

RICHARD J. UTZ, ed., *Literary Nominalism and the Theory of Rereading Late Medieval Texts: A New Research Paradigm*. Mediaeval Studies 5. Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1995. ISBN: 0-7734-8882-0. \$89.95.

In this collection, Richard Utz brings together essays on 'the promises and problems of a working paradigm' which has drawn 'an increasing number of practitioners in recent years.' His comprehensive introduction has two objectives: to 'survey when, why and how *nominalist* readings of late-medieval texts have been generated' and to 'delineate how a general paradigm shift in twentieth-century theory' has led to the gradual acceptance of what he terms 'literary nominalism;' and to 'supply and discuss examples of re-readings of...literature' based on such a model.

The nine essays which follow—six of them on Chaucer—illustrate both the insights and the difficulties such an evolving theory faces, not the least of the latter clustering around the (probably perennial) slipperiness of 'nominalism' as a term. William of Ockham, as might be expected, offers a focus, although as Jay Rudd notes in the first essay, 'Julian of Norwich and the Nominalist Questions' (the plural is significant), this 'outstanding thinker of the fourteenth century' evokes disagreement on 'aspects of his thought' among 'even his closest followers' (33). Rudd's interesting comparative study concludes that, among their common interests, individual freedom is more important for Ockham, God's love for Julian, and contemporary philosophical debates for both.

Also interesting and referentially wide-ranging is J. Stephen Russell's 'The Universal Soldier: Idealism and Conceptualism in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight.' Rather than seeing the Morgan-controlled Bercilak as 'the manufactured or simulated person' (51), he examines Gawain and the other Arthurians as nominalists—powerfully so, in their adoption of the green girdle as transmuted sign—rather than realists. Such 'outlandish imagery' (81), as Michael Randall terms it, governs the 'Reversed Analogy in Jean Molinet's *Chappellet des dames*' as well. Historically specific, this 'appropriation of analogy' in the relationship between the Virgin Mary and the poet's patron, Mary of Burgundy, demonstrates the evolution of modes of knowing at the end of the fifteenth century.

Such modes as they appear in Chaucer's work form the focus of the remaining essays. In 'Cosmic Law and Literary Character in Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*,' Edgar Laird argues that the Chaucerian poem—and particularly Theseus's reconciliatory speech at its end—expresses 'neither distorted Boethianism nor the...failure of rational metaphysics' but rather the culmination of 'a tradition antagonistic to the new nominalism' (114). Continuing this argument, John Michael Crafton in 'Emptying the Vessel: Chaucer's Humanistic Critique of Nominalism' uses the whole corpus of the poet's works to suggest that he 'folds these two contradictory theories [essentialist and nominalist] into each other in order to cancel them out,' a 'dialectical manner' revelatory of his sympathy with new and Italian 'rhetorical attitudes' (133). Doubt and questioning also govern the 'Nominalism in the Nun's Priest's Tale,' suggests Grover C. Furr, as the interjection 'concerning the philosophic debate between the nominalists and the Augustinians...disrupts the apparent unity of the Tale and shows

that 'he [Chaucer] neither ignored nor escaped' (146) the philosophical arguments of his age. This contemporary dialectic also informs the discourse of 'The Clerk vs. the Wife of Bath: Nominalism, Carnival, and Chaucer's Last Laugh,' Joseph Grossi's investigation into 'the poles of...the Wife's...Nominalism and the Clerk's...Realism' as they are mediated by Chaucer's 'moderate' Ockhamism.

Chaucer's dream visions offer a focus for the final two essays in the book. Kathryn L. Lynch's 'The Logic of the Dream Vision in Chaucer's *House of Fame*' holds that the poet's parody illustrates that the 'failure of logical, reasoning analysis' leaves the details of the poem as 'singulars not universals,' disordered particularities void of a 'general paradigm of understanding to' men other than the poet himself. Hugo Keiper, in "'I wot myself best how y stonde": literary nominalism, open textual form and the enfranchisement of individual perspective in Chaucer's Dream Visions' [capitalization and spelling *sic*], looks to auctorial point of view as a key to understanding the 'tension between the conflicting claims of nominalism and realism' (206), particularly in the *Parliament of Fowls*. A useful bibliography of literary nominalism completes the book.

The volume would have benefited from, perhaps separate, introductions to the Chaucerian and non-Chaucerian materials—the preponderance of the former essays gives the book a somewhat unbalanced appearance, and however valuable the editor's introduction to the history of the topic, a schematic overview would be welcome, as would have been more careful proofreading. But these are small quibbles indeed—this collection should earn its way into any medievalist's library for its virtue of bringing together a variety of views on a still emerging field of study.

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