also one focus of Erzsi Kukorelly's essay, which traces the afterlife of lines from Restoration and eighteenth-century literary texts that were extracted for use in a commonplace book, Edward Bysshe's *Art of English Poetry* (1702). After reading Bysshe's collection, Kukorelly informs us, Eliza Haywood went on to use many of the same citations in her conduct book, *The Wife* (1756), in which she encouraged her own readers to recite the lines aloud, or else to apply their precepts in their daily lives. The most frequently cited author is Dryden, who is named and also praised in Haywood's text, suggesting that an act of mutual canonization may have taken place whereby Haywood boosted Dryden's posthumous reputation whilst using lines from his popular texts to "bring substance and authority to her conduct advice" and augment her own status.

Greg Walker and Pascale Aebischer's essays encourage us to give serious thought to the language we use to describe performances and the ways in which we conceive of acting spaces. Walker is interested in what made late-medieval British drama distinct from that of other periods and suggests that we think in terms of "a *pre*-dramatic theatre, or rather a *pre-theatrical drama*, existing, not in the tragic theatre of ancient Greece, but in late medieval England and Scotland." Reflecting on how the word "theatre" tends to be used metonymically (and misleadingly) to describe both "the art-form and the structure that characteristically houses it in the modern world," and the implications this has "for our understanding of both dramatic practice and its associated aesthetics," Walker reminds us of the fact that purpose-built acting spaces were not introduced until the sixteenth century. Indeed, even when they were erected, performances continued to take place beyond their walls (also cf. Davies). Having outlined the ways in which early theatre was "self-reflexive," "site specific," and "blurred-boundaries between play-form and real-world events almost as a matter of course," Walker accordingly argues for an "afterlife" for the medieval and early Tudor stage, or at least for parallels between early performances and "the dramaturgy of postmodern performance," where attempts to "*untheatre* theatre" offer a return to the "bare-bones of the unhoused, mobile, porous figures" of the pre-1560 period.

Aebischer by contrast considers contemporary afterlives of early modern plays and acting spaces, focusing on the work of companies who transferred their live theatre performances to digital platforms during theatre closures of the Covid-19 lockdowns, and who continue to make productions of early modern drama that are specifically designed for videoconference platforms. Aebischer is concerned with how the "obscene," which can be defined as a space that is "off, or to one side of the stage" and thus "beyond representation," is depicted or envisaged using digital tools in made-for-digital productions of early modern plays. Her essay focuses on the afterlife of the "offstage," a space within theatres that is traditionally associated with "strange, and disturbing acts," in productions of William Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and John Ford, Thomas Dekker and William Rowley's *The Witch of Edmonton*. Aebischer suggests that "digital theatre creates an afterlife for the offstage that thrives on the tension between what is included in the fictional frame and the traumatic lived experiences that lie just beyond it." She analyses the use of digital wizardry and the blurring of boundaries between "real" and imagined spaces, and the layering of images of living and dead characters, fictional and historical figures, to argue that both *Macbeth*, directed for Big Telly

by Zoë Seaton in 2020, and Creation Theatre's production of *The Witch of Edmonton*, directed by Laura Wright in 2022, draw attention away from main plotlines and character arcs towards the lived experiences "that underpin the tragic plots of early modern drama." This might take the example of "the pressure-cooker environment of women trapped in locked-down domestic interiors," or the execution of real-life women accused of witchcraft.

Parallels arguably exist between the theatre closures which took place around the world in 2020 and the subsequent move to digital theatre, and the theatre closure of 1642 to 1659 that is frequently used to create a (false) division in early modern theatre history. In both historical periods, dramatic productions were kept alive, despite closures, through the work of innovative practitioners whose determination and innovations continued to shape performance practices long after the theatres re-opened. Equally, in both historical periods some practitioners returned to the traditional acting spaces they used before the closure of the theatres whilst others, for various reasons, continued and continue to perform beyond the walls of traditional, purpose-built acting spaces (cf. Aebischer and Allred, Broadribb and Sullivan). The closure of the public theatres at the outbreak of civil war in 1642 was for a long time depicted as a moment of dramatic hiatus, but as scholars like Dale Randell, Susan Wiseman and others have demonstrated, surreptitious performances continued to take place in these years; new genres – including the beginnings of a native English operatic tradition – flourished, and innovations took place in the publication of playbooks. Theatre companies of the pandemic likewise sought out ways for the show to go on, or to go online, and as Aebischer's essay illustrates, found new, digital acting spaces and used various forms of "digital wizardry" to expand on the capabilities of the dramatic medium.

