

for moral character. The third chapter focuses on the visualization of animated spectacles: it opens with a mechanized angel as spectacle at the coronation of Richard II; it then considers characters who are transformed as ‘moving marvels’ in the poems and images of Cotton Nero A.x. It turns to discussion of the Green Knight in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* as an animated spectacle that wields moral agency, an agency displaced onto him, Williams argues, by Morgan le Fay. Williams opens the fourth chapter by providing a contextual definition of the marvellous and proceeds to argue that conventions of visual spectacle are denied in Chaucer’s *The Squire’s Tale* and *The Wife of Bath’s Tale*, by focusing on spectacles of language rather than sight, which may encourage moral re-evaluation of broader community relationships.

At times it is somewhat difficult to see the rationale behind Williams’s scope or the connections that are made between texts. It is curious that the contextual definition of marvels is placed in the final chapter, not the first. This exploration could be lengthened with perhaps an entire chapter early on dedicated to untangling such a complex subject. As Williams’s central focus is on morality, spectacle, and marvel in romance, it might have been useful to note the generation of scholars deeply interested in the moral aspects of romance, particularly at moments of magic or transformation, such as W. R. J. Barron, Larry D. Benson, Lee Ramsey, John Stevens, and J. A. Burrow, or the more recent study of Barbara Newman, *Medieval Crossover*. It might also have been helpful to note the many pluralistic readings of morality in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* or to detail scholarly debate concerning Chaucer’s engagement with magic. It is extremely difficult to engage with such major topics as morality, marvel, and spectacle with the rigour, nuance, and complexity each demands. While this work does not quite sustain the analysis of all three topics, Williams has hit upon a fascinating triumvirate that is certainly worthy of investigation.

Durham University

NATALIE GOODISON

Michael J. Warren, *Birds in Medieval English Poetry: Metaphors, Realities, Transformations* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2018). ix + 259 pp.; 6 plates. ISBN 978-18438-4508-9. £60.00.

Literary criticism’s ‘animal turn’ has fostered ecologically informed studies of many animals, but the prevalence of birds in some of the most canonical works of medieval European literature has made them an ambassador for this critical movement. Michael J. Warren’s *Birds in Medieval English Poetry* engages with this ongoing discussion, providing subtle, nuanced and sophisticated new readings of poems from across the early, high, and late Middle Ages, namely: *The Seafarer*

and several riddles from the tenth-century Exeter Book, the twelfth-century *Owl and the Nightingale*, Chaucer's fourteenth-century *Parliament of Fowls*, and his contemporary Gower's *Confessio Amantis*.

Warren's focus is on wild birds native to the British Isles, and he argues convincingly for the place of medieval sources in modern ornithology and vice versa. This ornithology has cultural import: 'real contacts with birds contribute richly to the poems' avian interests, and recommend the diversity of ways in which birds could appeal to medieval thought' (p. 5). It is this cultural work that Warren sets out to analyse. Each chapter interweaves theoretical, historical, and ornithological contexts with close readings in a highly adept manner. This is not a book for beginners, but scholars working in the field of medieval literature will undoubtedly find it a stimulating read.

Chapter 1 discusses migratory seabirds and the bird/soul metaphor of *The Seafarer*, making a convincing case that these passages should no longer be read in isolation. Warren argues that the poet's naming of the seabirds 'prepares us for the synchrony between these early experiences and the much studied flight imagery' of the *anfloga* (lone-flier) that is the Seafarer's soul (p. 29). Chapter 2, also on Old English, emphasizes the pedagogical aims of the Exeter Book riddles and the role of birds in simultaneously revealing and concealing solutions. This chapter's discussion of unstable taxonomies is especially compelling, as are Warren's readings of two riddles that do not receive nearly enough scholarly attention: the clever mimicry of Riddle 24's jay and the un-nameable birds of Riddle 57 who claim to 'name themselves, neither requiring our intervention, nor, in fact, allowing us this privilege' (p. 96).

