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Abstract

I am a medievalist who is interested in post-medieval afterlives of medieval texts. In this piece, I offer an imaginary conversation between myself and the texts that feature on a final-year Undergraduate Module that I teach in a UK university. The conversation is modelled on those that are regularly being had in the seminar rooms for this module, giving a sense of the various harmonies and counterpoints that arise when Chaucer is placed alongside adaptations of his work with a heterogeneous student cohort.

This piece arises out of a final-year undergraduate module, "ReMix: Chaucer in the Then and Now," that I have been teaching at Aberystwyth University since the 2018/19 academic year. Since the module is interested in fostering a creative-critical engagement with Chaucer and a group of recent adaptations of his works, the account that I offer here is not shaped like traditional literary criticism but rather in the form of a prologue-like preparatory commentary which is in turn followed by an imagined conversation between the various textual voices as they feature in the module. The focus of the conversation in particular is to illustrate how the module regards Chaucer's voice not as a kind of originary voice, safely cordoned off in the long-ago medieval past, but rather as an active element in a constellation that is very much present in the classroom. Chaucer, as a representative of the allegedly unfamiliar Middle Ages, burdened with alterity, is integrated into the present of the ReMix classroom, and re-familiarised via a process of exploring his works alongside recent informed-by-Chaucer texts. Before we can zoom in on the conversation, though, a few words on the departmental context of this module are in order.

My department is a small one in the UK Higher Education context, as far as the number of academic staff is concerned. There are currently fewer than 20 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff. Student numbers are healthy, with an average of 130 FTE in each of the three years of the UG degrees offered by the department. Starting with the late Middle Ages, our modules cover the full range of historical periods, with re-writing and adaptation being a thread that connects a number of modules across years one through three. Late medieval literature is offered as an option across all three years of the UG curriculum and features prominently in a compulsory core year-one module for all literary studies students. Finally, as an English *and* Creative Writing Department, we have a student body that is made up of both literary studies and creative writing students. As a deliberately facilitating approach to this heterogeneous student body, the department has, for a few years, been running modules that combine creative and critical practice, offering students, regardless of their degree scheme, a choice between creative and critical modes of assessment.

"ReMix: Chaucer in the Then and Now" arises out of the re-writing and adaptation strand in the department and slots into the creative/critical suite of modules. There is an open acknowledgement that by no means all students choosing the module will have studied medieval literature in previous years. For example, a creative writing student may have taken modules on re-writing, but would have been under no obligation to study medieval literature. With this in mind, the module pushes students to cover as much Chaucer-ground as possible during the first half of the ten-week teaching term. This focus on Chaucer is in turn split evenly between *The Canterbury Tales* and *Troilus and Criseyde*. Students can use translations for their preparation, but seminar discussion (and assessed writing) explores Chaucer's work in its original Middle English. Over the course of these first five seminars, there is an expectation that students build upon their prior learning, be it medieval or post-medieval, and seminar discussion is geared towards collaboratively creating a shared awareness and baseline of understanding for Chaucer's texts.

Having created this shared baseline, the module then switches to Lavinia Greenlaw's *A Double Sorrow* (2014), Patience Agbabi's *Telling Tales* (2014), and the first volume of *Refugee Tales* (2016), edited by David Herd and Anna Pincus. These are examples of recent adaptations of Chaucer, responses to

Chaucer, influenced-by-Chaucer texts, and the second half of the module specifically focuses on the ways in which these texts engage with those by Chaucer that students are familiar with at this point. The post-medieval texts are considered as textual products in their own right, but Chaucer and our seminar discussion of his writings are used as a constellation on the interpretive horizon for these more recent texts. At the end of the semester, students then produce either a creative piece accompanied by a critical commentary or a critical essay. Whichever option they choose, their assignments must engage with either *The Canterbury Tales* or *Troilus and Criseyde* in relation to one of the post-medieval texts on the module. There is, thus, a constant dialogue between the medieval and the post-medieval throughout the module, and students are encouraged to join that dialogue.

