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 Isumbras, Ipomedon, Sir Launfal, King Horn, Havelock, Emaré, 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.

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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,
exploring whether there was, as is clear by the eighteenth century, a major separation between popular oral culture and that of the educated literary. This material suggests there may be substantial interrelation of the areas in the medieval period and that the popular domain had its own power and complexity.

Gray explores both issues in his first two chapters, showing first strong familiarity with the international scholarship of folk literature as well as the popular material itself, but also tracing connections between popular and literary culture – moving from *Havelock* and Margery Kempe to Chaucer, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Henryson, and Gavin Douglas. He finds the learned appropriation of the popular matched by its separatist strength, finding it capable of having the status of ‘folklaw’, following Richard Firth Green. Gray further suggests this ‘kind of customary oral law’ (p. 47) may be appropriated for its cross-class authority by Chaucer in his Plowman and Parson, Skelton in Collyn Clout, the plain figureheads of the late medieval ‘King and Subject’ ballads, and Robin Hood himself.

The third chapter, ‘The ocean of story’, develops this sense of domains both parallel and interrelated in a review of the oral and the literary around the world, ranging from heroes of history and epic to elusive figures like ‘Wild Edric’, anti-Norman hero from the late Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, and ‘Colbrand the Joculator’ of Wisbech, c.1338. Suggesting that Gray has a splendid reference-system, or a remarkable memory, or more probably both, the range of these three general chapters asserts, as the book intends, that the ‘simple forms’ it explores are by no means simple in their essence, impact, or importance.

The remaining two-thirds of the book focus such wide-ranging insights through genre-based studies. Chapters on ballad and popular romance build on earlier work, notably by Gray himself and Helen Cooper, but the succeeding chapters on folk-tale, saga-type story, and animal fables will be new to many modern anglophone readers, combining a wealth of intriguing international data with emphasis on richly multiple texts like *Emaré* and *Le Roman de Renart*, but also their more literary parallels such as Chaucer’s Clerk’s Tale and Henryson’s ‘The fox, the wolf and the cadger’. The final chapters on proverb, riddle, satire, and drama extend further both the detail and the challenge of this remarkable and valuable study.

Gray has effectively provided an analytic encyclopedia, and a substantial validation, of medieval popular materials, and this summary of his lifelong interest and expertise in the topic offers a basis for new research, especially in terms of socio-historical comprehension, extending his innovative insights in this area, such as those into the separate popular force of ‘folklaw’ and his parallel sense of the power and extent of cultural interconnection between allegedly high and low socio-cultural orders.

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