My title is "what is the age of Chaucer?" With this I want to take up some of the questions and challenges about temporality that were raised in the opening sessions and have resonated throughout the five days of our conference, while also hinting at the ways in which those questions are already foregrounded in the title of our society's official journal. By asking "what is the age of Chaucer" I want to consider not only how we conceive the period that we roughly define as "the age of Chaucer," but also how the notion of an age—a period defined through a single lifespan, or a set of defining events—was conceived in "the age of Chaucer" itself, whose inhabitants may not have been aware that they were living in "an age of Chaucer," but who, as many of the papers in this conference have shown, appear to have defined their period through myriad reference points and temporal models.

By now, July 27 may feel like a lifetime ago, so let me start by summarizing some of the key questions that were raised on that opening day, which seemed to issue a challenge that was variously taken up over the days that followed.

The conference opened on the theme of what David Wallace called in his
presidential address the "nonlinear temporalities" that seemed operative in the work of Chaucer as well as in the decidedly nonlinear receptions of Chaucer in our own age. In a crowded session that followed, entitled, "What is happening to the Middle Ages?", the question of medieval temporality received a lively hearing. In it, James Simpson challenged us to jettison the binary of medieval/early modern that was the by-product of what he calls early modernity's "revolutionary moment." Philip Thiel recalled the ways in which the marginalization of "the medieval" by the modern is reinforced in the institutions that train and credentialize medievalists. Stephanie Trigg alerted us to the possibilities opened when we refuse to relegate "the medieval" to the past but recognize the "medievalisms" of the present. And Carolyn Dinshaw recalled, against the temporal narratives that seem to distance us from that medieval past, that the "stream of time" doesn't run in a linear direction but tends, as she evocatively put it, to overflow its banks.

Complaints about the marginality of medieval studies within relentlessly modernizing academic institutions can seem like depressingly old news. But what gave this opening session a new energy (I found) was its invitation to rethink in creative and unsettling ways the temporality of "the medieval." Medievalists are not alone in this enterprise. Looking across the great early modern divide, Margreta de Grazia is currently attempting to unsettle the largely nineteenth-century narratives that continue to define the period known as "the Renaissance" as the beginning of modernity. But in contemporary historical models, she notes, "the new"—that marker of modernity—was a thing not to be embraced but to be treated with caution and suspicion. Similarly we might consider how
inhabitants of "the Middle Ages"—who never seem to embrace "middleness" as a particular identity—produce alternative temporal models that might be deployed against, in order to defamiliarize, the temporalities of modernity that have for so long defined that period.

Temporality is different from history, as we learned in the session on "Time, Measure, and Value in Chaucer's Art and Chaucer's World." By exploring how time became quantifiable in the Middle Ages, Dan Ransom and Dawn Simmons Watts reminded us that time is not the measuring stick of history but the product of human history, such as the histories of technology, religious practice, and narrative. This point was played out in the many models of medieval temporality that emerged from this conference.

One dominant model of medieval temporality, recalled in David Wallace's address and several papers that followed, is that of pilgrimage, a movement across space that is also a movement across time. The direction of pilgrimage is not linear, as no reader of the Canterbury Tales needs to be reminded; if it moves forward across space in wandering digressions, it also reaches backward in time, aiming to close the loop between the experiential present and the sacred past. It also reaches into futures unseen; it's significant that Chaucer's afterlife in our own age, as Wallace detailed, is so frequently figured in acts or adaptations of pilgrimage, showing how the signature Chaucerian experience of temporal wandering resonates with our own age's sometimes rootless uncertainty.

Other models suggest experiences of temporality that are less itinerant than
recursive. For a penitential culture, as Ann Astell showed us (with support from Levinas), the promise of forgiveness is a retro-action, a redemption of the past that remakes its significance for the future. If the linear progression of "the stream of time" also implies a patrilinear continuity of generation, as Carolyn Dinshaw suggested, a text like St. Erkenwald offers its own anti-patrilinear retro-action in the spectacle of parricide that is also, Frank Grady tells us (with support from Freud) a foundational act of culture. Retro-action, the return to origins, seems always fraught for Chaucer—and this is one point in which we could say that Chaucer is not a poet of "re-naissance." Just as the pilgrimage never reaches it goal, Lisa Cooper remarks (in one of the e-seminars) that homecomings are particularly vexed in Chaucerian texts like The Knight's Tale, suggesting not so much a return to origins as a realization that you can't go home again.