The remainder of this piece offers an account of the pedagogic and critical rationale(s) informing the module, followed by an extended dialogue between the different textual voices that share the intellectual space created by the module. The section on rationale(s) takes the form of a prologue to the conversation that is contained in the final section of this piece. The prologue embarks on the work of offering a summary account of the transformative education approach of the module, nestling it within the wider field of medievalism studies. The dialogue itself is moderated by the voice of the Host, representing my own role in the seminar room, but the emphasis is placed on the voices of the authors in order to enable the coming-into-being of a constellation of voices that illustrates the dialogue-across-time and dialogue-across-texts that lies at the core of the module. In this sense, the Host holds together the threads, offers a commentary, and steers the conversation towards the related themes of adaptation and appropriation, playful ambiguity of language, and affect-in-the-present of students' learning.

A Prologue

You have before you the transcript of a conversation between medieval and post-medieval poets as it happened in early 2023: a motley crew of sundry voices congregated to reflect on a module taught in a fairly far-flung corner of the UK. The module in question is called "ReMix: Chaucer in the Then and Now," and the Host who features in this transcript is responsible for its assemblage and running. The conversation explores the experience of handling adaptations of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* and *Troilus and Criseyde* in a twenty-first-century undergraduate classroom. The authors speak. Sometimes in turn, sometimes out of turn. While you wait for the conversation to begin, there is time—and a call—to prepare the ground, to lay out the ReMix deck, so to speak. Before we hear the voices speak, and so that we can measure the weight of their words, we must consider transformative processes in pedagogy alongside the scholarly study of medievalism. The transcript you have before you gestures to these, but gestures will remain oblique unless we shine a spotlight on their objects.

You have before you not an act of literary criticism, but an act of talking, a gesture of welcoming towards voices across times and places. This conversation is held together by pedagogy's core tenet of communication and transformation: to communicate… to spread and to reveal; to transfer; to change through interactions that affect others' selves just as much as they do your own. In relation to wider societal questions and challenges, Shauna Butterwick and Randee Lipson Lawrence suggest that "[s]omething ignites a process that ultimately leads to transformation of individual worldviews or societal norms, but it may not be disorienting or even a dilemma" (2023, 53). ReMix is about this and about exploring and querying what processes are in play in Chaucer's works as well as in their post-

medieval adaptations. There is deliberate disorientation involved in these explorations. 'The medieval'—this agreed-upon and yet vaguely-defined object—is not placed centre stage on ReMix. It comes first in the readings, yet follows on an opening discussion of medievalism and adaptation. Chaucer is not granted the privilege of soliloquising his works but rather seen as a constitutive element in the larger object as it is being made by the module. Chaucer does speak in the transcript, but he speaks not from the place of power of the canon but from among the chorus of other voices on the module.

You have before you a transcript of voices talking, of transformative processes as they manifest in adaptation. To see adaptation not as copying-that-dilutes… to embrace adaptation as appropriation-that-enriches is the learning aim of this process. While students may experience a sense of apprehension in the face of a perceived alterity that is braided into the strands of medieval texts, ReMix wants to transform this perception. Perceptions, assumptions, and expectations matter since they frame, produce, and often solidify frames of reference. ReMix is at least partly inspired by Jack Mezirow's concept of transformative learning, which at its core argues that

> [w]e transform our frames of reference through *critical reflection on the assumptions* upon which our interpretations, beliefs, and habits of mind or points of view are based. We can become critically reflective of the assumptions we or others make when we learn to solve problems instrumentally or when we are involved in communicative learning. (1997, 7; original emphasis)

Students of ReMix, as will you over the course of the soon-starting conversation, encounter Chaucer's texts as themselves enmeshed in processes of transformation, of encounters with alterity, of intertexts-that-enrich. ReMix loosens the sense of braided-in alterity and re-braids, enmeshes rather, Chaucer's texts into a less tidy mesh that stretches across the medieval and post-medieval.

You have before you, then, an instance of wanting to make the medieval familiar again. To show its value for and with and through re-writings. Of a medievalism of sorts. The informed-by-Chaucer texts have elements of what Tison Pugh and Angela Jane Weisl think of as medievalism in its "simplest sense," which includes cultural products that "turn to the Middle Ages for their subject matter or inspiration, and in doing so, explicitly or implicitly, by comparison or by contrast, comment on the artist's contemporary sociocultural milieu" (2013, 1). ReMix moves past an instinct to turn to the past, to re-visit the past. As Stephanie Trigg suggests,

> [w]hen we speak of 'approaching', 're-visiting', even 'looking back at' the Middle Ages, metaphors of space, distance, and travel are deeply embedded in the way we conceive our negotiation of historical difference. [...] metaphors such as 're-visiting' the past may also make manifest a latent desire behind scholarly acts of recuperation. (2016, 197)

ReMix is less interested in a recuperation of Chaucer than it is interested in the effects of having Chaucer and some of his adapters speak directly to each other.

