# Collecting Chaucer

It is an extraordinary honour to deliver the biennial Chaucer lecture at the Huntington Library, home of the Ellesmere Chaucer, and of one of the most famous collections in the world. Today, I'm going to be exploring two contrasting ways of approaching collecting: as something deadening and as something generative. The lecture is divided into four parts: Part 1 explores theories of collecting; Part 2 thinks about the Ellesmere Chaucer and its place here; Part 3 is text-based, and considers Chaucer himself as a collector, and Part 4 is a meditation on my own experience of collecting and exhibiting Chaucer earlier this year.

## Part 1: On Collecting

In his essay, *Unpacking my Library: A Talk about Collecting*, Walter Benjamin meditates on the process of book collecting. He takes us through the different ways in which one can acquire books – including (to my horror): 'Among common modes of acquisition, the neatest for the collector is undoubtedly borrowing followed by failing to return'.[1] He also lyrically describes the layers of personal history behind each of his books, in a passage that seems particularly poignant given the historical backdrop of Benjamin's life and death in 1930s Europe:

> Now, with the last packing case still only half-empty, it was already well past midnight. Other thoughts fill me than those of which I have spoken. Not thoughts; images, memories, Memories of the cities where I found so many of these things: Riga, Naples, Munich, Danzig, Moscow, Florence, Basel, Paris; memories of the splendid premises of Rosenthal in Munich, of the Stockturm in Danzig, home to the late Hans Rhaue, of Sussengut's musty book cellars in Berlin N; memories of the parlours where these books once stood, my student lodgings in Munich, my digs in Bern, the isolation of Iseltwald on Lake Brienz and lastly my bedroom as a boy, from which come a mere four or five of the several thousand volumes that are starting to pile up around me.[2]

That sense of the different rooms that a book has existed in, the different phases of life through which it accompanies its owner, is surely familiar to all of us, even if few of us have the resources to track books from Riga to Paris, Naples to Berlin. I think of the resonance of

[1] Walter Benjamin, 'Unpacking my Library' in *One Way Street and Other Writings* (London: Penguin, 2009), 161-171, 164.
[2] Benjamin, 'Unpacking my Library,' 170.

Daniel Davies's project on the humble Riverside Chaucer - looking at your own copy of the Riverside, when it has been with you through multiple phases of your scholarly life, 'tracks a life's work' as he writes.[3] I imagine that everyone in this room collects books to a certain extent, that many of us have overspilling shelves and ambitious 'to read' piles. For Benjamin, his books bring with them traces of their pasts; they are not divorced from their origins when they enter his collection.

Benjamin writes about the collector as an obsessive. The collector, he says, "has his being in a state of dialectical tension between the poles of disorder and order.'[4] Another theorist of collecting compares it to reading: Phillipp Blom writes that 'the collector, like the reader, seeks to convince himself that there is structure, that things can be ordered and understood.'[5] Putting together a collection is like ordering a narrative. The collector attempts to order part of the world; some collectors aim at completion; others are eclectic. The collection, as Susan Stewart writes, is an interplay of 'organisation and the chaos of infinity.'[6] Blom, Benjamin, and Stewart all write about collecting as an agon, a struggle between chaos and order.

The collection is not merely an accumulation of things; it needs to be organised. How do we collect things in ways that make sense to us? How – and why – do collectors divide, classify, label?

Jorge Luis Borges explores the idiosyncrasy of taxonomy when he writes about a fictional Heavenly Emporium of Benevolent Knowledge, that divides animals as follows:

a) Those that belong to the emperor
b) Embalmed ones
c) Those that are trained
d) Suckling pigs
e) Mermaids

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[3] Daniel Davies, 'The Social Life of the Riverside Chaucer,' https://avidly.lareviewofbooks.org/2021/06/23/the-social-life-of-the-riverside-chaucer/
[4] Benjamin, 'Unpacking my Library,' 162.
[5] Philipp Blom, *To Have and to Hold: An Intimate History of Collectors and Collecting* (London: Penguin, 2003), 206.
[6] Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 1993 [first published 1984]), 157.

f) Fabulous ones
g) Stray dogs
h) Those that are included in this classification
i) Those that tremble as if they were mad
j) Innumerable ones
k) Those drawn with a very fine camel's hair brush
l) Etcetera
m) Those that have just broken the flower vase
n) Those that at a distance resemble flies[7]

This wonderful taxonomy reveals the complexity and absurdity of classification. Many common animals might not fit any of these categories, while others fit into several different groups – anything that fits into one group automatically also is part of h, 'those that are included in this classification.' Some explicitly do not exist – fabulous ones. All the others are dependent on context – in other words they would only fit into the category at particular moments of their lives – when they were suckling, or when they were trembling, or when they had just broken the flower vase. Many only exist through human activity and perception, such as those drawn with a very fine camel's hair brush. The whole list is a comment on the subjectivity and futility of classification; the inevitable limits of attempting to impose structure onto the chaos of the world.

The imposition of so-called order onto the world inevitably has colonial connotations. While the complicated politics of collecting have long been clear to many thinkers, there has been an explosion of commentary on the colonial implications of collections in the last few years in particular. In the UK, books such as *The Brutish Museums* brought the history of the Benin bronzes into the public consciousness, and debates about the Parthenon sculptures, long known in the UK as the Elgin Marbles, are very much live at the moment.[8] Seeta Chaganti and Andrea Myers Achi's article "Semper Novi Quid ex Africa': Redrawing the Borders of Medieval African Art and Considering its Implications for Medieval Studies," thinks about the way that African art is framed in Western museums, exploring ways in which museum curation could 'engage in temporally productive work that brings past and present into radical dialogue.'[9]

[7] Jorge Luis Borges, 'John Wilkins' Analytical Language,' in *The Total Library: Non Fiction 1922-1986*, 229-232, 231.
[8] Dan Hicks, *The Brutish Museums: The Benin Bronzes, Colonial Violence, and Cultural Restitution* (London: Pluto Press, 2020).
[9] Andrea Myers Achi and Seeta Chaganti, '"Semper Novi Quid ex Africa": Redrawing the Borders of Medieval African Art and Considering Its Implications for Medieval Studies,' in Catherine E. Karkov, Anna Kłosowska,

It is now twenty years since Geraldine Heng argued in *Empire of Magic* that medieval European travel narratives replicated 'narrative itself as a collection.' She writes that the instinct to collect is motivated by the idea that 'it is possible to control and possess vastness and variousness, through the possession of representative objects.'[10] Travel literature miniaturizes the extraordinary variety of the world, distilling its complexity into stories that serve as souvenirs. In her more recent short book, *A Global Middle Ages*, Heng terms medieval European travel literature 'a precursor…of the wonder-boxes, and cabinets of curiosity of the early-modern era and, beyond that, of the modern museum.'[11] On the one hand, the marvels of *Mandeville's Travels* or of the cabinet of curiosity, are showcased as exotically weird, to be wondered at – but on the other, they are also presented in knowable form, universalised, often seen through a Christianising lens in the *Travels* as the European reader is encouraged to believe they can control, comprehend, and order the variousness of the world.