Whilst misconceptions about theatrical production in the 1640s and 50s have been (re-)addressed, the post-1660 era continues to be misrepresented through use of the label "Restoration," which aligns the return of the monarchy with the reopening of the theatres as if patents Charles II issued to just two men, Charles Killigrew and William Davenant, revived the same kind of varied, multi-theatre market that Londoners had enjoyed in the pre-1642 period. Charles's creation of a theatre duopoly, permitting only two companies to perform legally, left a multitude of actors, playwrights and managers as excluded from the profession as they had been during the 1640s and 50s. The large number of warrants for the arrest of unlicensed players during the period 1660-1700 (Milhous and Hume) suggest that those barred from mainstream, traditional acting spaces con-

tinued to find alternate ways to ply their trade. A rich history of performances beyond the King's Company and the Duke's Company theatres remains to be written and Walker's warning about the danger of collapsing "the long history of performance into a flattened, modern perspective that excludes more than it seeks to describe" is especially applicable to the late seventeenth century. As one of us has argued elsewhere, we need to rethink the ways in which theatre history is categorized and segmented, to expand our definitions of what constitutes dramatic entertainment and/or an acting space so that the wealth of performances that took place beyond purpose-built acting spaces can receive the attention they so thoroughly deserve (Depledge and Willie).

Rahel Orgis likewise revisits a longstanding critical assumption with fresh eyes in her reading of the representation of female writing found in the manuscript continuation of Lady Mary Wroth's *The Countess of Montgomery's Urania*. Wroth's depiction of Antissia, a character who "goes mad writing inappropriate poetry because an overly ambitious scholar of Ovid supposedly leads her to dabble with literature that is beyond women's mental capacity" has troubled critics due to the apparent attack on female authorship by a female author. Orgis offers an alternate reading of the character that has much to tell us about the ways in which Wroth sought to shape her authorial legacy. She argues that Wroth reflects more generally "on poetic invention and craftsmanship," suggesting ways to "engage with canonical precursors and models." For Orgis, the representation of Antissia and her tutor's uncritical engagement with canonical male authors allows Wroth to valorise her own reworking of Ovidian tales and to set out what she deemed to be worthy literary traditions on which to build.

William Edwards also considers the legacy of literary traditions in his reading of John Keats's *Endymion* as a revival of the genre of Elizabethan minor epic. He claims that in the language and narrative of the long poem one may trace the afterlives, or "family resemblance" of short epics of the 1590s, particularly Michael Drayton's *Endimion and Phoebe*, Thomas Lodge's *Glaucus and Scilla*, and Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis*. More generally, Edwards suggests that famous aspects of Keats' writing, such as his debasement of classical gods and the "conjunction of 'nightingale' and 'eglantine'" could very well come from the Romantic poet's study of Renaissance epyllions. Keats is, however, also innovative in his treatment of the genre: Edwards identifies "a unique fusion of Romantic and Elizabethan styles" in *Endymion*, describing his "metamorphic" style, with "words morph[ing] into other words" through "playful sonic textures," as

akin to the witty, playful style of Elizabethan epyllions, but finds his handling of some themes closer in kind “to Shelley’s *Alastor* than [...] Shakespeare’s *Venus and Adonis*.”

In reflecting on Keats’ indebtedness to earlier poems, Edwards considers occasions when he may have been exposed through the book collections of friends, editions and copies Keats himself may have owned – including an edition of Drayton’s poems published by John Smethwicke and a nineteenth-century edition of Marlowe’s *Hero and Leander*, complete with the ending furnished by George Chapman – or else through consultation of library books. Book history and the longue durée of individual copies of books offer an additional lens through which to view the subject of medieval and early modern afterlives,⁹ and we would therefore like to end by returning to the image with which we began this introduction.

The wooden block used to produce the Hall image has much to teach us about material afterlives and ways in which the book trade helped to shape authorial and textual legacies. Passed between stationers, and inked and pressed into damp sheets of paper, the same block was reused in more than one publication, and the meanings it helped to create were innumerable. The title-page border went on to appear in Thomas Marshe’s 1555 edition of John Lydgate’s *Troy Book*, the English roses and dynasties now ‘Englyshing’ through iconography “The auncient historie and onely trewe and syncere cronicle of the warres betwixte the Grecians and the Troyans,” just as Lydgate “Englished” the words within through translation of the Latin original. The border was also used in, and is today most commonly associated with John Stowe’s 1561 edition and Thomas Speght’s 1598 edition of Geoffrey Chaucer’s *Workes*,¹⁰ where it adorns interior title pages to *The Canterbury Tales* and the *Romaunt of the Rose*. As Megan L. Cook has argued, the frame “quite literally provides a historical frame for Chaucer’s text,” and arguably promotes Chaucer’s status through association with “the luminaries depicted in the woodcut, most notably Chaucer’s patron, John of Gaunt,” who is located at the bottom of