You have before you a transcript of a conversation which says that adaptation as appropriation and interpretation as invention are what Chaucer's texts share, in some respects, with Patience Agbabi's *Telling Tales*, Lavinia Greenlaw's *A Double Sorrow*, and *Refugee Tales,* edited by David Herd and

Anna Pincus. ReMix is about the lure of the Middle Ages but follows a pedagogy that aims to float on students' contemporary concerns by showing how writers have recently, in the footsteps of a group of earlier adapters, created their own texts out of Chaucer's texts. ReMix is about experiencing a dialogue, participating in the creation of a new kind of space in which Chaucer and his adapters, readers, and critics can co-exist and mutually feed and nurture. Students are not just witnessing this dialogue, they are experiencing it because they are part of it, within it.

You have before you a transcript of a roundtable conversation as it could have happened in early 2023. But it did not. The texts really speak those words, and the Host calls upon writers by their first name in this conversation, but the conversation itself has been happening only in my mind and throughout a series of semesters with a succession of student cohorts that have made the module in question very much their own.

The Transcript

Host: *Croeso bawb*, welcome all to this conversation about "ReMix: Chaucer in the Then and Now." It is exciting to see so many faces and to have heard the hustle and bustle just now as you were all chattering away. If I didn't know better, I'd think this were the Tabard Inn, back in the days when Chaucer himself imagined "Wel nyne and twenty in a compaignye / Of sondry folk" (Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales*, II. 24–5). The company with me around this table is not assembled in such a haphazard way but has been called upon by myself in my role as your Host tonight. Next to me here on the stage are: Patience Agbabi [*Applause*], Lavinia Greenlaw [*Applause*], David Herd, Anna Pincus, and some of their *Refugee Tales* Voices [*Applause*], and as a very special guest, none other than Geoffrey Chaucer himself [*Applause*]. We have no running order and no censorship, but there are waypoints that we'll need to tap-off: change in words across time; remnants of words between texts; meaning of words across languages. I'll be here all the way through this across-and-between journey, sometimes talking from the sidelines, but more often than not assuming control, or… trying to. Wish me luck since this is very much an out-of-tune chorus.

With that… I'd say it's time to shift over into what we are here to discuss: some of the actual workings of the module. In that spirit, I'll now call on the people assembled here with me, since they really are what ReMix is all about. Geoffrey, why don't you kick off proceedings with your view on looking at words and actions across temporal and spatial distances, the idea of Change in words across time. Keep it short, if you don't mind.

Geoffrey: Ye knowe ek, that in forme of speche is change
Withinne a thousand yeer, and wordes tho
That hadden pris, now wonder nyce and straunge
Us thinketh hem, and yet thei spake hem so,
And spedde as wel in love as men now do;
Ek for to wynnen love in sondry ages,
In sondry londes, sondry ben usages. (Chaucer, *Troilus*, II.22–8)

Host: Considering you've gone for *Troilus*, which is itself certainly not the shortest piece to read (Which, by the way, is challenging to sell to students until they really get into your narrative!), that *was* short, and quite snappy. As you say, the times they may be a-changin', but however strange these formerly-prized words may seem to us now, they are words that were spoken. The words employed change across times, across lands, yet their content remains unchanged. It's an important point you make here, and my students are often struck by the sondry, sondry, sondry. Geoffrey, that triplet-phrase really brings things home. Thank you for picking that particular passage. Before more words from me… Since we are here to explore Remnants of words across texts. Lavinia, would you mind giving us your version of these words?

