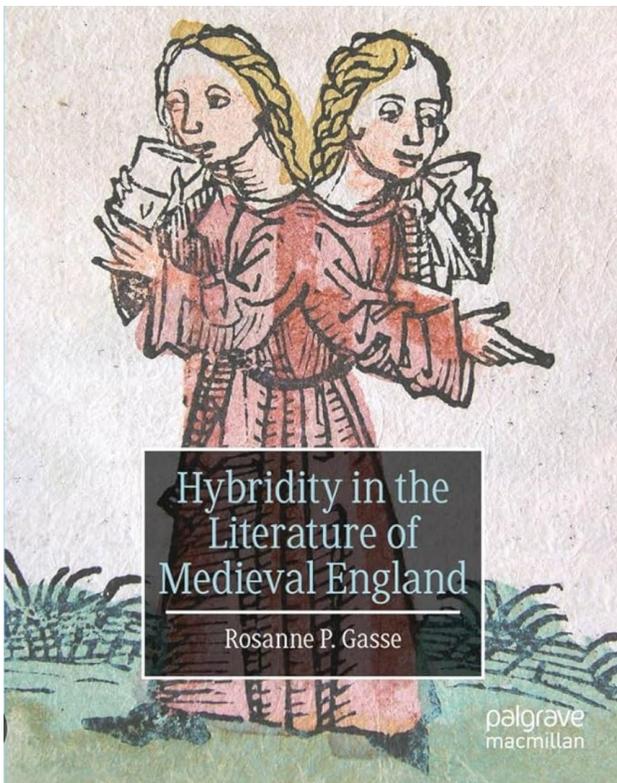


RESEARCH CONNECTION

Hybridity in the literature of medieval England

By Rosanne Gasse, PhD



Why this research is important

There are multiple guises in which someone or something can be considered hybrid. Mixed ancestry or a hybrid car are two examples. Yet are people ‘mixed’ when they wear glasses, have an artificial hip, and share the space in their gut with multiple species of bacteria? Why, or why not? Why do some combinations and differences bother us while others do not? In this book, through study of how

What you need to know

As much as some people may wish to deny it, hybridity is a fact of existence. *Hybridity in the Literature of Medieval England* explores four different types of hybridity found in literature written in English between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries: mixed ethnic identity, human/supernatural hybrids, the changeability of the human body and identity, and those hybrids who exist in-between life and death.

medieval authors handled the concept of mixture, I answer such questions. I show that hybridity, although it is grounded in difference, points toward what is held in common. Hybridity points to our sameness, even with those we label monsters.

How the research was conducted

My research invariably starts with a puzzle. For this project, I wondered why there are so few children of mixed ethnicity to be found in medieval romances when mixed marriages – partners of different ethnic, social, and religious backgrounds – are so commonplace in them. Through close reading of more than twenty-five Middle English stories, I found an answer to that puzzle in how medieval authors dealt with hybridity. I then realized that other projects I was working on also centred on hybridity, but of very different sorts. I united all these projects in this one book.

What the researcher found

The first and second sections of the book centre on the most obvious type of hybridity in literary texts: biological miscegenation in which ancestry is mixed and cultural status is complicated by having parents from two different groups. In medieval literature, this social dilemma, if regarded as unacceptable, can be expressed in code through a half human/half faery (or half demon) character who resolves the problem by the end of the story. The first section shows the resolution in one direction as the character becomes wholly human; the second section, the opposite direction. The third section turns attention to the body and body parts as expressions of identity in John Gower's fourteenth-century poem *Confessio Amantis*. The boundaries crossed are human and animal, person and thing, male and female, able and disabled. The final section of the book considers the hybridity of dying, a state in which one is simultaneously alive and dead. These stories include tales of the resurrected dead, ghosts, and revenants.

How this research can be used

My work on hybridity can supplement any one of various theoretical stances. Critical race studies, postcolonial studies, disability studies, monster studies, gender studies, animal studies, cyborg studies, and translation studies (among others) all have something to say about the hybrid. Constructions of mixed identity, whether based on the biological, the cultural, the social, the material, the spiritual, or something else entirely, speak to the pressures and anxieties of the period. In understanding how medieval authors grappled with hybridity we can, therefore, better appreciate their works but also recognize how hybridity in our own time can unite where division may otherwise prevail.

About the researcher

Rosanne P. Gasse is Professor of English Literature at Brandon University. Her work has been published in journals such as *The Chaucer Review*, *JEGP*, and *Enarratio*. She is the author of the *The Feral Piers* (Cambridge Scholars, 2016) and the Book Review editor for Brandon University's *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies*.

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