⁹ Recent studies have shed light on the ways in which books and manuscripts were repurposed during the early modern period, particularly following the dissolution of monasteries, when documents ranging from account books to “service books, theological treatises and historical chronicles” found their way into book bindings, or else were used to wrap loose printed sheets (Coates 37). See, for example, Smyth and Partington; Ker; and Pickwood.

¹⁰ In his chapter in this volume, Matthews writes that “despite its apparent historical specificity, the woodblock survived, was passed down, shared, or sold, among printers and reused in new, specifically literary contexts.”

the image (Cook 30). Used in publications that open with a dedication to Henry VIII,¹¹ the woodcut may also have further associated Chaucer with Henry himself, particularly as the dedication describes Chaucer as if “belonging less to late medieval England” and more to the (then) “Henrician present” (Cook 29).¹² We are left with what Jonathan Gil Harris might term “untimely matter,” or bibliographical polychronicity: an Elizabethan edition of the works of a late medieval writer, wrapped in paratexts that fashion him as Henrician. Collectively, these publications underscore the important ways in which the same image meant differently at different points in time and highlight the important role editors and paratexts play in the invention of early modern authors.

The individual leaves of paper on which the woodcut was printed and the physical books in which they were once housed have also enjoyed afterlives that impact, among other things, the ways in which the warring historical figures are presented. For example, one remediated “reproduction” of a copy of Speght’s edition presents users of Early English Books Online with a Lancastrian victory of sorts as Henry’s closest white-rose relatives have taken on a ghostly appearance and have almost faded from sight.¹³ As a counter strike, damage to the woodblock reflected in multiple copies of the Speght makes it look as if the Lancastrian Duke of Somerset’s body has been gravely injured, with his axe-wielding arm seemingly lopped off.¹⁴ Many of the extant copies of the Hall, Tyndale and Chaucer editions are also listed on the English Short Title Catalogue (ESTC) as being heavily trimmed and/or repaired. In such copies, the Lancastrians generally find safe haven due to their close proximity to the books’ binding but the Yorkists, perching perilously close to the outer margin, risk having their limbs and/or titles severed or damaged. These examples underline the value of distinguishing not only the role specific editions play in reception but also the impact the material afterlives of individual copies within a print run can have on the legacies of texts, authors, and even

¹¹ First included with William Tynne’s 1532 edition of Chaucer’s *Works*, but reused in subsequent editions, Greg Walker has argued that the preface was designed to encourage Henry to see the edition as worthy of his attention and Devani Singh has suggested that “the visibility of the Preface on booksellers’ stalls also made the King an important symbolic reader of the edition” (485).

¹² Also see Singh 2016.

¹³ See images 24 and 144 of STC 5077, as shown in the linked Early English Books Online copy of ESTC S107208. It is listed as from a Huntington Library copy.

¹⁴ See, for example, the title page for *The Canterbury Tales* in the 1598 Speght edition held at the Newberry Library (Case FY 185 .C4059).

battles. These material and electronic copies re-enact materially the violence of the Wars of the Roses and, cumulatively, seem to echo written accounts of a Red-rose victory.

Texts, books, characters, authors, concepts, imagined spaces and periods of time all enjoy long lives and are reconceived through both conscious and accidental acts of adaptation and re-appropriation. Cumulatively, the essays collected in this volume remind us that the canons of literature that we study and teach – like the language we use to describe, and with which we often seek to police period boundaries and literary forms – are by no means arbitrary: they have been, and to a large extent continue to be, mediated through select institutions, socio-cultural shifts and power struggles across time.