Lavinia: 'A form of speech'
Stories change shape in the telling
As words alter through long use.
This is nothing new
But it's close to home
Which might colour my view (were I to have one).
It's not exactly light, not entirely dark.
I'm saying what happens not naming parts. (Greenlaw 2014, 46)

Host: Words altering through long use… That is one of the core elements of ReMix. Lavinia has just now spoken back to Chaucer[1]; spoken *with* Chaucer, even. The saying of what happens is what Chaucer's *Troilus* does, too. It is not something specifically *new* to *A Double Sorrow*. The characters in *Troilus* act, they experience, they live. Chaucer, like any writer at any point in time, packages these experiences into words. *A Double Sorrow* picks up these threads and makes them its own, which is something that I encourage my students to do, too. Come to think of it, David Matthews closes his account of witnessing a performance of *A Double Sorrow*, an account which in turn closes his extensive critical history of medievalism, like so: "as Troilus' laughter echoed from the eighth sphere, anyway, and the last chords from the cello died away, I walked away thinking there was some future in all of this, some future for the Middle Ages" (2015, 184). There are no cellos in the ReMix classroom, there are no cellos here tonight, but the future for the Middle Ages is very much present, and the picking up of threads, of re-braiding, re-making is part of that present-future.

The module is one of several in my department where students have the option of either writing a critical essay or a creative response (with a commentary) to the module materials, and several have, over the years, chosen the idea of changes-across-time as their *leitmotif*, be it in critical or creative pieces. ReMix is not the only module in my department that challenges students to choose between creative and critical paths for their assessment, but as a module specifically *on* adaptation, the line between

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[1] This transcript, the conversation it records, follows a consensus among the participants to refer to each other by first names only, but the body of work by Chaucer (or, Geoffrey in the immediate space of the conversation) is referred to under the widely-accepted label of Chaucer's surname.

these two choices, the central reservation between the two paths, is already blurred in the first place. There is, therefore, no creative/critical binary, an absence that has been feeding the seminar discussions since the module's first iteration in 2018/19.

In this sense, there is a kind of journey that the students and I embark on every time the module runs. Words travel, and we travel with them, immersing ourselves in them and routing them…

Patience: On this Routemaster bus, get cerebral,
Tabard Inn to Canterbury Cathedral,
poet pilgrims competing for free picks,
Chaucer Tales, track by track, here's the remix
from below-the-belt base to the topnotch (Agbabi 2014, 2)

Host: re-routing them… I lost my train of thought there for a moment. Thank you, Patience, for that interjection. Where were we? Ah, yes, we are routing words. Which prompted Patience to speak up about her own imagined travelling company in *Telling Tales*. The Routemaster bus no longer enjoys active service, so you are perhaps engaging in some nostalgic longing there, Patience, when you place your poet pilgrims on it for your, for *their* own remix of the *Tales*. I wonder, is this an original Routemaster or a New Routemaster? Not that this matters all that much, but you could be playing with several different layers of transposition from old to new here. But seriously… it is a case of routing words. It's a case of re-routing, re-mixing, re-shaping them into things that are new-yet-familiar. Geoffrey, could you tell us a little about the Tabard Inn and Canterbury Cathedral?

Geoffrey: And specially from every shires ende
Of Engelond to Caunterbury they wende,
The hooly blisful martir for to seke,
That hem hath holpen, whan that they were seeke.
Bifil that in that seson on a day,
In Southwerk at the Tabard as I lay
Redy to wenden on my pilgrimage
To Caunterbury with ful devout corage,
At nyght was come into that ho stelrye
Wel nyne and twenty in a compaignye
Of sondry folk, by aventure yfalle
In felaweshipe, and pilgrimes were they alle,
That toward Caunterbury wolden ryde. (Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales*, II.15–27)

Host: From all over England, they move towards Canterbury. Geoffrey, you take the Tabard Inn as the starting point for your pilgrims' journey, and Patience's *Telling Tales* takes that precise starting point as a bookend together with Canterbury Cathedral as the goal that your pilgrims never actually reach. In *Telling Tales*, we get, track by track, a one-at-a-time sequence, while your *Tales* are more diffuse, more interlocking. Pilgrims interact,

interject, interfere, and those *inter*-ings become memory waves in the reading space that has been created for us, and that we ourselves perpetually re-create in our re-mixes, just like *Telling Tales* does. Patience's poet pilgrims don't really speak directly to each other, but they do speak to your pilgrims, Geoffrey. They pick up themes and images and braid them into their tracks. The same can't quite be said for *Refugee Tales*, which are generally more distant from *The Canterbury Tales*, but would you mind giving us a sense of your approach to this idea of language and starting out in the 'Prologue' to *Refugee Tales*, David?