Thinking about collection in these terms chimes with Susan Stewart's comment about collections as 'reframing' objects in order to manipulate their context. She adds that 'the point of the collection is forgetting.'[12] Removed from their place of origin, collected objects accumulate different meanings – meanings determined by what they are collected with, what stories they become part of within their case, or within their room in the museum. This kind of collection is very different from Benjamin's books, which continue to bear the traces of their pasts in them. That dichotomy between forgetting and remembering, sterility and generation, death and life, is at the heart of different ways of collecting.

We are here today at the home of one of the world's great collections, a collection that has at its heart an extraordinary set of books and manuscripts, the most glorious of which is the Ellesmere Chaucer, a fetishised object in Chaucer studies. I turn now to the story of the Ellesmere Chaucer – how it was collected and by whom from the early fifteenth century to

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Vincent W.J. van Gerven Oei (eds.), *Disturbing Times: Medieval Pasts, Reimagined Futures* (Punctum Books, 2020), 73-106, 94.

[10] Geraldine Heng, *Empire of Magic: Medieval Romance and the Politics of Cultural Fantasy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 248.

[11] Geraldine Heng, *The Global Middle Ages: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 30

[12] Stewart, *On Longing*, 151, 152.

the early twentieth. I want to think about what we might be forgetting when we remember its history.

**Part 2: Collecting the Ellesmere Chaucer**

The Ellesmere Chaucer is now the jewel in the crown of the manuscript collection here at the Huntingdon. In the more than six centuries since it was copied, it has been part of other collections and has lived with different books. What do we know about its provenance and the collections it moved through?

It was copied very shortly after Chaucer's death, by a scribe who also copied Hengwrt and a range of other English texts, and it was decorated by limners who also worked on Bodleian MS Hatton 4, a large psalter and Book of Hours made for the choir of a London church.[13] Perhaps the Ellesmere Chaucer was commissioned by Thomas Chaucer, or someone else very close to the poet.[14] The signatures and poems on the fly-leaves reveal that the book was for a long time on the borders of Essex and Suffolk. The poem, Per Rotheley, on its fly leaves, includes a panegyric to the de Vere earls of Oxford, who were based at Castle Hedingham in Essex, and who owned other books and supported drama too. It may have been available to the Pastons; it was certainly owned by Sir Robert Drury (1455-1536), a London barrister and Commons Speaker, whose estate was at Hawstead, just a few miles from the de Vere base at Castle Hedingham and who inherited other items from de Vere. The Drury family also owned other books, including a *Siege of Thebes* and other writings by Lydgate and Hoccleve. The names of many of the Drury family are written on the flyleaves. The book was in the possession of Henry Payne, who then bequeathed it to Sir Giles Alington – a Drury descendent – and it then went to Roger, Lord North, who has signed poems on its flyleaves. North worked closely with Sir Thomas Egerton at court, and the book passed into Egerton's possession in around 1600. He was a great collector and was particularly interested in Chaucer. Egerton's son, John, was the first earl of Bridgewater, and

[13] For the debate about the scribe Adam Pinkhurst see Linne R. Mooney, 'Chaucer's Scribe,' *Speculum* 81, 2006, 97–138; Lawrence Warner, 'Scribes, Misattributed: Hoccleve and Pinkhurst.' *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, vol. 37, 2015, 55-100. For MS Hatton 4, see Ralph Hanna and A. S. G. Edwards, "Rotheley, the De Vere Circle, and the Ellesmere Chaucer," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 58/1 (1996): 11-35, 11–12.

[14] John M. Bowers, 'The House of Chaucer & Son: The Business of Lancastrian Canon-Formation,' *Medieval Perspectives* 6, 1991, pp. 135–43; Simon Horobin, 'Thomas Hoccleve: Chaucer's First Editor?' *The Chaucer Review* 50, no. 3-4 (2015), 228-50.

the book stayed in this family for hundreds of years. In 1803, the library went to the marquis of Stafford, whose son became the first earl of Ellesmere in 1846.[15] In 1917, the library, containing 8300 printed books including three Caxtons, all four Shakespeare folios, and 13,000 manuscripts, was sold to Henry Huntington for a million dollars, shipped over to New York, and then transported to California – where it has remained.[16]

In sum - this is a book that was owned by a series of important men – mainly aristocrats, but also gentry, and eventually an American industrialist. It was, in its early years, part of smaller collections of books that often included texts by Lydgate and Hoccleve, as well as by Chaucer. Eventually, it became part of a massive, prestigious collection that was private and fairly undisturbed for many years, before coming to its (perhaps final) home, where it is celebrated and showcased as part of world heritage – and of course now it also has an online presence as part of the Huntington's digital collection, allowing people access from all over the world.[17]

So, that's the official story.

I want now to explore an alternative history for Ellesmere. If Thomas Chaucer were involved in its origins, the most obvious person for him to pass it on to would be his daughter, Alice, herself a member of the nobility by the time Thomas died in 1434.[18] It is certain that Ellesmere was in 'close proximity' to MS Arundel 119, a manuscript made either for William de la Pole, duke of Suffolk or for his wife, Alice Chaucer, as Carol Meale has argued.[19] This is a

[15] See Hanna and Edwards, 'Rotheley, the De Vere Circle, and the Ellesmere Chaucer,' and Alfred David, 'The Ownership and Use of the Ellesmere Manuscript,' in Martin Stevens and Daniel Woodward (eds.), *The Ellesmere Chaucer: Essays in Interpretation* (San Marino, California: Huntington Library, 1995), 307-326.
[16] The letter from Henry Huntington to Sotheby's confirming the purchase is dated February 27th, 1917 (Henry Huntington's birthday). It is in the Huntington Library, HIA 31.1.1.42.3, and is also digitized and available online. https://hdl.huntington.org/digital/iiif/p15150coll8/442/full/full/0/default.jpg. See also the Huntington's online information about the Bridgewater Library and the Ellesmere Collection: https://researchguides.huntington.org/bridgewater.
[17] See also Robert O. Schad, "Henry Edwards Huntington: The Founder and the Library," *The Huntington Library Bulletin*, no. 1 (1931): 3–32, James Thorpe, "The Founder and His Library," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 32, no. 4 (1969): 291–308, and George Sherburn, "Huntington Library Collections." *The Huntington Library Bulletin*, no. 1 (1931): 33–106.
[18] For an overview of Alice's life see Rowena E. Archer, 'Chaucer [married names Phelip, Montagu, de la Pole], Alice, duchess of Suffolk (c. 1404–1475).' *In Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).
[19] See Hanna and Edwards, 'Rotheley, the De Vere Circle, and the Ellesmere Chaucer,' 16, and Carol M. Meale, 'Reading Women's Culture in Fifteenth-Century England: The Case of Alice Chaucer,' in Piero Boitani and Anna Torti (eds.), *Mediaevalitas: Reading the Middle Ages* (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 1996): 81–102.