References

- Aebischer, Pascale. *Viral Shakespeare: Performance in the Time of Pandemic*. Cambridge UP, 2022. Elements in Shakespeare Performance.
- Allred, Gemma, Ben Broadribb and Erin Sullivan, editors. *Lockdown Shakespeare: New Evolutions in Performance and Adaptation*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2022. The Arden Shakespeare.
- Alvestad, Karl, and Robert Houghton, editors. *The Middle Ages in Modern Culture: History and Authenticity in Contemporary Medievalism*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021. New Directions in Medieval Studies.
- Ashton, Gail, editor. *Medieval Afterlives in Contemporary Culture*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015.
- “Biden: Capitol Police were ‘Heroes’ on ‘Medieval Hell’ Jan 6. Insurrection.” *Youtube*, uploaded by *Newsweek*, 26 July 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IEiVekYPG0A>. Accessed 28 July 2022.
- Britton, Dennis A., and Melissa Walter, editors. *Rethinking Shakespeare Source Study: Audiences, Authors, and Digital Technologies*. Routledge, 2018.
- Coles, Kimberly Anne, and Dorothy Kim, editors. *A Cultural History of Race in the Renaissance and Early Modern Age (1350-1550)*. Bloomsbury, 2021.
- Coates, Alan. *English Medieval Books: The Reading Abbey Collections from Foundation to Dispersal*. Oxford Clarendon Press, 1999. Oxford Historical Monographs.
- Cook, Meghan L. *The Poet and the Antiquaries: Chaucerian Scholarship and the Rise of Literary History, 1532-1635*. U of Pennsylvania P, 2019.
- Craig, Heidi. *Theatre Closure and the Paradoxical Rise of English Renaissance Drama in the Civil Wars*. Cambridge UP, 2023.
- D’Arcens, Louise, editor. “Introduction. Medievalism: Scope and Complexity.” *The Cambridge Companion to Medievalism*, Cambridge UP, 2016, pp. 1–13. Cambridge Companions to Culture.
- . *World Medievalism. The Middle Ages in Modern Textual Culture*. Oxford UP, 2021. Oxford Cultural Perspectives.
- Davies, Callan. *What is a Playhouse?: England at Play 1520-1620*. Routledge, 2022.

- Davis, Kathleen, and Nadia Altschul, editors. *Medievalisms in the Postcolonial World: The Idea of 'the Middle Ages' Outside Europe*. Johns Hopkins UP, 2009.
- Depledge, Emma, John Garrison, and Marissa Nicosia, editors. *Making Milton: Print, Authorship, Afterlives*. Oxford UP, 2021.
- Depledge, Emma, and Rachel Willie, "Introduction." *Performance and the Paper Stage, 1640-1700*. *Huntington Library Quarterly*, vol. 85, no. 1, 2022, pp. 1–10.
- Diebold, William. "The Nazi Middle Ages." *Whose Middle Ages? Teachable Moments for an Ill-Used Past*, edited by Andrew Albin, et al., Fordham UP, 2019, pp. 104–115.
- Elliott, Andrew B. R. *Medievalism, Politics and Mass Media: Appropriating the Middle Ages in the Twenty-First Century*. D. S. Brewer, 2017.
- Garrison, John S., and Goran Stanivukovic, editors. *Ovid and Masculinity in English Renaissance Literature*. McGill-Queens UP, 2020.
- Gayk, Shannon. "Early Modern Afterlives of the *Arma Christi*." *The Arma Christi in Medieval and Early Modern Material Culture: With a Critical Edition of 'O Vernicle'*, edited by Lisa H. Cooper and Andrea Denny-Brown, Ashgate, 2014, pp. 273–307.
- Gerzic, Marina, and Aidan Norrie, editors. *From Medievalism to Early-Modernism: Adapting the English Past*. Routledge, 2019. Routledge Studies in Medieval Literature and Culture 11.
- . "Introduction: Medievalism and Early-Modernism in Adaptations of the English Past." Gerzic and Norrie, pp. 1–17.
- Gil Harris, Jonathan. *Untimely Matter in the Time of Shakespeare*. U of Pennsylvania P, 2009.
- Hahn, Thomas, editor. *A Cultural History of Race in the Medieval Age (800-1350)*. Bloomsbury, 2021.
- Heng, Geraldine. *The Global Middle Ages*. Cambridge UP, 2021.
- Heng, Geraldine, and Lynn Ramey. "Early Globalities, Global Literatures: Introducing a Special Issue on the Global Middle Ages." *Literature Compass* vol. 11, no. 7, 2014, pp. 389–394.
- Heng, Geraldine, and Susan Noakes. <http://www.globalmiddleages.org>. Accessed 26 July 2022.
- Hsy, Jonathan. *Antiracist Medievalisms. From "Yellow Peril" to Black Lives Matter*. Arc Humanities Press, 2021. Arc Medievalist.
- Karkov, Catherine E., et al., editors. *Disturbing Times: Medieval Pasts, Reimagined Futures*. Punctum Books, 2020.