David: It says that we have started—
That we are starting out—
That by the oldest action
Which is listening to tales
That other people tell
Of others
We set out to make a language
That opens politics
Establishes belonging
Where a person dwells. (Herd 2016, v)

And so we stop this night
And the Host steps up
And he says
Listen to this story
Whan that Aprill with his shoures soote
And the room goes quiet
And a voice starts up
And then the language
Alters
Sweet
Tender
Perced to the roote. (Herd 2016, x)

Host: Here we have the *General Prologue* literally as a starting point. The Host (a different one. Not me. Not even Harry Bailey!) asks us to listen. And with the memorable opening line of April showers…

Patience: My April showers me with kisses (Agbabi 2014, 1)

Host: Patience! The folks assembled here in front of us might prefer a kind of coherent thread, not one that gets entangled in your interruptions. But yes, there are ways of re-purposing those April showers, you are correct. And, after all, we are here tonight to speak with each other. Geoffrey's theme of renewal and rejuvenation in the *General Prologue* certainly fits neatly into the re-worked PDA of Harry's April's kisses. In the interest of openness, this entanglement of interruptions often happens in ReMix

seminars: an idea is started, and a different-yet-related idea suddenly surfaces to redirect the conversation. Patience, if you don't mind, I'd like to continue on this track, though. We will get back to yours. So, yes, April showers… they make the *Refugee Tales* room go quiet. A silence that creates the space for a voice, a different voice, one that actually, like Geoffrey's sweet showers, pierces the ground to reach roots. Things are altered. Things become tender and sweet. The *Refugee Tales* attempt the work of making language sweet, of creating a language that accommodates experiences and that establishes belonging. Chaucer, in *Troilus*, ponders what it is and was in the words that "they spake hem so," becoming "close to home" for *A Double Sorrow* and a cerebral re-mix for *Telling Tales*. The roots that are reached in pierced ground by April showers/April's showering kisses are ones that connect across time, across spaces, across environments.

On the module we are here to discuss, each of these texts, each of these voices, occupies a space or at least has the opportunity to occupy a space. Chaucer in the then and now is about Chaucer's *own* positioning, too. About his telling of stories. The way his texts themselves are concerned with language's movement across time spaces, across meaning spaces…

Geoffrey: The double sorwe of Troilus to tellen,
That was the kyng Priamus sone of Troye (Chaucer, *Troilus*, 1–2)

Host: Yes, Geoffrey, I was getting to that. Or trying to… The act is one of telling. The *Troilus* narrator has a purpose and that purpose is one of telling a story that is, in its outline, "wel wist" (I. 57). And yet for students the story may *not* be familiar. There is work that the module, the discussion, the reading need to do. *Troilus*' matter is not new, but the shape(s) of it is/are. *The Canterbury Tales* is a new constellation of fairly familiar stories that once again may be new to many twenty-first-century students. There is a gap to acknowledge and bridge-building materials to provide. One of the bridges that students of ReMix regularly build is the one between appearances and truth or reality. Although there is a regularly rotating selection of Canterbury pilgrims that are given a voice from year to year, the Friar and the Summoner regularly open proceedings. One of the reasons for this is the open and unmissable animosity between the two speakers, and another is the way in which both tales play—both subtly and more openly—with the question of words and the essences they aim to represent. In this way, they build upon (or in the sequence of the actual seminars on the module, they lead into) the passage from *Troilus* with which Geoffrey opened this evening's proceedings.

The Friar tells of a summoner, and the Summoner tells of a friar. Geoffrey, would you mind telling us here tonight why it is that you see fit to have your Friar tell us all, with no holds barred, of the corruption of this fictional summoner within the fiction of the *Friar's Tale*?