manuscript of Lydgate's *Siege of Thebes*, and its decoration is very similar to Ellesmere's. Most importantly, a gloss that is unique to Elllesmere – 'id est sol in Ariete / Phoebe in ariete' – also appears in Arundel 119.[20] Arundel 119 was copied around 1430, probably around Bury St Edmund's. The same scribe also copied the *Confessio amantis*, the *South English Legendary*, and Walton's translation of the *Consolation of Philosophy*.[21] We know that Alice was a great book owner: her literary books included a *chanson de geste* concerning Charlemagne, Lydgate's translation of the *Pelerinage de la Vie Humaine*, Christine de Pizan's *Citee des Dames*, a saint's life, and a book of philosophy.[22] She commissioned Lydgate's *Virtues of the Mass*: St John's College Oxford MS 56 includes the dedication to her, in which Lydgate writes that he wrote the text 'ad rogatum dominae comitissae de suthefolcia' (at the invitation of his mistress the countess of Suffolk).[23] She took care of her books, having them repaired and moved to safe places, and she gave books to Oxford University.[24] It is likely that she either owned or at the least encountered the Ellesmere Chaucer, the most lavish homage to her grandfather's poems, and a book that certainly was physically near books that she owned, and that was circulating in East Anglia, where the Suffolks had their principal home, Wingfield, which was also where Alice kept many books (although Alice preferred Ewelme and moved some of her books there from Wingfield in 1466).[25] It would be fairly surprising, given Alice's interests and family background, if she didn't know the Ellesmere Chaucer.

A little later, in the sixteenth century, we see women *physically* engaging with the Ellesmere Chaucer – writing in it. There are various signatures – 'Margery,' 'Margery saynt John,' as well as 'domina Jernegan.' At one point someone wrote 'Margery saynt john is a shrew.'[26] These are women linked to the Drury and Waldegrave families, women who were either

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[20] Hanna and Edwards, 'Rotheley, the De Vere Circle, and the Ellesmere Chaucer,' 17.
[21] See Jeremy Griffiths, "Thomas Hyngham, Monk of Bury and the Macro Plays Manuscript," *English Manuscript Studies* 5 (1995): 214-19.
[22] For a list of Alice's manuscripts, see Bodleian Library, Ewelme Muniments A.VII.47 (3); see also Historical Manuscripts Commission, 8th Report, Appendix I, i:629a. For further discussion see Karen K. Jambeck, 'The Library of Alice Chaucer,' *Profane Arts* 7:2 (1998): 106–135, and Carol M. Meale, '"alle the bokes that I have of latyn, englisch, and frensch": Laywomen and Their Books in Late Medieval England,' in Carol M. Meale (ed.), *Women and Literature in Britain, 1150–1500*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 128-158.
[23] Oxford, St John's College, MS 56.
[24] John Goodall, *God's House at Ewelme: Life, Devotion and Architecture in a Fifteenth-century Almshouse* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), 11–12; H. Anstey (ed.), *Epistolae Academicae Oxon*, 2 vols., OHS 35–36 (Oxford: Oxford Historical Society, 1898), 1:303, 326, 2:369–370.
[25] Meale, 'Reading Women's Culture,' 81–101; Jambeck, 'Library of Alice Chaucer,' 133–134.
[26] David, 'Ownership and Use,' 314.

reading or listening to the *Canterbury Tales* – or using it to practice their handwriting and assert their own place in history by making their marks alongside their male relatives.

In the long centuries in which the Ellesmere was fairly untouched, we don't know whether anyone was engaging much with it – women or men. But there is reason to believe that its journey across the Atlantic, and then across the US, to its home here in Pasadena, was driven by a woman, not a man.

I take you now to around 1850, and the birth – in either Alabama or Virginia – of Arabella Duval Yarrington.[27] We can't be sure when or where she was born, because she told people different things at different times, just one part of the way that she obscured her early life.[28] Her official story was that she married Mr Worsham before 1870, moved to New York, had a child, was widowed, and then began to care for a rich society woman. That doesn't seem to be the real story though and there is a mysterious lack of documentation, including no marriage certificate. Arabella's mother ran a boarding house in Richmond, Virginia, and her father was a machinist. When the forty eight year old married railroad pioneer Collis Huntington came to Richmond in 1868, with a plan to merge three railroads in Virginia, he met the teenage Arabella, perhaps because he stayed at her mother's boarding house, perhaps around the saloons and gambling parlours nearby. They started a relationship, and soon afterwards she turned up in New York, pregnant, with Mr Worsham, and calling herself Mrs Worsham – although he, in fact, had a wife named Annette back in Virginia. Mr Worsham ran gambling parlours and had had brushes with the law. Arabella gave birth to a son, Archer, and lived in a house in New York owned by Collis Huntington. Mr Worsham disappeared soon afterwards, and Arabella styled herself a widow, although Worsham was living back in Virginia with his wife and did not die until 1878. Meanwhile, Arabella was living

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[27] See Parke Rouse, "Belle Huntington, Her Men and Her Muse." *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 88, no. 4 (1980): 387–400.

[28] James T. Maher comments: 'Arabella Huntington is not so much forgotten as misremembered, when she is remembered at all. […] She protected herself from the press so adroitly that, despite the fact that she had been married to two of the best-known men of the era, and had herself been one of the richest Americans of history, no accurate obituary of her could be written when she died.' See James T. Maher, The Twilight of Splendour (Boston, 1975), 242. Robert R. Wark notes: 'The amount of reliable documentary evidence about Mrs Huntington is extraordinarily meager. […] The archive of Huntington papers at the Huntington Library contains only a few scattered references to Arabella. No major cache of her personal papers has yet been located.' Robert R. Wark, 'Arabella Huntington and the Beginnings of the Art Collection,' *Huntington Library Quarterly* 32:4 (August, 1969), 309-331, 309, n.1.

in New York.[29] Arabella sometimes travelled with Collis – she is mentioned in a society column of the Austin Statesman, Texas in this fashion 'Mrs Worsham is a niece of Collis P. Huntington.'[30] After Elizabeth, Collis's wife, died in 1883, Collis married Arabella and adopted Archer, whom he always treated as his son – probably because he was his son. Arabella, as soon as she had money, had embraced art, becoming a great collector of European paintings, jewellery, antiques, and other decorative arts, and she also focused on introducing Archer to the canon of English literature.[31] When Collis died in 1900, he left enormous fortunes to Arabella, to Archer, and to his nephew, Henry Huntington. Arabella now embarked on what has been called an 'incredible spending spree that lasted for the better part of a decade,' and established her as 'one of the most important art collectors of her generation.'[32] In a gossipy chapter of his memoir, the art dealer James Duveen calls her 'an extraordinary woman,' and 'a "twenty million widow,"' full of 'pride and obstinacy,' emphasizing that she had been the 'unofficial wife' of Collis for a long time before they married, that she was ten years older than her second husband, and that some said she had once been a cook.[33]

For most of his life, Henry Huntington was not interested in art or collecting. Between 1901 and 1906, he spent about three thousand dollars on art. Then, in 1906, he divorced his wife, started spending a lot of time with his aunt, Arabella, and, in the next two years, spent two million dollars on art. During this time, there is evidence of a close association between Henry and Arabella, including letters and telegrams in which Arabella urges Henry to purchase various works of art.[34] While the two were closely connected, they did not marry until 1913, when they were both about 63. (This was somewhat scandalous and would have been illegal under British law until the 1931 marriage act.) They continued to collect European art and books avidly for the rest of their lives.

