

Medieval into Renaissance: Essays for Helen Cooper. Andrew King and Matthew Woodcock, eds.
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Helen Cooper has been an important scholar for those of us who see not only good evidence, but also good reason for tracing continuities and connections between medieval and Renaissance / early modern literature and thought. Discovering such continuities and connections forms the thematic center of this collection of essays that a number of her former students affectionately write, as the title indicates, for her. Indeed, one gets the distinct sense that the contributors put forth special effort to please a much-loved but also formidable teacher whose highest compliment for a paper, so Andrew King and Matthew Woodcock tell us in their acknowledgements, is to call it “nice” (ix). The result is that each author produces a solid piece of scholarship on the specific texts and traditions they examine and, more generally, on the value of constituting literary and cultural history as an “into,” as much or more than it is an “away from,” an especially contested issue in the specific case of the periods under consideration in this book. Every chapter builds on or imitates—in the Renaissance sense of that word—some aspect of Cooper’s research. And happily, this volume achieves a satisfying conceptual unity: this edited volume succeeds in becoming a book.

Like their mentor, King and Woodcock show in their introduction that they are fully aware of the problems, as well as the possibilities, that “Medieval into Renaissance” entails. But one of the great strengths of these essays is that their authors, as dutiful students of their mentor, have read what seems to be everything anyone could read on their chosen topics. And then read some more. In her “Unknowe, unknow, Vncovthe, uncouth: From Chaucer and Gower to Spenser and Milton,” the first chapter of the volume, Alexandra Gillespie not only has read deeply and widely on her four poets, she also has surveyed every sixteenth-century printed edition of Chaucer’s works that she could find to show how Chaucer specifically influenced Spenser in particular—all to good effect. The attempt to derive patterns and resonances in a wide array of texts is, to be sure, hard to keep on point. R. W. Maslen writes convincingly in “Armour That Doesn’t Work: An Anti-Meme in Medieval and Renaissance Romance” that broken or malfunctioning armor becomes an “anti-meme”—that is, quoting Cooper herself, “a ‘meme that has gotten out of hand,’ that of the magical object” (35)—in medieval and Renaissance romance. But this trope itself needs to be brought under better control in Maslen’s final set of examples in the chapter.

In each chapter, smart, sophisticated readings and interpretations are very much on display. I especially enjoyed Megan G. Leitch's "'Of his ffader spak he no thing': Family Resemblance and Anxiety of Influence in Fifteenth-Century Prose Romance." In the "concern" that she finds in many prose romances "that positive traits may not be inherited, and/or that negative traits will be inherited," Leitch senses perceptive resonances between "representations of inheritance within the prose romances" with "the texts' own literary inheritance" (69). But Leitch also knows when to ease up on the gas pedal, which reflects well certainly on her, but also on Cooper's influence on her.

Space does not allow me to detail all of the virtues of the chapters that follow these three as they each truly deserve. But briefly: Aisling Byrne's chapter ought to be required reading for anyone working on Edmund Spenser's Irish context, as should Nandini Das's article on the *Arcadia* for Sidney scholars. Woodcock's piece convinces me that I should know Thomas Churchyard's work better, and King makes me feel similarly about Samuel Sheppard's *The Faerie King*. Shakespeare Studies is well served here by James Wade's chapter on post-Reformation penitential romances (*King Lear*) and by Jason Powell's insightful reading of *Hamlet*.

Finally, this volume demonstrates that at least in certain cases a collection of essays can actually make an argument more effectively than a single-authored book. It is a significant tribute to Helen Cooper that over her career she has brought forth, as it were, a genuine community of scholars that, I hope, continues to grow.

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