Geoffrey: For thogh this Somonour wood were as an hare,
To telle his harlotrye I wol nat spare;
For we been out of his correccioun. (Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales*, III.1327–9)

Host: There certainly is danger in the Friar's summoner's uncontrollable 'wood'-ness, but the Friar does not have to spare us any of the "harlotrye" precisely because this is a story. It is a story that does not directly affect the pilgrim audience, that does not threaten to leap beyond the page into even our lives as an audience. The conversation between the devil and the summoner in the *Friar's Tale* opens up a space within which we can query the use of language. Geoffrey, could you perform that moment when the devil asks what the summoner is?

Geoffrey: "Artow thanne a bailly?" "Ye," quod he.
He dorste nat, for verray filthe and shame
Seye that he was a somonour, for the name. (Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales*, III.1392–4)

Host: The Friar's summoner may be 'wood' (or, in *our* English: mad), but he feels a sense of shame about his profession. And the *Friar's Tale* mingles this sense of shame, a psychological sensation, with a sense of "verray" (true) filth, which is an altogether more holistic damning of the summoner's nature. Both his nature *and* the sense of shame he feels about it render this particular summoner unable to say what and who he really is. As the tale progresses, we learn that the shape, the appearance of the devil itself, is not entirely real since he (and his fellow hell-demons) can assume any shape they choose. As David Raybin argues, "Chaucer asserts here the primacy of intentionality in containing and delimiting the fiendish power of illusion" (2011, 99). Illusion and reality are central to the workings of Chaucer's words, and particularly those in the *Friar's Tale*.

Geoffrey, once more up to the microphone, if you may. This time, please be so kind to tell us how your *Friar's Tale* brings together this kind of language shape-shifting with the idea of intentionality.

Geoffrey: And whan the devel herde hire cursen so
Upon hir knees, he seyde in this manere,
"Now, Mabely, myn owene mooder deere,
Is this youre wyl in ernest that ye seye?"
"The devel," quod she, "so fecche hym er he deye,
And panne and al, but he wol hym repente!"
"Nay, olde stot, that is nat myn entente,"
Quod this somonour, "for to repente me
For any thyng that I have had of thee.
I wolde I hadde thy smok and every clooth!" (Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales*, III.1624–33)

Host: The devil knows how to query an utterance, and he gets exactly what he wants: Mabel confirms that her curse does indeed represent her true intention, while the summoner firmly refuses any suggestion that he may be intending to repent. Seminar discussion of this particular tale frequently revolve around the issue of the Friar's summoner being unable to realise the true implications of the devil actually being 'the devil.' The summoner acknowledges this reality, and he displays clear curiosity, but he ultimately

fails to realise the implications for his own reality and self-being. The interplay between reality and representation has long been a key focus of readings of the *Friar's Tale*. As Katie Homar highlights, "[t]he emphasis on *entente* situates the devil-yeoman's discourse—and the *Friar's Tale* as a whole—within the nominalist-realist debates about the nature of language that reached their climax in Chaucer's era" (2010, 98; original emphasis). The Friar plays with ideas of external and internal perception, with an inability to fully grasp something that is right there in front of him. Before we move on from this story: Patience, thank you for patiently biding your time. How does your remix of the *Friar's Tale* deal with this particular climactic scene?

Patience: Helluva sly, Robbo. She says, *You're*
wicked, Robert Owen, I only
knew one man, my late husband, Dai,
then starts speaking Welsh, like. *Repent*
or the Devil take your soul and the teapot ancient!
Robbo tells her where she can put
her repentance and the Devil bags him and the teapot
non-stop to Hell! Dying for a pint, he is.
Only serve tea down there, and bloody biscuits …
Bitter for me … He'll be back here
in less than a month, though, bet you a fiver,
they'll be beggin' him to go.
Get an ASBO from Hell, Robbo. (Agbabi 2014, 39–40)

Host: Ah, yes, I momentarily forgot that you are setting your tale just a little way down the road from here in Cardiff. Since only a relatively small number of students here come from Wales, and an even smaller number from among that small number from Cardiff, the translocation of the tale to the Welsh capital does not in itself make it obviously relevant to them. Having said that, the combination of the location with the hint of bilingualism has an immediacy to it for us here in West Wales. ReMix is a final-year module, so even non-Welsh students will have spent more than two years living in a location where the Welsh language is ever-present. Patience does not foreground *Gymraeg*, but "starts speaking Welsh, like" (2014, 40) very much tags it as a presence in this passage. The exchange of words is real-seeming here, and my students rarely fail to enjoy this sense of co-location between them and the text. That, and the nicely-blurred lines between Hell and prison. In Chaucer's *Friar's Tale* it is very much presented as a terminus, a place from which there can be no return. But your Robbo, your summoner-equivalent, is so obnoxious that even *that* place cannot contain him. More than that, even: it will not *want* to contain him.