There is every reason to believe, then, that it was Arabella's tastes, influence, and fascination with collecting that inspired her husband – that she was the force behind the Huntington

[29] Rouse, 'Belle Huntington,' 390-394.
[30] See Maher, *Twilight of Splendour*, 260.
[31] See James Henry Duveen, Secrets of an Art Dealer (New York,: Pohl Press, 1938), 160-171, Arthur Upham Pope, Last of the Titans, (New York, 1956), 4.
[32] Wark, 'Arabella Huntington,' 319.
[33] Duveen, *Secrets of an Art Dealer*, 160, 167, 166, 171
[34] Wark, 'Arabella Huntington,' 322.

collection, and the amassing of the art and books that has left such an extraordinary legacy. But Arabella's story also reminds us of other aspects of the history of collections. There is always an official story – in this case, a book by the white male founder of the canon, owned by English earls, was bought by an American railroad magnate, and preserved for posterity by these mighty men. And then there is the shadow story, which is the real story – the story of the women who get somewhat elided from the record. Many books that were chosen by and read by women are assumed to have been owned and read by their husbands and fathers – we see that time and again across the centuries.

Furthermore, the really interesting thing about Arabella is that she may well have intervened in the historical narrative to try to craft her own legacy in a way that few women have had the power to do. Collis's biographer wrote, 'Efforts to discover information about her background lead to such blank walls as to leave one wondering whether she systematically has eliminated any traces of her youth.'[35] Frustrating as this is, when so often the narrative is controlled by the Collis Huntingtons of the world, it is a little pleasing to think of the machinist's daughter managing her own history and reputation. Most significant to me, though, is the fact that it was a woman from lowly origins, that crafted this collection. This is the most dramatic part of the Ellesmere's shadow history. Women such as Alice Chaucer and Arabella Huntington – clever women who, like the Wife of Bath, were multiply married, did well from inheritance, and knew how to assert themselves in a man's world – were sometimes the collectors, not the collected. We are much more used to seeing women collected in books of wicked wives or legends of good women but if we peer into the shadows of history we also find them shaping and preserving books and culture.

**Part 3: Chaucer as a Collector**

I am going to move now from thinking about how and by whom Chaucer was collected, to considering Chaucer as a collector. Chaucer was fascinated by collecting – its opportunities and its limits. Across his work we see modelled different kinds of collectors and different kinds of collections. The Pardoner collects fake relics; the Parson collects sins; the Clerk collects books; the Canon's Yeoman collects alchemical terms; the Wife of Bath collects husbands.

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[35] David Lavender, *The Great Persuader* (Garden City: New York, 1970), 343.

One of the key decisions that a collector or a curator makes is whether they are collecting things that are the same, or things that are different. Susan Stewart draws a contrast between the hoarder and the hobbyist. She argues that the hoarder is motivated by a 'refusal of differentiation.'[36] This is the collector who keeps everything, without discrimination, aiming at a total retention. The hobbyist, on the other hand, accepts differentiation, selects, compares, does not think that everything is of equal value, nor that she can accumulate everything. Chaucer shows us both kinds of collector.

His most ostentatious example of a failed collector is the Monk – and I want to acknowledge the brilliant article by Jahan Ramazani and chapter by Aranye Fradenburg about the Monk's collecting.[37] The Monk announces to his audience, 'tragedies wol I telle, / Of whiche I have an hundred in my celle' ('Prologue of the Monk's Tale,' 1972-1972). These tragedies – stored in the cell in which he lives and the cell of his brain – are all essentially the same, he believes – stories 'of hym that stood in greet prosperitee, / And is yfallen out of heigh degree / Into myserie, and endeth wrecchedly' (1975-1977). If there is any doubt he repeats, fifteen lines later that tragedy is about 'The harm of hem that stoode in heigh degree / And fillen so that ther nas no remedie / To brynge hem out of hir adversitee' ('The Monk's Tale,' 1992-1994). To the Monk, the key point about these stories is that they follow the same formula, and will be told in the same metre. The plot will be retold over and over again. And, as other critics have pointed out, the language that he uses is also deeply repetitive. The Monk is a miser: he loves gold, he keeps his stories, he is uninterested in nuance or difference – this is a collector uninterested in differentiation. He simply wants to accumulate, to retain. He also acknowledges his lack of interest in ordering, in discriminating, when he tells us that he will not tell stories 'by ordre,' and instead will list them 'as it now comth unto my remembraunce' ('Prologue of the Monk's Tale,' 1985, 1989).

[36] Stewart, *On Longing*, 154.
[37] Jahan Ramazani, "Chaucer's Monk: The Poetics of Abbreviation, Aggression, and Tragedy." *The Chaucer Review* 27, no. 3 (1993): 260–76; L.O. Aranye Fradenburg, *Sacrifice Your Love: Psychoanalysis, Historicism, Chaucer* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 113-154.

Of course, he fails as a storyteller. No one wants to hear the same predictable story over and over again. In the same way, the project of the *Legend of Good Women* fails.[38] Alceste tells the Chaucer avatar in the *Prologue* that he must spend the rest of his life, year by year, 'In making of a glorious legend / Of goode wymmen, maydenes and wyves, / That weren trewe in loving al hire lyves; / And telle of false men that hem bytraien' (F 483-6). The project only gets worse – the Chaucer figure is told to get his book about Alceste out of his cheste (510) and write about her, as well as all the other women there, who will also be found in his collection of books (556). The God of Love announces that there are twenty thousand possible subjects there. Most tellingly, Love then tells the author not to go into detail, not to think about language or subtlety: he must 'Sey shortly, or he shal to longe dwelle' (577). The point is to repeat the plot – good woman, true in loving, betrayed by man – and move on. Needless to say, this is another failed collection.[39]

In fact, the stories of the 'Monk's Tale' are emphatically not all the same, and nor are the stories of the *Legend of Good Women*. The collector, in the case of the 'Monk's Tale,' and the patron, in the case of the *Legend of Good Women*, seek to flatten difference, to make the collections homogenous. Any reader can see that the story of Lucifer is quite different from that of Julius Caesar, that Cleopatra and Ariadne follow very different plot lines. The point is not that the material is the same but that these stories are being forced into a collection that pretends they are the same, that they are taken out of their context and placed into a predetermined pattern – tragedy, good women.

I'm going to take a longer example now, from the 'Knight's Tale,' to explore how Chaucer plays with the idea of similarity, differentiation, and indeed aggression in thinking about collection and taxonomy. This section comes towards the end of the tale, and describes Arcite's funeral, specifically the building of his funeral pyre – and I want to acknowledge here the work done by ecocritics such as Gillian Rudd on this passage:[40]

[38] For discussion of the 'Monk's Tale' and the *Legend of Good Women* as staged failed tale collections see Marion Turner, 'Form,' in Frank Grady (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Canterbury Tales* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 1-20, 5-7.

[39] See also Carolyn Dinshaw, *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press), 1989, 67–87; Nicola McDonald, "Chaucer's Legend of Good Women, Ladies at Court, and the Female Reader," *The Chaucer Review* 35:1 (2000): 22–42, 31; Sheila Delany, *The Naked Text: Chaucer's Legend of Good Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 139–50.

[40] Gillian Rudd, *Greenery: Ecocritical Readings of Late Medieval English Literature* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007).

