

and the tricky question of how to identify lyricism.

The discontinuous nature of such a collection naturally limits attention to categorical questions of what exactly the Middle English lyric is and how it should be divided up. This does however come to the fore in Bernard O'Donoghue's discussion of 'popular' lyrics. O'Donoghue argues that the poems collected as 'Popular Songs' in Robbins's canonical edition are goliardic parodies, part of a strong literary culture which he situates in relation to Chaucer. This emphasis upon a robust literary tradition can be observed throughout the volume, as the body of lyrics grows from the more fragmentary pre-Chaucerian evidence into a heterogeneous but often accomplished corpus. Thus, a surprise pleasure is Vincent Gillespie's exploration of moral and penitential lyrics, a category generally unappealing to modern readers but here presented with appreciation of the verbal skill much in evidence within the genre. Here and throughout the volume, the lyrics' cultural role in disseminating 'moral values and ethical principles' (68) receives due emphasis, however. This is prominent in Thorlac Turville-Petre's analysis of the political lyric, another group whose ideology can be off-putting today. Introducing the category of 'the hate lyric', Turville-Petre suggests that our difficulties in reading these celebrations of violence provide an 'opportunity for medieval literature to teach us about cultural difference' (185). This suggestion can be extended beyond the context to many aspects of the lyrics' themes, aesthetics, and functions.

Although performance and music receive passing attention, most helpfully from Karl Reichl, this reader would have appreciated a specific exploration of the subject. Nevertheless, the book provides a valuable service in organizing the current state of research, as well as making suggestions for further work and presenting insightful and diverse readings. In combination with anthologies recently edited by Duncan and by John C. Hirsh, it generously facilitates students' and other readers' enjoyment and understanding of the Middle English lyric.

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MARK MILLER, *Philosophical Chaucer: Love, Sex, and Agency in the Canterbury Tales*. Pp. x + 289 (Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature 55). Cambridge, New York, Oakleigh: Cambridge University Press, 2005. £45.00 (ISBN 0 521 84236 0).

A READER might be forgiven for thinking that a book on 'philosophical Chaucer' might focus on the philosophical writings familiar to Chaucer himself – the commentary traditions centred on Boethius, the *insolubilia* associated with the author as a result of the dedication of *Troilus and Criseyde* to the logician Ralph Strode, and so on. Mark Miller's 'philosophical Chaucer' is of a different species, however: instead of using fourteenth-century philosophy to historicize medieval poetry, Miller seeks to use both classical philosophy (Plato, Aristotle) and modern philosophy (Frankfurt, Nagel, Nietzsche, Williams, Wittgenstein, Zizek) in order to produce a reading of Chaucer that generates 'a substantive analysis of normativity' (12). Miller is eager to reassure his readers that, in seeking to use Chaucer's writings to produce a critique of normativity as it appears in postmodern theory, he does not disavow the importance of 'historicizing' Chaucer in his medieval context. Miller acknowledges that his focus on normativity emerges from 'a desire to address this blind spot in our intellectual culture'; he hastens to add, however, 'I have strictly historicist reasons for doing so' (21). *Philosophical Chaucer* thus takes its place among other recent monographs in medieval literary studies, such as Daniel Heller-Roazen's *Fortune's Faces: The Roman de la Rose and the Poetics of Contingency*, as a work that attempts to assume the theoretical mantle of postmodernism while remaining grounded in historicist readings of literature. In this attempt to navigate the Scylla of postmodern

theory and the Charybdis of historicist practice, Miller partakes in a mode of critical writing that is peculiar to contemporary North American academia, as he himself signals in referring to 'contemporary US academic culture' (21) and, more boldly, assuming a fundamentally American audience for his book (30).

Philosophical Chaucer reflects an intellectual context that is not simply American but, more specifically, grounded in the traditions of the University of Chicago. Miller himself signals this affinity not only by means of the modern philosophers he identifies as most central to his project but in the language he chooses to frame the goals of his study: the approach he takes is 'in my view truer to what philosophy is and why it matters, as well as to how it matters to Chaucer' (31). This instrumental view of philosophy, as well as of literature's subservient role as a handmaid of philosophy, is characteristic of what is sometimes referred to as the 'Chicago school' of criticism. It is helpful to understand the local situation of Miller's approach in order to measure both the limitations of *Philosophical Chaucer* and its very real accomplishments.

Following the Introduction, which outlines the aims of Miller's project with a special focus on the ethics and philosophy of normativity, *Philosophical Chaucer* includes six chapters: two on tales from the *Canterbury Tales* (the *Miller's* and *Knight's Tales*); two on important source texts for Chaucer, the *Consolation of Philosophy* and the *Roman de la Rose*; and two more on the *Canterbury Tales* (the *Wife of Bath's* and *Clerk's Tales*). Miller chooses not the most overtly 'philosophical' of Chaucer's writings, *Troilus and Criseyde*, but rather the *Canterbury Tales* because his goal is to demonstrate Chaucer's concern with philosophical issues as they play out in the real world, not as 'abstract articulations of philosophical problems' (30). Accordingly, Miller begins with a study of 'Naturalism and its discontents in the *Miller's Tale*', in which 'naturalism' provides the basis for an analysis of normativity in the tale, as well as within the *Canterbury Tales* as a whole. Erotic desire, in the *Miller's Tale*, is the foundation for the establishment of 'an ideology of normative masculinity' (50),

one which constructs "'woman'" as 'a means to an egocentric end, little more than a place for a man to find his own pleasure' (52).

