



BOOK REVIEWS

PRE-1800

Gillian Adler and Paul Strohm. *Alle Thyng Hath Tyme: Time and Medieval Life*

Medieval Lives. London: Reaktion, 2023. Pp. 248. \$22.50 (cloth).

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Since the publication of Carolyn Dinshaw's illuminating and ground-breaking *How Soon is Now? Medieval Texts, Amateur Readers and the Queerness of Time* (2012), a growing interest in the multiple timeframes lived and experienced by medieval cultures has manifested itself in academic contexts. *Alle Thyng Hath Tyme: Time and Medieval Life*, adds to this growing body of work; and, while not engaging directly with Dinshaw's work on the queer workings of time in medieval literary representation, this book takes as a given the complex and slippery understandings of time that underpinned all areas of medieval life in western European contexts.

Such complexity is broken down by this book in helpful ways for the reader, offering eight chapters, each of which examines medieval time and its narratives from a separate perspective. The introductory chapter, for example, focuses on different varieties of time and their "colliding temporal systems" (9): primarily the cyclical time of the natural world and the rigid disciplines of the type of liturgical time adhered to within the monasteries. Meanwhile, the second chapter offers intriguing insight into the many ways in which time was measured, particularly before the invention of mechanical clocks began to homogenize people's experience of time passing. Chapter 3 offers a more macro and philosophical examination of how time and planetary influence went hand-in-hand, from the accuracy of gauging the passing of time from an understanding of astral and planetary alignment, to beliefs regarding the relationship between the zodiac and human volition.

Having established the multiplicity of medieval temporalities, in the following four chapters the book moves on to a consideration of how medieval people lived within these overlapping frames, with chapter 4 drawing upon three autobiographical texts to do so: the writings of Julian of Norwich, Margery Kempe, and Thomas Usk, all of whom muse repeatedly on the workings and constraints of multiple temporalities in their work. The conclusions drawn about these three fairly predictable examples are then developed and nuanced by the authors' casting their wider net in the following chapter to cover Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseide* and Malory's *Morte Darthur*, concluding that "[a] supple time-sense is medieval temporality's gift to poetic narrative, and medieval poets and writers exploited it to the full" (121).

Such exploitation is convincingly argued for again in chapter 6, which examines the delight and complexity of how temporal allegory is deployed in medieval texts, particularly the popular allegorization of the cardinal virtues—Temperance, Justice, Prudence, Fortitude—that tended to link temporality, ethics, and aesthetics within a single body usually gendered female. Similarly, in this chapter, Idleness, as allegorical figure demonstrating the dangers of "wasting time," is discussed alongside other more gloomy figures, such as Father Time and Dancing Death, all common didactic warning systems for the complacent

reader also intent on wasting precious time on earth. As in all chapters, these discussions are accompanied by a series of arresting—and sometimes highly dramatic—color images to delight the reader and bring into polychromatic vividness exactly what was at stake within the medieval imaginary regarding allegorical representations of time, its ethics, morality, aesthetics, and urgency.

The final two chapters, “Ages of Humankind” and “The End of Time” conclude this engaged and engaging study with a focus on understandings of the ageing process in the Middle Ages and eschatological beliefs respectively. While chapter 7 argues for a belief in the “moribundity of the world” (188) as a theological commonplace and established literary theme by the late fifteenth century, chapter 8 focuses on what is termed the “uneasy anticipation” (191) of the Last Things and Judgement Day amongst the faithful, concluding aptly with animated discussion of “The Day of Doom.” Accordingly, the book’s coverage is wide, varied, and generally interlocking, offering an often-fascinating insight into the workings of time and its material and representational manifestations during the period under scrutiny.

That said, on one level the book’s subtitle of *Time and Medieval Life* is, perhaps, a little misleading. Evidence drawn upon to make its case is overwhelmingly from temporal representations within literary texts and their iconographic illustrations. These are, however, sometimes interspersed with more historical illustration—of horological history for example, development of the astrolabe, and some of the ways in which human ageing was conceptualized—but the overwhelming impression of medieval temporalities achieved is via the usual suspects: Chaucer, Gower, Malory, Julian, Margery Kempe. It is also somewhat disappointing that the diverse experience of time within the anchorhold receives little attention beyond foray into Julian’s atypical texts and a glimpse at *Ancrene Wisse* (although I acknowledge that this more reflects my own subjective interests than any real shortcoming). It may well be, however, that this putative lacuna in the book’s coverage will ultimately serve to promote further study into this area of anchoritic understandings of time, rather than have it conflate unproblematically with the “liturgical time” of the monasteries.

These quibbles are, of course, minor: authors need ultimately to decide what to include and what to omit, and a book such as this one cannot aim at being fully comprehensive. Indeed, like the other books published in this excellent Reaktion Medieval Lives series, it presents complexity and nuance in readily accessible ways, is written with clarity and precision, and has all the hallmarks of two accomplished scholars at two different career stages who have melded their skills, experience, knowledge, and expertise into a book that is both compelling and informative. I can happily recommend it for inclusion in any library of medieval studies.

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Tim Alborn. All that Glittered: Britain’s Most Precious Metal from Adam Smith to the Gold Rush

New York: Oxford University Press, 2019. Pp. 276. \$44.99 (cloth).

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The most important word in the title of Timothy Alborn’s expansive and revealing history of gold in Britain is “all.” This is not because he aims to discuss all of the ways gold was