But how the fyr was maked upon highte,
Ne eek the names that the trees highte,
As, ook, firre, birch, aspe, alder, holm, popeler,
Wylugh, elm, plane, assh, box, chasteyn, lynde, laurer,
Mapul, thorn, bech, hasel, ew, whippeltree -
How they weren fild shal nat be toold for me,
Ne how the goddes ronnen up and doun
Disherited of hir habitacioun,
In whiche they woneden in reste and pees,
Nymphes, Fawnes, and Amadrides;
Ne how the beestes and the briddes alle
Fledden for fere, whan the wode was falle;
Ne how the ground agast was of the light,
That was nat wont to seen the sonne bright;
Ne how the fyr was couched first with stree,
And thanne with drye stokkes cloven a thre,
And thanne with grene wode and spicerye,
And thanne with clooth of gold and with perrye,
And gerlandes hangynge with ful many a flour,
The mirre, th'encens, with al so greet odour;
Ne how Arcite lay among al this,
Ne what richesse aboute his body is,
Ne how that Emelye, as was the gyse,
Putte in the fyr of funeral servyse;
Ne how she swowned whan men made the fyr,
Ne what she spak, ne what was hir desir;
Ne what jeweles men in the fyre caste,
Whan that the fyr was greet and brente faste;
Ne how somme caste hir sheeld, and somme hir spere,
And of hire vestimentz whiche that they were,
And coppes fulle of wyn, and milk, and blood,
Into the fyr, that brente as it were wood,
Ne how the Grekes, with an huge route,
Thries riden al the fyr aboute,
Upon the left hand with a loud shoutynge,
And thries with hir speres claterynge,
And thries how the ladyes gonne crye,
And how that lad was homward Emelye;
Ne how Arcite is brent to asshen colde,
Ne how that lyche-wake was yholde
Al thilke nyght, ne how the Grekes pleye
The wake-pleyes ne kepe I nat to seye,
Who wrastleth best naked, with oille enoynt,
Ne who that baar hym best in no disjoynt;
I wol nat tellen eek, how that they goon
Hoom til Atthenes, whan the pley is doon;

But shortly to the point thanne wol I wende,
And maken of my longe tale an ende.
('The Knight's Tale,' 2919-2966)

Chaucer shows us the forest as a collection of different trees, and shows us that *Theseus* does not care about the variety of these trees. For Theseus, they are a resource, to be used indiscriminately to make an impressive funeral pyre. The varying properties of the trees do not matter to him – he wants to cut them down and deploy them for something else. Theseus indeed makes a habit of mindless, deadening collecting – he collects piles of bodies; he repeats the same mistakes over and over again; his collecting of the trees removes their life and their agency. This is collecting as forgetting; as ignoring the specific beauty and value of the individual trees. And this is a passage of formal sameness – of repetition, especially in the long passages of *occupatio* – 'Ne how, ne how,' 'and thanne, and thanne,' 'ne what, ne what,' 'And thries, And thries.'

But Chaucer *does* take pains to show us the specifics – these trees are named and we are told of the displaced gods, desperately running around, no longer able to live in peace. As well as the nymphs, fawns, and amadryads, the beasts, the birds, and the ground itself are all under attack – 'agast' in the face of the light. While collecting is often thought of as bringing order to chaos – as discussed in the first section of this talk – that is the opposite of what Theseus is doing. Theseus wades in to an ordered environment, in which the trees are part of a complex ecosystem, a natural collection, and *he* brings chaos – the 'rest and peace' that the gods had lived in becomes a desperate exodus and fiery destruction. Nature had made a collection that worked well; man destroys it. Theseus's lack of interest in the names of the trees reveals not only his ignoring of differentiation but also his destructive inhumanity – unlike Adam, who gave names to the things of the world, Theseus wants only to forget those names, to wreak destruction. The episode is part of the broader theme across the tale of Theseus wanting to control the world, to order what he perceives as chaos

– but in fact only succeeding in creating more chaos, more violence, more death.[41] The refusal to acknowledge difference and nuance is depicted as a horrific act of ecocide.

Across his *oeuvre*, Chaucer sets collections that purport to be collections of sameness such as the 'Monk's Tale' or the *Legend of Good Women against* the Canterbury Tales. The *Tales* is a collection based on variety – of tellers, or voices, above all of perspectives – and also of genres and forms. It is really easy to forget how radical that was: Gower's tale collection was all in the same voice; Boccaccio's varied the voices, but they were all tellers from the same social class, and they all spoke in the same prose form. The 'Monk's Tale' and the *Legend of Good Women* are both told in one voice and in one form. Aesthetically and politically, the *Canterbury Tales* focuses on juxtaposition and variety of voice. The point of this collection is to collect things that are diverse.[42]

Chaucer, as a collector, was also a master at demonstrating the infinite possibilities for variety within things that seem to be the same. We can see this in what he does with stanza form. For example, his experiments with stanza form resulted in his creation of the rhyme royal stanza, an exceptionally rich formal innovation. Rhyme royal creates an oscillation that freezes time for us, seems to progress, pulls us back again, and often ends in stasis, before starting again - at times in a recursive return. We think we have moved on to the closure of the final couplet, but the new stanza pulls us back to stasis and uncertainty. Each stanza is like another wave on the beach, paralleling each other rather than progressing. But they are not all the same. The way Chaucer uses this stanza form, sometimes refusing to end stop it, sometimes returning to earlier rhyme patterns, sometimes eschewing all pauses, sometimes slowing time down, sometimes speeding it up, is an extraordinary example of his virtuosic abilities. If you look at any collection of stanzas from *Troilus and Criseyde*, you will see this

[41] For the chaos of the tale and Theseus's inability to impose order, see David Aers, 'Imagination, Order and Ideology: The Knight's Tale,' in *Chaucer, Langland, and the Creative Imagination* (London: Routledge, 1980), 175-195. See also Elizabeth Salter, *Chaucer: The Knight's Tale and the Clerk's Tale* (London: Edward Arnold, 1962) and Joshua R. Eyler and John P. Sexton. "Once More to the Grove: A Note on Symbolic Space in the 'Knight's Tale.'" *The Chaucer Review* 40, no. 4 (2006): 433–39. For a contrary view on order in the tale see Charles Muscatine, *Chaucer and the French Tradition: A Study in Style and Meaning* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964), 175-190; see also V. A. Kolve, *Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative: The First Five Canterbury Tales* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1984), 85-157.

[42] For further discussion see Paul Strohm, *Social Chaucer* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1989), 144-182, and Marion Turner, *Chaucer: A European Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 392-409.

variety.[43] Here is a five-stanza section from Book I, 799-833. I'm going to talk briefly about one aspect of variety, the way that the stanzas seem to be divided up, as an example of how Chaucer embeds difference in his collections.

The first stanza here fairly clearly separates the back and forth from the couplet:

> `What may she demen other of thy deeth,
> If thou thus deye, and she not why it is,
> But that for fere is yolden up thy breeth,
> For Grekes han biseged us, y-wis?
> Lord, which a thank than shaltow han of this!
> Thus wol she seyn, and al the toun at ones,
> "The wrecche is deed, the devel have his bones!"

