
Arthurians are most likely familiar with Professor Shun’ichi Noguchi’s work on Malory’s and Caxton’s English, as in his ‘Englishness in Malory’ (in Aspects of Malory, ed. Takamiya and Brewer) and ‘The Winchester Malory’ (Arthuriana 5). In fact, Noguchi’s scholarship ranges from Beowulf to Yeats. This Festschrift matches Noguchi’s wide-ranging scholarly interests. The volume contains ten essays—on Chaucer, the Alliterative Morte Arthure, Malory, Deloney, Milton, and Joyce—by ten different Japanese scholars.

Most of the authors approach their topic through the kind of lexical/syntactic study Noguchi himself employs. The best of the essays ground their observation in reception or linguistic history, as does Masahiko Agari when he begins his study of Milton’s inversion of the inflected pronoun (‘Him the almighty power/Hurled headlong…’, PL I. 44–45) with early readers noticing this technique, or Manabu Agari when he studies Malory’s ‘Latinisation of Spelling’ from the vantage of this (later) Renaissance phenomenon. In ‘The Prologue, Text and Epilogue of de Worde-Copland’s Edition of The Parliament of Fowls: An examination of the Printer’s Commercial Tactics,’ Tsuyoshi Mukai locates de Worde-Copland’s edition between Pynson’s of c. 1526 and Thynne’s of 1532. Mukai demonstrates that, despite a poor job of textual editing, the editor’s claims in the prologue and epilogue do advance “the concept of a standard and authentic text,” an issue of concern to Renaissance humanists interested in preserving the “English Homer” (p. 74).

Chaucer receives most of the attention (five essays) in the Festschrift, but the essays break no new ground. Gregory K. Jember’s ‘Confessions of an English Storyteller: Chaucer and The Canterbury Tales,’ begins with a consideration of the Middle English verb confessen in both its ‘ecclesiastical/penitential’ and its ‘laic/common’ meanings and examines acts of confession in the Miller, the Canon’s Yeoman, the Pardoner, and Chaucer’s Retraction. Jember’s interesting conclusion, that ‘Confession becomes…a positive celebration of the modern, humanistic self’ can hardly be proven in a twelve-page essay. Because Jember does not define the terms ‘modern’ and ‘humanistic,’ I was left wondering whether he was locating Chaucer’s confessional tendency in the early modern/Humanist movement of the sixteenth-century or in our own times. In contrast to Jember’s over-reaching, Yoshiyuki Nakao in his ‘Social-Linguistic Tension as Evidenced by Moot/Moste in Chaucer’s Troilus and Criseyde,’ reaches too limited a conclusion: that the poet ‘perhaps pushed the ME moot/moste toward its functions in ModE’ (p. 31). Masahiko Kanno’s ‘Chaucer’s Conception of Originality’ surveys medieval ideas of invention and auctoritas but at a rather introductory level.

As I read this collection, I had the distinct and recurring feeling that these authors were working without access to the latest books and journals in the field. (On the other hand, very few North American scholars check into Japanese journals such as Poetica before we publish.) Nonetheless, several of the essays struck me as removed
from current scholarly debate. For example, Akiyuki Jimura’s essay is an interim report on a comprehensive textual comparison of Blake’s and Robinson’s editions of the *Canterbury Tales*, which are based respectively on the Hengwrt and Ellesmere Manuscripts. Since Benson’s *Riverside Chaucer* replaced Robinson’s edition in 1987, it was not clear to me why Benson ‘will be dealt with in a future study’ (p. 35) and why in fact we still need to consider Robinson.

The essays in *Essays on English Literature and Language* are pleasant, but none of them show the incisiveness of the Noguchi’s own work. Several seem pedestrian in comparison. Still I am grateful that these Japanese scholars attend so closely to the literal and linguistic level of the text. In a profession given to abstraction and theory, the colleagues and friends of Shun’ichi Noguchi are to be commended for reading English texts carefully and thus keeping the rest of us grounded.

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