But let's circle back to the idea of words and reality, of reality *in* words. Meanings of words across languages is an ever-present factor in the discourses of migration and (indefinite) detention as we find it rippling through *Refugee Tales*. So, Carol, since your contribution to the voicing of the refugee experience is *The Interpreter's Tale*, could you

give us a sense of how identity, 'I'-ness, works in the context of translation from one language to another?

Carol: I will tell you word for word.
My word for hers.
I say *I.*
I say I for her or his I.
I came from Eritrea.
I was shackled.
I saw people die in the desert.
That day I came out of the lorry I felt I had been born for a
second time.

Word for word.
I am not believed.
I am believed when she is not. (Watts 2016, 64)

Your duty is to interpret everything that is said.
Find composure.
Listen.
Speak.

Everything is at stake each time.
Everything. (Watts 2016, 68)

Host: At this stage in the journey, me and my students have reached the point where not even the first-person pronoun can be taken for granted in its anchored-ness anymore. Chaucer and his pilgrims, Criseyde, Troilus, Pandarus, they are all 'I's, but they are not physically real, of course. *Telling Tales* and *A Double Sorrow* change them. Our view of them is changed through the re-working of their they-ness by Agbabi and Greenlaw, and this change in turn reflects back on how *Troilus* does itself not contain stable 'I's.

"Word for word" is what we want to get. It is what is called for by everything being "at stake each time," but reading adaptations alongside Chaucer's texts, in open embrace of Chaucer's practice as itself being concerned with adaptation and appropriation, encourages (student) readers to question the very idea of "word for word." There is no direct equivalent passage in Chaucer's work, but indeterminacy of language is used throughout as an opening-up gesture. Lavinia, would you mind bringing our proceedings here this evening to an end with 'A clause,' and act of writing and reading?

Lavinia: 'A clause'
What you believe you need to know
So write. Ask if she has reason not to come.
If she doesn't reply you will have your answer.
If she does then we can read true cause

> Between her lines.

> The prince sits down to turn over the matter
> Of how best to describe his suffering. (Greenlaw 2014, 202)

Host: The act of writing, of communicating, is necessary if there is a perceived need to know something. Yet, this act brings with it the risk of there being no reply, a refusal to join the discourse that is in itself full of meaning, since this absence carries an answer. Even if there is a writing-back, the "true cause" will rest not within the lines but between the lines. How, then, can the prince (Geoffrey, this would be Troilus if this were your story…) find the right words for his suffering? Acts of writing, of speaking, of describing are at this point in our journey through these texts so complex and almost-futile that a firm answer to this question will not be possible.

   We have been talking for a while now, and I am sure that the mention a few minutes ago of tea, biscuits, pints has whetted appetites for an end to these proceedings and more informal conversations beyond this space. The bar will be open soon, but I still should bring things to a more formal close here in this space. Us who are assembled here on this platform-stage hope that we have given you a sense of how ReMix works as a module. There are connections to be drawn and being drawn. As I outlined a little while ago, the students of this module have a shared identity as students in the same department, but their experience of medieval literature, even the focus of their degrees, vary, which always makes for intriguingly surprising seminar conversations. One of the things that I had in mind when I designed this module was to make 'the medieval,' and Chaucer in particular, less alien-seeming to our students. To counter a narrative that has defamiliarised the Middle Ages, and that is already being worked against by texts such as *A Double Sorrow*, *Telling Tales*, and *Refugee Tales*. So far, it has been a productive and enjoyable journey, and I hope that y'all don't mind that I will leave the final word to *The Detainee's Tale*, since it—in a much darker setting than ReMix—highlights the always-still-happening of words and experiences. Ali, would you mind leading us out of here?

Ali: Here's what you tell me. It's all in the present tense, I realise afterwards, because it is all still happening. (Smith 2016, 50)

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