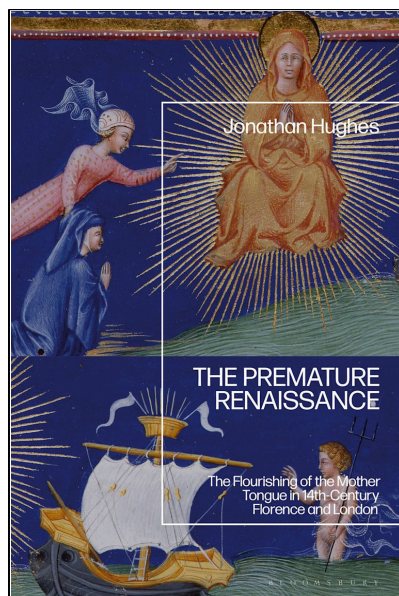




The Premature Renaissance

The Flourishing of the Mother Tongue in 14th-Century Florence and London

Jonathan Hughes

"Hughes thesis is a fitting tribute to the texts that inspired it: like the Divine Comedy a bold original, as colourful as the Decameron and as steeped in the literary canon as the Canterbury Tales." *James G. Clark, Professor of Medieval History, University of Exeter, UK*

"Jonathan Hughes has written an original and challenging book in which he argues that Dante, Boccaccio, Petrarch and Chaucer in different ways all gave women a new and independent voice free from the constraints of Marian imagery. This voice, he argues, was silenced by the attack on vernacular writing mounted by fifteenth century churchmen. This is a wide-ranging book which will provoke discussion and dissent, but it cannot be ignored." *Caroline Barron, Emeritus Professor of History, Royal Holloway University of London, UK*

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Using a wide range of sources and a novel interdisciplinary approach, Jonathan Hughes convincingly argues that a renaissance occurred in late 14th-century Florence and London that had less to do with the discovery of classical antiquity than the inspiration of Dante's vernacular Divine Comedy. Hughes shines a light on how Petrarch, Boccaccio and Chaucer, writers working largely outside the traditional centres of Latin education and cultural authority like the universities, cathedrals and monasteries, realized that the language imparted by mothers to their children held the key to the creation of literature that was imaginative and personal; literature that explored the mysteries of the human personality, demonstrated the power of nature, and reflected the lives and worlds of ordinary people in the city streets and rural fields.

A Premature Renaissance reflects on the ways in which this literature challenged the pre-eminence of Latin and questioned ecclesiastical assumptions (even those of Dante) about the nature of reality, the justice of Divine judgment and the existence of an afterlife, giving prominence to the voice of women and their perspective in the process.

The book also considers how and why this was a brief and ultimately premature renaissance by examining the retreat of these intellectual pioneers from the bold and disturbing implications of their discoveries.

Jonathan Hughes is Honorary Research Fellow at the University of Exeter, UK. His books include *Arthurian Myths and Alchemy: The Kingship of Edward IV* (2002), *Rise of Alchemy in the Fourteenth Century* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2009) and *Dante in the Early English Renaissance* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2022).

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