Against the experience of temporality as retro-action, models emerging in other papers address the temporality of change. In place of the defining modern narrative of change as a violent break from the past, alternative medieval models envision change through forms of re-making, transformation, and adaptation. Some of these possibilities emerge, for example, in the model of metamorphosis explored by Suzanne Conklin Akbari, who finds that Chaucer engages in a "continual metamorphosis," by exploring acts of change that are never unidirectional. Similar models of change might be suggested in the figure of alchemy, as discussed by Jonathan Hsy, that of conversion, as discussed this morning by Jennifer Jahner, or those of economic exchange of translation, discussed in many papers, which involve change from one material, medium, or state of being to
Claire Jardillier explored the question of change through architectural transformation, observing that Theseus doesn't destroy materials but uses them to make new things: he clears the forest but harvests wood that makes the funeral pyre. This model of material change differs from the destruction that we're used to finding in the Reformation's break from the medieval past. But how complete is that break, and what are the possibilities for seeing it too as transformation and adaptation? If medievalists are used to seeking "finials in farmhouses," as David Wallace remarks, those finials' very survival indicates that the Reformation didn't always eradicate medieval buildings but sometimes—indeed, often--adapted them to new uses. Change in this model of material culture isn't an act of destruction but one of metamorphosis.

Material culture was a recurrent concern across many of the panels—John Ganim, who ran an e-seminar on Institutions and Objects, estimated that it defined the focus of nearly half the panels at this conference: we heard papers considering domestic architecture and space, material objects and their exchange as goods or gifts, and the materiality of textuality itself, the pens, ink, and parchment (or paper, as Orietta Da Rold reminded us) that made up the stuff of scribal culture.

Material objects can be time travelers, emissaries, like the body of St. Erkenwald, from the past into the present. Indeed, the aim of bridging past and present through material culture formed the original mission of the Cloisters museum; as we learned,
Rockefeller wanted Americans to be able to walk into the Middle Ages, so he concentrated on large-scale objects—architectural artifacts, tapestries, and furnishings that made visiting the museum feel like a trip back in time.

Yet the attempt to recreate medieval space in a modern context suggests that spatial experience somehow transcends time, a suggestion that several papers that we heard on medieval architecture would contest. And if medieval objects today seem to bridge the past and the present, to medieval eyes, objects were sometimes less like time-travelers than they were symptoms of a more threatening historical change. As Andrea Denny-Brown shows, in the universally excoriated figure of the "gallaunt," an over-indulgence in material objects and fashion was associated with the dangers of the new.

Objects offer another possible inroad for rethinking modernity's "universalizing humanism," by unsettling humanism's posterchild, the liberal subject. As Mark Miller points out, today the effects of liberalism have been generalized to the point of invisibility, particularly its definition of human subjectivity as a private interior space harboring a hidden and individualized truth within. But studying the medieval object proves that the division between human and thing, as Kellie Robertson suggests, is less absolute than it appears. This argument resonates with that of Susan Crane, who showed us how the boundaries between animal and human are traversable through compassion. Just as animals ask us to rethink the meanings of the human, so do things. As Robertson shows, medieval things have agency. Similarly Louise Bishop shows that in a Galenic universe things (like eggs) can even have emotions. The inquiry into medieval emotions
that was sustained through several panels likewise proved unsettling to the liberal subject of "universalizing humanism." As several papers showed, medieval emotion is less an inner truth to be revealed and expressed than a situated performance to be enacted.