It is a five plus two stanza with the final couplet summarizing and seeming to close, the break marked with 'Thus'. The next stanza moves differently:

> `Thou mayst allone here wepe and crye and knele;
> But, love a woman that she woot it nought,
> And she wol quyte that thou shalt not fele;
> Unknowe, unkist, and lost that is un-sought.
> What! Many a man hath love ful dere y-bought
> Twenty winter that his lady wiste,
> That never yet his lady mouth he kiste.

It is a four plus three structure with a clear marker in the rhetorical tricolon and the endstop in the fourth line, the new sense unit beginning with the exclamatory 'what!' Of course, such divisions are always ambiguous, as they often work against the rhyme, the enjambement between 'bought' and 'twenty' preventing the couplet from being separated from the rest of the stanza. The next stanza begins recursively with another 'what' –

> `What? Shulde be therfor fallen in despeyr,
> Or be recreaunt for his owene tene,
> Or sleen him-self, al be his lady fayr?
> Nay, nay, but ever in oon be fresh and grene
> To serve and love his dere hertes quene,
> And thenke it is a guerdoun hir to serve

[43] For discussion of rhyme royal in *Troilus and Criseyde* see Barry Windeatt, *Oxford Guides to Chaucer: Troilus and Criseyde* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 354-359, David Wallace, 'Chaucer's Italian Inheritance' in Piero Boitani and Jill Mann (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Chaucer*, 2nd edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 36-57, and Mark Lambert, 'Telling the Story in *Troilus and Criseyde*', also in Boitani and Mann (eds.), *Cambridge Companion*, 78-92.

A thousand-fold more than he can deserve.'

That stanza is a three plus four pattern, the rhetorical question ending one unit before the emphatic ‘Nay, nay’ begins the second section. The next stanza, I’d suggest, is all one, overflowing unit, as we so often get when Troilus is thinking:

Of that word took hede Troilus,
And thoughte anoon what folye he was inne,
And how that sooth him seyde Pandarus,
That for to sleen him-self mighte he not winne,
But bothe doon unmanhod and a sinne,
And of his deeth his lady nought to wyte;
For of his wo, god woot, she knew ful lyte.

This is then followed by:

And with that thought he gan ful sore syke,
And seyde, `Allas! What is me best to do?'
To whom Pandare answered, `If thee lyke,
The best is that thou telle me thy wo;
And have my trouthe, but thou it finde so,
I be thy bote, or that it be ful longe,
To peces do me drawe, and sithen honge!'

In both sense and sentence the stanza is split into two plus five, with the first two lines given to Troilus and the rest to Pandarus.

There are different ways of thinking about these stanzas, and Chaucer also does other things with stanza division, including sometimes enjambing stanzas. My point here is that even when Chaucer sticks with one carefully patterned form, he shows us its infinite variety – a collection of seemingly identical stanzas is, for Chaucer, a collection of difference, a way to display the fact that poetry, like life, constantly changes and contains endless possibilities for differentiation. He is, above all, a poet of heterogeneity, of juxtaposition, of change.

**Part 4: Collecting Chaucer in 2023-2024**

So – how might one approach becoming a collector of Chaucer today? This was the question that I thought a great deal about when I first considered, a few years ago, proposing to the Bodleian Library in Oxford that I curate a Chaucer exhibition. This exhibition, *Chaucer Here*

*and Now*, was opened in early December 2023 by the poet Ben Okri, and it closed on April 28, 2024. This was my first experience curating an exhibition and, as far as I know, it is the only major Chaucer exhibition to have been mounted in my lifetime. The pressure was on.

The last major exhibition of Chaucer of which I am aware occurred in 1900, at the British Museum, to commemorate the quincentenary of Chaucer's death. *The Observer* said that it was 'an interesting if hardly splendid or complete memorial exhibition,' adding that it was 'surprising' that 'so little has been done to commemorate one who was, in a sense, the greatest Englishman of the fourteenth century.'[44] I didn't want my own exhibition to garner these kinds of comments. The dilemma I was wrestling with was how to make my exhibition alive, life-giving, generative – not memorializing, fixing, sterile.

The *Chaucer Here and Now* exhibition was not an exhibition about Chaucer's life and times – it was really about his readers across time, from 1400 to the present day. The broad argument of the exhibition was that each generation creates their own Chaucer and reads his work in innovative and interventionist ways.[45] Rather than trying to show an authentic Chaucer, the exhibition demonstrated that the earliest manuscripts are wildly varying, and that scribes had to make decisions about what to do with the disordered papers that he left. As you went into the exhibition, you could move around the room roughly chronologically. If you did that, you started with three cases of manuscripts, including the Hengwrt *Canterbury Tales*, the Corpus *Troilus* with its astonishing frontispiece, and Bodleian Fairfax 16 with its gorgeous illumination.[46] There were also several other manuscripts demonstrating different aspects of the early reception of Chaucer's texts: Scottish Chaucer, the mansplaining scribes who sought to attack the Wife of Bath in a fifteenth-century manuscript; and the huge diversity of approaches to the unfinished 'Cook's Tale' in the fifteenth-century – one manuscript in which the *Tale of Gamelyn* was inserted, another where the tale was finished off in a different metre and also censored.[47]

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[44] *The Observer*, Sunday 21st October, 1900, p. 4

[45] See the accompanying book, Marion Turner (ed.), *Chaucer Here and Now* (Oxford: Bodleian Publishing, 2023).

[46] Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, Peniarth MS 392D, Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS 61; Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Fairfax 16.

[47] For Scottish Chaucer, see Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Arch Selden B. 24; see also Julia Boffey and A.S.G Edwards, 'Bodleian MS Arch. Selden. B. 24 and the 'Scotticization' of Middle English Verse,' in Thomas A. Prendergast and Barbara Kline, *Rewriting Chaucer: culture, authority, and the idea of the authentic text, 1400-1602*, (Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1999), 166-185, and T. S. Miller, 'Chaucer Abroad, Chaucer at Home:

The next section of the exhibition was a case of early printed books – both editions of William Caxton's *Canterbury Tales*, as well as editions published by Richard Pynson, William Thynne, and Thomas Speght.[48] It told the story of how Chaucer became seen as the Father of English Literature, an Author with a capital A: this was visually emphasised by oversized graphics of the outline of 'Father Chaucer' in vivid colours, looming behind the books [FIGURE 1].[49] The next chronological case moved to translation and adaptation themed through the Wife of Bath – John Dryden, Alexander Pope, John Gay; the Wanton Wife of Bath ballads [FIGURE 2].[50] It showed Chaucer moving to the continent through Voltaire's 1763 translation of Dryden and the musical, *La Fée Urgèle* (1765), inspired by Voltaire's conte.[51] In the long eighteenth century writers heavily censored and selected the Chaucer that they wanted. 'Victorian Chaucer' showcased beautiful, idealised medievalism, through the Kelmscott Chaucer and other gorgeous images of an impossible medieval England.[52] This case also focused on children's Chaucers of which there were very many in the nineteenth

