Imagining Medieval English concerns how we think about language, and simply through the process of thinking about it give substance to an array of phenomena, including grammar, usage, variation, change, regional dialects, sociolects, registers, periodization, and even language itself. Leading scholars in the field here explore conventional conceptualizations of medieval English, and consider possible alternatives and their implications for cultural as well as linguistic history. They explore not only the language’s structural traits, but also the sociolinguistic and theoretical expectations that frame them and make them real. Spanning the period 500–1500 and drawing on a wide range of examples, the chapters discuss topics such as medieval multilingualism, colloquial medieval English, standard and regional varieties, and the post-medieval reception of Old and Middle English. Together, they argue that what medieval English is depends, in part, on who’s looking at it, how, when, and why.

Tim William Machan is Professor of English at the University of Notre Dame. He has published extensively on historical linguistics, medieval English, and Old Norse, with a particular focus on language contact and change. His most recent books include What Is English? And Why Should We Care? (2013) and Language Anxiety: Conflict and Change in the History of English (2009).
This series of critical books seeks to cover the whole area of literature written in the major medieval languages – the main European vernaculars, and medieval Latin and Greek – during the period c.1100–1500. Its chief aim is to publish and stimulate fresh scholarship and criticism on medieval literature, special emphasis being placed on understanding major works of poetry, prose, and drama in relation to the contemporary culture and learning which fostered them.

Recent titles in the series

Michael Van Dussen From England to Bohemia: Heresy and Communication in the Later Middle Ages
Martin Eisner Boccaccio and the Invention of Italian Literature: Dante, Petrarch, Cavalcanti, and the Authority of the Vernacular
Emily V. Thornbury Becoming a Poet in Anglo-Saxon England
Lawrence Warner The Myth of "Piers Plowman"
Lee Manion Narrating the Crusades: Loss and Recovery in Medieval and Early Modern English Literature
Daniel Wakelin Scribal Correction and Literary Craft: English Manuscripts 1375–1510
Jon Whitman (ed.) Romance and History: Imagining Time from the Medieval to the Early Modern Period
Virginie Greene Logical Fictions in Medieval Literature and Philosophy
Michael Johnston and Michael Van Dussen (eds.) The Medieval Manuscript Book: Cultural Approaches
IMAGINING MEDIEVAL
ENGLISH

Language Structures and Theories, 500–1500

EDITED BY
TIM WILLIAM MACHAN
Contents

List of figures \hspace{1em} \textit{page vii}
List of tables \hspace{1em} viii
Notes on contributors \hspace{1em} ix
Acknowledgments \hspace{1em} xii

I. introduction \hspace{1em} 1
1. The metaphysics of medieval English \hspace{1em} 3
\hspace{1em} \textit{Tim William Machan}

II. organizing ideas \hspace{1em} 13
2. What was medieval English? \hspace{1em} 15
\hspace{1em} \textit{Seth Lerer}
3. The evolution of Old and Middle English texts: linguistic form and practices of literacy \hspace{1em} 34
\hspace{1em} \textit{Jeremy Smith}
4. Snakes, ladders, and standard language \hspace{1em} 54
\hspace{1em} \textit{Tim William Machan}

III. the continuities of language \hspace{1em} 79
5. “þæt is on englisc”: performing multilingualism in Anglo-Saxon England \hspace{1em} 81
\hspace{1em} \textit{Christopher M. Cain}
6. Regional language and culture: the geography of Middle English linguistic variation \hspace{1em} 100
\hspace{1em} \textit{Merja Stenroos}
Contents

7. The linguistic repertoire of medieval England, 1100–1500
   Ad Putter

IV. THE DISCONTINUITIES OF ENGLISH

8. The nature of material evidence
   Simon Horobin

9. Sifting through the evidence: principles and pitfalls
   Cynthia L. Allen

10. Everyday English in late medieval England
    Colette Moore

11. Imagining the literary in medieval English
    Andrew Galloway

V. RETROSPECTION

12. “The most excellent creatures are not ever born perfect”:
    early modern attitudes to Middle English
    Helen Cooper

13. Ideas of medieval English in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries
    David Matthews

Bibliography
Index

© in this web service Cambridge University Press
www.cambridge.org
Figures

Unless stated otherwise, all figures are created by the author and reproduced by permission.

1. Geographical distribution of <a> and <o> spellings of land page 105
2. The chronological development by royal dynasty of five northern features 114
3. The chronological development by royal dynasty of the third-person singular present indicative ending 114
4. The chronological development of the four main spellings of the vocalic element of they in the North 115
5. The Determiner Phrase 174
7. The Towneley Plays; San Marino, Huntington Library, MS HM 1, fol. 1. Reproduced by permission of the Huntington Library, San Marino, California 212
9. “Semi-Saxon” and “Middle English” in nineteenth-century periodicals 274
Tables

1. The beginning of the grammatical treatise Accedence in eight versions page 121
2. Adam Pinkhurst’s copying preferences 151
3. The Digby scribe’s copying preferences 155
4. James Gloys’s pronoun usage 159
5. James Gloys’s pronoun usage in individual letters 160
6. Geoffrey Spirleng’s spelling habits 161
7. Definite determiner in Ælfric’s Grammar with object of preposition vs. direct arguments 181
8. Determiners in PObj in Grammar and Homilies 182
9. Possessive second-person determiner your in the Middle English Grammar Corpus 203
Notes on contributors

Cynthia L. Allen is an Emerita Fellow at the Australian National University, where she taught Historical Linguistics, History of English, and Structure of English until her retirement in 2015. She is a Fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities in recognition of her work in the history of English morphosyntax. Her publications include the monographs *Case Marking and Reanalysis: Grammatical Relations from Old to Early Modern English* (1995) and *Genitives in Early English: Typology and Evidence* (2008). She has recently contributed chapters to *Historical Linguistics of English: An International Handbook* (2012) and *The Cambridge Handbook of English Historical Linguistics* (2015) and the entry on Old English in the second edition of the *Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics*. She is a co-founder and current editorial board member of the series Studies in Language Change and is a member of the editorial board of *The Journal of Historical Pragmatics* and the series Studies in Diachronic and Historical Linguistics.