- Ker, Neil R., *Fragments of Medieval Manuscripts Used as Pastedowns in Oxford Bindings, with a Survey of Oxford Binding c. 1515-1620*. Oxford Bibliographical Society, 2004. Kingsley-Smith, Jane. *The Afterlife of Shakespeare's Sonnets*. Cambridge UP, 2019.
- Littau, Karin. *Theories of Reading: Books, Bodies and Bibliomania*. Polity Press, 2006.
- Livingston, Josephine. "Racism, Medievalism, and the White Supremacists of Charlottesville." *New Republic*, 15 August 2017.
- Loewenstein, David, and Paul Stevens, editors. *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare and War*. Cambridge UP, 2021.
- Lomuto, Sierra. "Becoming Postmedieval: The Stakes of the Global Middle Ages." *postmedieval*, edited by M. Rambaran-Olm, M. B. Leake and Micah Goodrich, vol. 11, no. 4, 2020, pp. 503–512.
- . "White Nationalism and the Ethics of Medieval Studies." *In the Middle*, 5 December 2016. <http://www.inthemedievalmiddle.com/2016/12/white-nationalism-and-ethicsof.html>.
- Matthews, David, and Michael Sanders, editors. *Subaltern Medievalisms*. D. S. Brewer, 2021.
- Matthews, David. *Medievalism. A Critical History*. D. S. Brewer, 2015. Medievalism VI.
- Milhou, Judith and Robert D. Hume, editors. *A Register of English Theatrical Documents, 1660-1737*, 2 vols. Carbondale, 1991.
- Perry, David. "Introduction." *Whose Middle Ages? Teachable Moments for an Ill-Used Past*, edited by Andrew Albin et al., Fordham UP, 2019, pp. 1–8.
- Pickwood, Nicholas, "The Use of Fragments of Medieval Manuscripts in the Construction and Covering of Bindings on Printed Books." *Interpreting and Collecting Fragments of Medieval Books*, edited by Linda L. Brownrigg and Margaret M. Smith. The Red Gull Press, 2000.
- Randall, Dale B. J. *Winter Fruit: English Drama, 1642-1660*. The UP of Kentucky, 2014.
- Rambaran-Olm, Mary. "A Wrinkle in Medieval Time: Ironing out Issues Regarding Race, Temporality, and the Early English." *New Literary History*, vol. 52, no. 3/4, 2021, pp. 385–406.
- . "Misnaming the Medieval: Rejecting 'Anglo-Saxon' Studies." *History Workshop*, November 2019.
- Rambaran-Olm, Mary, and Matthew Gabriele. "The Middle Ages Have Been Misused by the Far Right. Here's Why It's So Important to Get Medieval History Right." *Time*. November, 2019.

- Rodrigues Da Silva, Renato. "The Uses of the 'Anglo-Saxon Past' between Revolutions, Imperialism and Racism." *Práticas da História*, no. 12, 2021, pp. 129–160.
- Singh, Devani. *Chaucer's Early Modern Readers: Reception in Print and Manuscript*. Cambridge UP, 2023.
- . "'In his old dress': Packaging Thomas Speght's Chaucer for Renaissance Readers." *The Chaucer Review*, vol. 51, 2016, pp. 478–502.
- Smyth, Adam, and Gill Partington, editors. *Book Destruction from the Medieval to the Contemporary*. Palgrave, 2014.
- Sontag, Susan. "Against Interpretation." *Against Interpretation and Other Essays*, Dell, 1966, pp. 3–14.
- Starks, Lisa. *Ovid and Adaptation in Early Modern English Theatre*. Edinburgh UP, 2021.
- Treharne, Elaine. *Living through Conquest: The Politics of Early English, 1020-1220*. Oxford UP, 2012. Oxford Textual Perspectives.
- Treharne, Elaine, and Greg Walker, editors. *Textual Distortion*. Boydell and Brewer, 2017. Essays and Studies 70.
- Vernon, Matthew X. *The Black Middle Ages: Race and the Construction of the Middle Ages*. Palgrave, 2018.
- Whitaker, Cord J. and Matthew Gabriele, editors. "The Ghosts of the Nineteenth Century and the Future of Medieval Studies." *postmedieval*, vol. 10, no. 2, 2019.
- Willie, Rachel. *Staging the Revolution: Drama, Reinvention and History, 1647-72*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 2015.
- Willis, Ika. *Reception*. Routledge, 2018.
- Wiseman, Susan. *Drama and Politics in the English Civil War*. Cambridge UP, 1998.