"Memory," another topic invoked by several papers, emerged less as a personal experience of the individual subject than the condition of collective identity. In her paper early in the conference, Stephanie Trigg argued that as an analytic category, "memory" allows us to consider the afterlife of the medieval past in the present. We might recall that the act of "remembering" is also one of "re-membering," that is, the incorporation of parts into coherent wholes, a process that we learned is fundamental to medieval textual culture. In a paper on medieval pamphlets, Joel Fredell called attention to the significance of the "little quire," the small booklet, which was made in order to be bound, or re-membered, in a fascicle. In this sense, fascicular re-membering is the opposite of the modern acts of dis-membering that were for so long visited on medieval books—not only in the shape of Ruskin's infamous scissors but also in librarians' and collectors' impulses to separate medieval quires into individual units. The medieval fascicle invites us to trouble distinctions between the agency of writer and reader, since the act of compiling quires into a volume allows every reader both to re-member texts and to make them anew. So too we've clearly reached a key moment for reconsidering the distinction between production and reproduction as it once differentiated, and hierarchized, the work of author and scribe. If scribes like Adam Pinkhurst are coming out of the shadows of anonymity, thanks to the extraordinary work of Lynn Mooney, we are also learning new
things about authors who were scribes themselves, like the Thomases Hoccleve and Usk. If new research on scribes is asserting their importance to medieval literary culture, one of the most encouraging developments I saw in this conference was an apparent breakdown of the traditional division between manuscript study and literary study. While in previous conferences these have been divided into our own version of the "two cultures," this year the two were more clearly integrated and in productive dialogue with one another.

As several sessions suggested, through their traditional expertise in manuscript study, medievalists can make a unique contribution in addressing some of the broader methodological challenges of literary study. The study of manuscripts can mediate the imperatives of historicism and close reading, whose divorce was lamented by Derek Pearsall in the opening panel of the series on close reading. For all the texture it brings to the experience of literature, close reading has sometimes been seen as an enemy to the broad, diachronic analysis called for in the opening sessions, to such an extent that my colleague Franco Moretti advocates what he calls, tongue only partly in cheek, "distant reading," a practice aimed at bringing the big picture into view. But if manuscript study is one way to read closely in a historically attentive way—as was suggested in the discussion following that first panel on close reading—it also offers a route for tracing diachronic change as it is registered on and through material objects as they traversed their own itinerant spatial and temporal routes. In this, manuscript study potentially brings together many of the themes that have been played out across this conference--
material culture, close reading, and temporality—in the copying and re-membering of texts through time. Consider the very textual objects of our study: released from the monastic contexts in which they were made, medieval books then traveled into the hands of early modern collectors, and from them, into the major collections on which the discipline of medieval English literary studies continues to ground itself: the Bodleian, the Cotton library in London, the Parker library in Cambridge. These collections offer us concrete examples of how, to recall Simpson from the first day's session, the medieval past was remade by the subjects of early modernity. But in our own continued interactions with the same books, we recall Stephanie Trigg's assertion that the medieval continues to be remade, and that we remake it in our own acts of remembrance.

My own effort to re-member this conference and thus to bind together its diverse elements into something approaching a fascicular whole recalls how imperfect and individual a process this is—especially in the face of concurrent sessions, long days, and the frailty of human memory, namely mine. I must stress that the view I've presented is no map but, like the medieval fascicle, a highly individual and sometimes selective compilation.

With this I want to move toward a conclusion. I've been considering how the challenge raised on this conference's first day—of how to refigure the "multiple temporalities" of the Middle Ages, apart from the narratives of break or rupture imposed on "the medieval" by later periods, was variously taken up and addressed across the five days of this long and rich conference. In place of the unidirectional linearity of "the stream of time," we've been given what might be recognized to be alternative models of
temporality. These are visible, for example, in the idea of circulation, as it governs goods, objects, manuscripts, and people across spatial travels that are also travels through time. So too medieval narratives of penitence, redemption, translation and even exemplarity suggest temporal schemes based on the ability to bring the past into the present in order to remake it anew. If the medieval was produced through modernity's self-defining break from an abjected past, this conference has suggested that the materials that we need for critiquing and unsettling that narrative are already close at hand.