Christopher M. Cain is Professor of English at Towson University in Towson, Maryland. He has published on Old English and Anglo-Latin in *Studies in Philology, JEGP, Review of English Studies*, and *Philological Quarterly*, among others. He is the co-author (with R. D. Fulk) of *A History of Old English Literature* (2nd edn., 2013) and co-editor (with Geoffrey Russom) of *Studies in the History of the English Language III – Managing Chaos: Strategies for Identifying Change in English* (2007) and has been a contributor to *The Year’s Work in Old English Studies*.

Helen Cooper was Professor of Medieval and Renaissance English at the University of Cambridge from 2004 to 2014; she holds Emeritus and Honorary Fellowships at University College, Oxford, where she was appointed as their first woman Fellow in 1978, and a Life Fellowship at Magdalene College, Cambridge. She has particular interests in the cultural continuations across the medieval and early modern periods.


**Simon Horobin** is Professor of English Language and Literature at the University of Oxford. His research interests lie at the interface of historical linguistics, manuscript studies, and literary scholarship. He has published extensively on manuscripts of Middle English literary works, including the circumstances of their production, circulation, and reception as well as their linguistic features.

**Seth Lerner** is Distinguished Professor of Literature and former Dean of Arts and Humanities at the University of California at San Diego. He has taught and published widely in medieval and early modern English literature, the history of the English language, children’s literature, and the history of scholarship. His books have received the Harry Levin Prize from the American Comparative Literature Association, the Beatrice White Prize of the English Association, the National Book Critics Circle Award, and the Truman Capote Prize in Criticism. His most recent publications include the memoir *Prospero’s Son* (2013) and a revised and expanded edition of *Inventing English: A Portable History of the Language* (2015).

**Tim William Machan** is Professor of English at the University of Notre Dame. His teaching and research interests focus on medieval literature and language, specifically on historical sociolinguistics, multilingualism, and text editing. His publications include five scholarly monographs, four critical editions, three edited anthologies, and some fifty research articles and chapters in books. His most recent books are *Language Anxiety: Conflict and Change in the History of English* (2009) and *What Is English? And Why Should We Care?* (2013).
Notes on contributors


COLETTE MOORE is Associate Professor of English at the University of Washington. Her areas of specialization are the history of the English language, English language studies, and late medieval literature. Her published articles and her book *Quoting Speech in Early English* (Cambridge, 2011) reflect her interests in the combination of historical pragmatics, sociolinguistics, and stylistics. Her current research examines the ways that late medieval texts combine discursive, narrative, and visual methods for organizing discourse.


JEREMY SMITH is Professor of English Philology in the University of Glasgow. He has published widely on topics in English historical linguistics and medieval English studies; his monographs include *Older Scots: A Linguistic Reader* (2012), *Sound-Change and the History of English* (2007), and *An Historical Study of English: Function, Form and Change* (1996). His current research is in the area of historical pragmatics, focusing on the implications of diachronic change in textual form.

MERJA STENROOS is Professor of English Linguistics at the University of Stavanger in Norway. She leads the Middle English Scribal Texts Programme at Stavanger and is the main compiler of two corpora of Middle English: the *Middle English Grammar Corpus* (MEG-C) and the *Middle English Local Documents Corpus* (MELD). She has published articles on different aspects of Middle English, including orthography, dialectal variation, and pragmatics. Together with Inge Særheim and Martti Mäkinen, she edited the volume *Language Contact and Variation Around the North Sea* (2012).
Acknowledgments

This book began with a suggestion by Linda Bree and the continued support of Alastair Minnis. At the outset I would like to thank them both for their encouragement – Linda in particular for many insightful comments along the way, and Alastair for many years of friendship and intellectual inspiration. From the book came the idea of a conference, at which the contributors would meet to present penultimate versions of their papers. The conference became a reality on 15–17 September 2014, thanks to the University of Notre Dame’s institutional commitment to the humanities and to generous grants from the Institute for Scholarship in the Liberal Arts, the Notre Dame College of Arts and Letters, the Henkels Lecture Series, the Medieval Institute, the Nanovic Institute for European Studies, and the Department of English at Notre Dame. The conference was an extraordinary opportunity for improving not only the quality of the individual papers but also the coherence of the volume in its entirety. It made for an invigorating three days, and whatever success this volume has is owed in no small part to it and those who made the conference possible.

I thank the contributors for taking a flyer on a perhaps curious proposal to bring together linguists, literary scholars, and those who are a little of both in order to talk about matters of interest to them all. And I thank them for participating in the conference and writing the first-rate papers collected here. Bobby Meyer-Lee was a virtual contributor, crucial to the conference as well as the book, and many attendees whom I cannot name here asked probing questions, raised pertinent issues, and refined the essays and the book. For making the conference run as smoothly as it did, I thank the Notre Dame Academic Conference Center, especially Lauri Roberts, as well as several Notre Dame graduate medieval students who chaired sessions and animated discussions: Amanda Bohne, Mimi Ensley, Richard Fahey, Marjorie Harrington, Mae Kilker, Anna Larsen, Leanne MacDonald, and Erica Machulak. Amanda Bohne also contributed as an
Acknowledgments

all-important research assistant in the preparation of final copy. For crucial help of various other kinds I thank my colleagues Steve Fallon, Valerie Sayers, and John Van Engen.

T. W. Machan
April, 2015