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MS Arch. Selden B. 24 as the 'Scottish Ellesmere.'' *The Chaucer Review*, vol. 47, no. 1 (2012), 25–47. For the 'mansplaining scribes,' see London, British Library, Additional MS 5140 and London British Library Egerton MS. 2864; see also my discussion in Marion Turner, *The Wife of Bath: A Biography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2023), 147-153 and Susan Schibanoff, 'The New Reader and Female Textuality in Two Early Commentaries on Chaucer,' Studies in the Age of Chaucer 10 (1988): 71-108. For the 'Cook's Tale 'see Oxford, Christ Church MS 152 and Oxford Bodleian Library MS Bodl. 686; see also John M. Bowers (ed.), *The Canterbury Tales: Fifteenth-Century Continuations and Additions*, *(*Kalamazoo, Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 1992). For the manuscripts in the exhibition and their context more generally see Marion Turner, 'Collaboration and Chaos: Chaucer's Early Readers,' in Turner (ed.), *Chaucer Here and Now*, 23-47. The key essay on the production of the Tales remains A. I. Doyle and M. B. Parkes, 'The Production of Copies of the *Canterbury Tales* and the *Confessio Amantis* in the Early Fifteenth Century,' in M. B. Parkes and Andrew G. Watson, eds., *Mediaeval Scribes, Manuscripts and Libraries: Essays Presented to N. R. Ker*, (Aldershot, Scolar Press, 1978), 163–203.

[48] The Caxton books were Oxford, Merton College, 111.C.9, and Oxford, St John's College, A.2.5. Pynson's edition was Oxford, Bodleian Library, Douce 218, Thynne's Oxford, Bodleian Library, Asm. 1095, and Speght's Oxford, Bodleian Library, A 2.5 Art. Seld.

[49] See Jeff Espie and Alexandra Gillespie, 'Authorizing the Canon: Chaucer in the World of Print,' in Turner (ed.), *Chaucer Here and Now*, 49-71; see also Seth Lerer, *Chaucer and His Readers: Imagining the Author in Late Medieval England*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 147—75, Alexandra Gillespie, *Print Culture and the Medieval Author: Chaucer, Lydgate, and their Books, 1473—1557*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), and Megan Cook, *The Poet and the Antiquaries: Chaucerian Scholarship and the Rise of Literary History, 1532—1635* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019). For essays on editing Chaucer across time see Paul G. Ruggiers, ed., *Editing Chaucer: The Great Tradition* (Norman OK: Pilgrim, 1984).

[50] See Adam Rounce, 'Here is God's Plenty,' in Turner (ed.), *Chaucer Here and Now*, 73-95. For discussion of Chaucer in the eighteenth century see also Tom Mason and David Hopkins, *Chaucer in the Eighteenth Century: The Father of English Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022) and William L. Alderson and Arnold C. Henderson, *Chaucer and Augustan Scholarship* (Berkeley CA: Univ. of Calif. Press, 1970). For the Wanton Wife ballad tradition see Betsy Bowden, *The Wife of Bath in Afterlife*, (Bethlehem PA: Lehigh University Press, 2017) and Turner, *Wife of Bath*, 154-159.

[51] Voltaire, *Contes de Monsieur de Voltaire ou de Guillaume Vadé* (1764).

[52] See David Matthews, 'Empire, Education, and Englishness: Domesticating Chaucer,' in Turner (ed.), *Chaucer Here and Now*, 97-119.

century – these collections never included the fabliaux but tended to focus on tales such as the Knight's, Clerk's, Man of Law's, and Nun's Priest's.[53] I was particularly indebted to the doctoral work of Lucy Fleming in putting that section together.[54] While Chaucer moved into the nursery, to be read by mothers to their sons, he was also sent out into the world as a representative of Englishness in the empire, and other nineteenth-century editions reveal comments about Chaucer as a suitable poet for both hemispheres, for example.[55] And this was also the era of heavy editing of Chaucer as English became a university subject.[56] Moving on chronologically, the case about Chaucer in the twentieth and twenty-first century had two principal foci: first, Chaucer in multiple media – this included film posters and DVDs, but also tarot cards, a puppet theatre, an intricate pop-up book, soap. Secondly, I showcased the recent re-imagining of Chaucer as a poet of diaspora and refugees, through the *Refugee Tales* project, as well as work by Jean Binta Breeze, Patience Agbabi, Marilyn Nelson, and Zadie Smith, among others.[57]

This chronological story was not, however, the only story I wanted to tell. Piercing that chronological narrative was a story about multilingualism, a narrative that counters the Father of English idea.[58] In the centre of the room was a case that you could approach from

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[53] See also David Matthews, 'Infantilizing the Father: Chaucer Translations and Moral Regulation,' *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 22 (2000), 93–114 and Velma Bourgeois Richmond, *Chaucer and Children's Literature: Retellings from the Victorian and Edwardian Eras*, (Jefferson: McFarland, 2004).

[54] Lucy Fleming, *Towards a poetics of sexuality in retellings of Chaucer and Shakespeare for young readers 1806-2020* (University of Oxford, doctoral dissertation, 2023).

[55] Charles Cowden Clarke, *The Riches of Chaucer: in which his impurities have been expunged; his spelling modernised; his rhythm accentuated; and his obsolete terms explained*, 2nd edition (London: Lockwood and Company, 1870), xi.

[56] See D.J. Palmer, *The Rise of English Studies: An Account of the Study of the English Language and Literature from its Origins to the Making of the Oxford English School* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965).

[57] See Marion Turner, 'Chaucer on Film and Television,' and 'Chaucer in the Twenty-First Century,' in Turner (ed.), *Chaucer Here and Now*, 165-181, 183-201. For Chaucer on screen see also Kathleen Coyne Kelly and Tison Pugh (eds.), *Chaucer on Screen: Absence, Presence, and Adapting the Canterbury Tales (*Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2013), Kathleen Forni, *Chaucerian Afterlife: Adaptations in Recent Popular Culture*, (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company: 2013) chapter 3, and Steve Ellis, *Chaucer at Large* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 121-140. For discussions of recent adaptations, especially diasporic ones, see Helen Barr, 'Stories of the New Geography: The Refugee Tales,' *Journal of Medieval Worlds* (March 2019), 1 (1), 79–106, David Wallace, 'New Chaucer Topographies' *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 29 (2007), 3-19; Jonathan Hsy and Candace Barrington, 'Queer Time, Queer Forms: Noir Medievalism and Patience Agbabi's *Telling Tales*,' in David Hadbawnik (ed.), *Postmodern Poetry and Queer Medievalisms: Time Mechanics* (Berlin, De Gruyter, 2022), 159-177, David Hadbawnik, 'Speak Like a Child: Caroline Bergvall's Medievalist Trilogy,' in Hadbawnik (ed.), *Postmodern Poetry and Queer Medievalisms*, 179-204, and Turner, *Wife of Bath*, 227-246.