In the following chapter, on 'Normative longing in the *Knight's Tale*', Miller's argument regarding 'normative nostalgia' in the *Miller's Tale* is extended to the lost 'golden age' evoked in the first of the *Canterbury Tales*. He chooses to 'more or less bracket gender and sexuality' (topics central to many recent readings) in order to 'lay out some problems of ethical normativity on their own ground' (83). In view of the pervasiveness of the study of medieval gender and sexuality in connection with the *Canterbury Tales*, this choice might seem to be a wise one. In the fifth chapter, however, on 'Suffering love in the *Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale*', this omission becomes troubling, as the Wife is unproblematically presented as an individual whose 'personal identity resides in an essentially private subjectivity' in just the same way as her 'masculine counterparts' (201–2). The reductiveness of this reading of individual agency within the *Canterbury Tales* extends beyond them, as the 'reflective engagement' on 'desire and agency' in the *Roman de la Rose* is identified as 'precisely what Chaucer does in the *Canterbury Tales*' (192), while the distinction between the presentation of desire and the self in the two parts of the *Roman de la Rose* (written by two separate authors) is similarly elided into a homogeneous unity of narcissistic eroticism (168). The assimilation of disparate points of view appears in Miller's treatment of more complex philosophical problems as well: for example, Boethius's treatment of autonomy in the *Consolation of Philosophy* is said to be 'roughly the same as the one offered by Bernard Williams in critique of Kant' (134).

Miller's focus on agency within the *Canterbury Tales* produces some rather jarring turns of phrase, in which individual characters appear to act autonomously, having fully developed personalities and the power to choose their own courses of action. For example, we are told that 'What mainly annoys the Miller about the *Knight's Tale* . . . is what he sees as the perpetual refusal of the tale's main characters to stand up and be men' (91), while the Wife of Bath

'wants to imagine that the body serves as the experiential source of her autonomy and pleasure', 'is aroused by glossing', and 'wants to take up the place reserved for her in a familiar patriarchal fantasy' (208). Here, tale-tellers of the frame narrative determine what elements to include in their tales and what to leave out: 'the Knight deeroticizes and generally deemphasizes the relationship between Theseus and Hippolyta, and suppresses Theseus's Ovidian history as a betrayer of women' (107). Figures within the tales are endowed with similar agency: for example, in 'The Clerk's Tale and the scandal of the unconditional', we are told that Walter 'wants, like other sadists, to get dirty – if not literally to have Griselde's blood to wash over him, then perhaps more profoundly to feel her suffering soak into his pores.....torture is his way of loving Griselde' (227). By configuring agency as the property of the character within the narrative, and assigning him or her the responsibility for narrative choices, Miller sidesteps an alternative that perpetually lurks in the wings of *Philosophical Chaucer*: that is, a reading of the *Canterbury Tales* that acknowledges Chaucer as the author who autonomously determines the content of his literary production, and of the philosophical problems rehearsed within it.

This carefully disguised substrate of the book's argument makes itself evident in the passages in which Miller explicitly identifies Chaucer as a philosopher who, through literature, partakes in the ongoing effort to achieve the historical goal of all philosophers: that is, wisdom. For example, Miller states that, in his treatment of desire and autonomy in the *Clerk's Tale*, 'Chaucer makes a contribution to philosophical inquiry by exploring the way a deep practical commitment opens into a set of conceptual problems' (220); elsewhere, Chaucer examines 'the myth of "the subject"...not merely to subject that myth to critique, but to understand what gives it its ideological power' (192). If the latter part of the twentieth century witnessed the 'death of the author', in Miller's work we observe his energetic resurrection. In spite of the sophisticated theoretical and philosophical frameworks it brings to bear on medieval literature, *Philosophical Chaucer* is

thus in some ways a very conservative book, one which positions literature as a mode of rational enquiry, and which confers upon Chaucer the status of interlocutor not just in philosophical debates of the Middle Ages, but within debates carried out inside American philosophy departments of the present day.

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ELLEN SHAW BAKALIAN, *Aspects of Love in John Gower's Confessio Amantis*. Pp.xx + 203 (Studies in Medieval History and Culture). New York and London: Routledge, 2005. £55.00 (ISBN 0 415 96976 X).

FOUR 'aspects of love' occupy Ellen Shaw Bakalian's attention here: 'the notions of *kinde* and reason in the sphere of love; "honeste love" in marriage; passionate and excessive love; and lovesickness', all of which Gower takes up in the *Confessio Amantis* by way of pursuing his larger purpose there, 'to emphasize and to illustrate his beliefs that reason must rule man in all things, including his natural instincts to love' (xvii). The slim volume emerged from Bakalian's doctoral dissertation, and still bears some of the lineaments thereof. Such origins are especially apparent in the first chapter, 'The Struggle between Nature and Reason in Gower's *Confessio Amantis*', in which Bakalian rushes rather breathlessly through the backgrounds – Bernard Silvestris' *Cosmographia*, Alan of Lille's *De Planctu Naturae* and *Anticlaudianus*, the *Roman de la Rose* – directing a de rigueur nod to each before turning to what she is apparently best at (and clearly most enjoys), the close reading of individual tales. Focusing on the narratives of 'Albinus and Rosemund' from Book I and 'Piramus and Thisbe' from Book III, Bakalian critiques the mistakes made by the eponymous lovers, arguing that for Gower love and sexuality, when rationally enjoyed