their source, e.g. the tendency to suppress “solecistic” prepositions in favour of the “proper” ablative of means …’ (p. 82). And from time to time, it is arguably too compressed, almost gnomic: ‘However, the presentation of the sources has a logic integral to the presentation of the text; it is a general bibliographical rule that the physical form and context in which a text has been transmitted, broadly communicated in a manuscript description, provides evidence of potential editorial importance’ (p. 103). The third demerit (doubtless beyond the control of the author) is the price, which is, frankly, outrageous for a concise book without illustrations, and effectively ensures that no graduate student will ever own a copy. It is earnestly to be hoped that a second edition – ideally with some strategic simplification and the addition of sub-headings – will shortly be produced in paperback so that the work can genuinely reach those who most have need thereof.

Durham University

RICHARD GAMESON


In this volume for the fine series on medieval romance edited by Corinne Saunders, Jamie McKinstry takes a novel approach to his study of a number of Middle English romances. I was not at all sure that discussing them in terms of ‘the craft of memory’ could be more than a misapplied gimmick, but I am pleased to report that in fact McKinstry makes an intriguing, if not entirely satisfying, case for analysing many structural features of these narratives in that light. Rather than a strictly linguistic approach to vernacular romances (the main interest they had when I was in school), or a post-colonial, gendered, or psychological approach, he has chosen to look at their structures and patterns as cognitively productive, and has absorbed completely what is now a common neuropsychological view, that memory supplies the matrix for imagination and reasoning, and that recollection is a cognitive activity that looks to past experiences uncovered through images in order to construct present understandings and future plans, the Ciceronian idea that recollection has a ‘Janus face’. As the matrix of the virtue of Prudence (Wisdom), it should always have these three ‘faces’ (or ‘phases’). The result is a cognitively based formal analysis that asks not what a particular work (or repeated trope) means, but how it acquires and sustains some understanding both for the characters in the narrative and – even more importantly – for the audiences who experience it. For McKinstry argues forcefully that these works seek to involve audiences actively, to make them labour within their own memories, by telling
the stories in such a way that the audience is as much a part of ‘making’ the poem as the author and the narrative. This is not, I think, just a restatement of post-modern reception theory. To do the kind of prudential memory-work McKinstry describes, their audiences must be fully implicated in the works as they unfold through time: an oral/aural reading situation is his premise. As he writes in his introduction, ‘[t]he creative aspect of recollection … share[s] processes with … meta-performative aspects’ of all reading, voiced or silent, in the later Middle Ages (pp. 12f.). Most reception theory still presumes a singular, abstracted receptor: ‘the reader’. The audience that McKinstry’s analysis requires is neither made up of solitary individuals nor is only silent. It is a collaborative group, interactive always with the narrative patterns supplied in the work, a thesis that is well suited to a networked age like our own – and also to societies that have emphasized community-making virtues, such as monasteries and courts, and, as an aspect of their projects, also privileged group response through reading aloud.

Though the stalwarts of the undergraduate curriculum are discussed – *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Chaucer’s *Troilus and Knight’s Tale* – McKinstry mainly discusses a number of less-taught romances, *Sir Orfeo*, *Athelstan*, *Guy of Warwick*, *Sir Issumbras*, *Ipomedon*, *Sir Launfal*, *King Horn*, *Havelock*, *Emare*, and others. Since the book is organized by recurrent plot situations and patterns that invoke or require their connections to be made by characters and audiences alike actively using their memories, the effect is to chop up discussions of particular poems in several separate chapters. The index is as helpful as it can be to bring these together, but students using this book will need to rely as well on their own memories to follow McKinstry’s arguments. It is a creative memory-task well worth doing.

New York University

MARY CARRUTHERS


Douglas Gray is well known for his books and editions on Henryson, Chaucer, Skelton, and medieval literature in general, but he has also been deeply interested in the popular literature of the medieval period, having made over some forty years important statements on lyrics, carols, charms, the Robin Hood ballads, and even flytings and proverbs. He now brings together his extensive thoughts on the medieval English popular traditions – and internationally well beyond them – in this important and richly suggestive study.

The first three chapters offer an analytic account of the early materials,