[58] See Jonathan Hsy, 'Chaucerian Multilingualism Past and Present,' in Turner (ed.), *Chaucer Here and Now*, 143-163. See also David Wallace, *Chaucerian Polity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997) and Marion Turner, *Chaucer: A European Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019).

all sides, about medieval multilingualism. It included manuscripts of texts by Dante and Boccaccio that were central to Chaucer's imagination, as well as multiple Chaucer manuscripts open at parts of his texts that display his multilingualism – the reference to the song made in France in the *Parliament of Fowls*, a copy of the *Treatise on the Astrolabe*, the Flemish proverb in the 'Cook's Tale'. This case faced a case about modern multilingualism [FIGURE 3]. It included versions of Chaucer in many languages – including Korean, Ukrainian, Farsi, Brazilian Portuguese, German, Esperanto, Hebrew, French, Japanese, Russian, Mandarin, and Latin – special thanks to Candace Barrington and Jonathan Hsy for their advice and help.[59] The idea was that these two cases together demonstrated that the recent explosion of translations of Chaucer all over the world was deeply appropriate to Chaucer's own multilingual background and his intensive reading in works in many languages and from many cultures. Standing in the centre of the room, one could see behind the modern multilingual case the case about twenty-first century Chaucer with its focus on refugees and diaspora. And on another wall, at the back of the room, was a screen, which flashed up the opening couplet of the *Canterbury Tales* in many different languages, changing every few seconds [FIGURE 2]. I was trying to let multilingualism and the challenge to the idea of Chaucer as a narrowly national poet breathe through the whole exhibition space.

The other part of the exhibition that did not fit into chronology was a long case along the back wall of the exhibition, under the screen that I just mentioned. This was a case about women reading and interacting with Chaucer across time.[60] I thought a great deal about whether or not to include a case themed in this way – I'm always anxious about silo-ing women into one section There were indeed female writers in some other cases too, but in the end it did seem important specifically to focus on women, all the more so as many of the visitors to the exhibition would be people who were not medieval experts and who might have very different expectations about women's role. The centre of the case emphasised that women have always read – it included, for instance, images of women reading in medieval manuscripts and a manuscript of the *Prologue to the Legend of Good Women* with

[59] For discussion of the global Chaucer project see Candace Barrington and Jonathan Hsy, 'Global Chaucers,' in *Medieval Afterlives in Contemporary* Culture, ed. Gail Ashton (Bloomsbury, 2015), 147-56, and Candace Barrington and Jonathan Hsy, 'Editors' Introduction: Chaucer's Global Orbits and Global Communities,' *Literature Compass* 15.6 (June 2018), 1-12.
[60] See Marion Turner, 'Women Reading Chaucer,' in Turner (ed.), *Chaucer Here and Now*, 121-141.

Chaucer directing the text to the queen, as well as a birthing charm.[61] To the right, was a section about women illustrating Chaucer, from Lady Diana Beauclerk in the late eighteenth century through Lucia Joyce, to modern children's illustrators and cartoonists.[62] To the left, was a section about women studying and writing in response to Chaucer, including nineteenth-century responses by Maria Edgeworth and Eleanora Hervey, female scholars such as Edith Rickert, Mary Hamel, Clair Olson, Carolyn Dinshaw, Holly Crocker, and Carissa Harris, contemporary poets including Caroline Bergvall and Lavinia Greenlaw, and some of my own current graduate students, pictured with their *Riverside Chaucers* or their Chaucer tattoos.[63] This was part of the exhibition that especially celebrated Chaucer now – the students that at that very moment were bringing Chaucer to new life.

That sense of collecting Chaucer as something that was ongoing, that was not finished, was a crucial part of the exhibition. One wall in the exhibition functioned as a screen on which every eight minutes we projected a one-minute modern monologue of an actor playing the part of one of the pilgrims [FIGURE 4]. As well as the quotations from current students, the exhibition included new work by puppet artist Sigi Koerner as well as cartoonist Kristen Haas Curtis. Outside the exhibition room, in the transept, Kristen's whole-wall graphic of the route to Canterbury changed every day as visitors made puppets and cartoon pilgrims to add to the wall, so it ended up as an extraordinarily creative testament to visitors' own re-creation of Chaucer now. Workshops, school visits, and creative events with theatre companies and poets all contributed to the sense that everyone coming to the exhibition could play a part in interpreting and recreating Chaucer, just as the earliest scribes had done.

Putting on an exhibition at the Bodleian takes many years – I wrote the initial proposal several years before the exhibition opened, as they timetable their spaces well in advance. The initial proposal came from me alone. But as time went on, more and more it was clear

[61] On reading at Anne of Bohemia's court and the context for the Prologue to the Legend of Good Women see Nicola McDonald, 'Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*, Ladies at Court and the Female Reader,' *Chaucer Review* 35, no. 1, (2000), 22–42 and 'Games Medieval Women Play,' in *'The Legend of Good Women': Context and Reception*, edited by Carolyn P. Collette, (Cambridge, D.S. Brewer, 2006), 176-197.

[62] For Lady Diana Beauclerk, see Bowden, *The Wife of Bath in Afterlife*, 206; for Lucia Joyce see Turner, *The Wife of Bath*, 214.

[63] For nineteenth century women reading Chaucer see Clare Broome Saunders, *Women Writers and Nineteenth-Century Medievalism* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); for female medievalists see Jane Chance (ed.), *Women Medievalists and the Academy* (Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 2005), 127-145; see also Elizabeth Scala, 'Scandalous Assumptions: Edith Rickert and the Chicago Chaucer Project' *Medieval Feminist Forum* 30 (2000), 27-37.

that putting on an exhibition is a deeply collaborative enterprise. This was one of the great joys of the exhibition – working with theatre companies, poets, and artists; learning from the exhibitions team, the education team, the digital team, and the public engagement team at the Bodleian; liaising with many librarians both in Oxford and beyond. Above all, I loved seeing what the different technicians and craftspeople did – making the cradles for the books, designing the lighting, the sound, the graphics. And although the kind of technologies that we were using were often profoundly modern, there was also something very medieval about remembering the collaborative nature of cultural production. I took many different groups around the exhibition, and many of the audiences were fascinated to hear about scribal culture, about patrons and illuminators, about professional writers and editors, about glosses and interventions. Chaucer, of course, was not the solitary genius that William Morris and Edward Burne-Jones depicted in the images in the Kelmscott Chaucer.[64] He was part of a cultural and commercial world; he collaborated with others. And collecting Chaucer, displaying his work and his influence in this exhibition, was a collaborative endeavour.

Often when we think of collecting we might think of the individual with their coins or stamps or, in more grandiose terms, of a collection such as this one, the Huntington, named after one individual. But my experience of collecting Chaucer was quite different – it was something that was only possible as a joyful and diverse collaboration. And collecting Chaucer only made sense to me as something that was living – not a memorial or commemoration like the 1900 exhibition – but a celebration of creativity across time, into the very moment of the exhibition itself. To return to Walter Benjamin, with whom I began this talk, he writes that 'making the old world new again – is the deepest drive in the collector's desire.'[65] I don't have to tell this audience that Chaucer is many things. But for the study of Chaucer to survive, he has to be constantly renewed, he has to be of the present moment, an inspiration for people, especially young people today. Chaucer begins the *Canterbury Tales* with a sentence about inspiration itself, breathing life into the world and the word, in lines that are based closely on older texts placed in a new context, and voiced in a new poetic line. Collecting Chaucer should not be sterile – it should be, above all, generative, celebrating the past and the present, and pointing forward to the future.

[64] *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer Now Newly Imprinted*, ed. F.S. Ellis, Kelmscott Press (London, 1896).
[65] Benjamin, 'Unpacking my Library,' 163.