The third chapter explores *The Owl and the Nightingale's* ornithological underpinnings at a time when moral lessons from the natural world were increasingly influential. This poem diverges from the bestiary tradition's more fanciful approach to nature to demonstrate real knowledge of a range of species' habitats and behaviours. Even so, Warren argues that the 'birds are indoctrinated with the human-imagined lore pertaining to their kind to the extent that they are embroiled in a meta-game of sign-making' (p. 117). As simultaneously real and metaphorical, their representation has implications for both the treatment of birds and oppressed peoples outside the world of the poem.

Chapter 4, on Chaucer's *Parliament of Fowls*, includes a fascinating discussion of biotranslation: translation across species. Warren addresses issues of voice and allegory, troubling the boundaries of human and animal in provocative ways. Finally, chapter 5 examines hybridity and transformation in Gower's 'Tale of Tereus' from *Confessio Amantis*, with a special focus on human and non-human bodies. Warren reads Tereus' violent desire in terms of the poem's predator-prey imagery and his inadvertent cannibalism as a prefiguring of his avian metamorphosis.

The book concludes with a short epilogue and is followed by a glossary of Old and Middle English names for (wild/native) birds, which will undoubtedly prove useful to those entering this scholarly discussion. There is much discussion yet to be had in the field of medieval animal studies and, with biodiversity dangerously compromised in our own time, this theoretical approach has never seemed more urgent. Warren's handling of medieval material in a way that reminds us of both the innate value of the species we run the risk of destroying and the dangers of human exceptionalism is a welcome and, moreover, a significant contribution to the field.

University of Birmingham

MEGAN CAVELL

Andrew Galloway, *The Penn Commentary on Piers Plowman*, 1: C Prologue – Passus 4; B Prologue – Passus 4; A Prologue – Passus 4 (Philadelphia, Pa: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006). xiii + 491 pp. ISBN 978-0-8122-3922-5. £79.00.

Ralph Hanna, *The Penn Commentary on Piers Plowman*, 2: C Passūs 5–9; B Passūs 5–7; A Passūs 5–8 (Philadelphia, Pa: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017). xxvi + 390. ISBN 978-0-8122-4891-3. £74.00.

Traugott Lawler, *The Penn Commentary on Piers Plowman*, 4: C Passūs 15–19; B Passūs 13–77 (Philadelphia, Pa: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018). xv + 499 pp. ISBN 978-0-8122-5026-8. £74.00.

Stephen A. Barney, *The Penn Commentary on Piers Plowman*, 5: C Passūs 20–2; B Passūs 18–20 (Philadelphia, Pa: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006). xv + 309 pp. ISBN 978-0-8122-3921-8. £58.00.

These astonishingly erudite four volumes of commentary on the three versions of the fourteenth-century alliterative poem *Piers Plowman* (we await a posthumous third volume by Anne Middleton) have been heralded as vital, not to say overdue, references for the Langland scholar. Annotation accompanies more recent editions from Derek Pearsall (C-text) and A. V. C. Schmidt (A-, B-, C-, Z-texts), but a full commentary on the A-, B-, and C-texts was previously only available in W. W. Skeat's still-useful 1886 edition (*William Langland: Piers Plowman, A New Annotated Edition of the C-Text*, ed. Derek Pearsall (Exeter, 2008); *Piers Plowman: A Parallel-Text Edition of the A, B, C and Z Versions*, ed. A. V. C. Schmidt, 2nd edn (Kalamazoo, Mich., 1995–2008/2011); *The Vision of William concerning Piers Plowman in Three Parallel Texts*, ed. W. W. Skeat (London, 1886)). Because of the poem's wide-ranging interrogations of its era's theology, religious institutions, and roles; government, leadership, and law; social and economic orders and their fractures; and literature itself, scholars generally concerned with England in the fourteenth century may on occasion also find valuable the miracles of concise