Douglas Gray (ed.), *From the Norman Conquest to the Black Death: an anthology of writings from England*. Pp. xv + 3 maps + 591. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011. £85.00 (ISBN 978 0 19 812353 8).

This timely anthology presents extracts from 127 texts written in England between 1066 and c. 1350, and is a worthy addition to a distinguished tradition that includes Joseph Hall's *Selections from Early Middle English* (1920), Bruce Dickins and R. M. Wilson's *Early Middle English Texts* (1951), and J. A. W. Bennett and G. V. Smithers' *Early Middle English Verse and Prose* (1966; 2nd ed. 1968).

The easiest way of assaying the value of Gray's anthology is by comparing it with these three forebears. The first difference evident is in scope: Hall's anthology included 23 texts; Dickins and Wilson's 38, and Bennett and Smithers' 19. The massive increase in breadth comes not (alas!) from Gray's rediscovery of vast cache of lost early Middle English texts, but from his astute decision to include texts written in Anglo-Norman and Anglo-Latin alongside those in English. As a consequence, the anthology is the first to instantiate the multilingual approaches to twelfth- and thirteenth-century literature now gaining traction. The downside of this decision is that the English texts are choked, with Gray finding no place for numerous texts familiar from the earlier anthologies. There is, for example, no space for the evocative short poem beginning 'Sanctus Beda was iboren her', printed by Dickins and Wilson as *The Disuse of English*. Religious texts have suffered particularly intensely: there is nothing from the Lambeth or Trinity homilies, no *Poema morale*, nothing from the Kentish sermons, no *Genesis and Exodus*. While such texts may not have the appeal of the romances, their literary-historical significance is considerable.

A second notable difference between the new anthology and its precursors is in intended audience. Hall's anthology devotes over two-thirds of its pages to notes; there is no glossary. Bennett and Smithers preface 261 pages of texts with a 61 page introduction, and close with 164 pages of commentary, and an almost 200 page glossary. Gray's anthology has merely an eleven page introduction and twenty pages suggesting further reading. It would be an understatement to say it is designed to be more accessible its ancestors.

As a moving passage in Gray's Preface argues, accessibility is a pedagogical imperative with this period: whose students have not, like his, 'often felt that they had to deal with scraps or isolated examples which seemed to exists in a kind of vacuum, until they reached the better documented literature of the later fourteenth century and its great masters, the Gawain-poet, Langland, Chaucer and Gower'? But accessibility is a double-edged sword. Though designed for a smooth reading experience, the scant annotation often frustrates. Students are unlikely to be familiar with the *rotruenge*, a type of song performed by William Marshall's daughter, Joan (167); they might balk at the Guillaume le Clerc's curious assertion that Carlisle is in Wales (251). Gray's handling of English verse texts, discussed more fully below, makes them appear rebarbative in comparison with the French and Latin texts he so fluently translates. While the use of short excerpts gives the anthology an admirable breadth, reading *florilegia* is, in practice, no substitute for reading texts in their entirety.

None of the foregoing criticisms diminish the value of Gray's anthology, which aspires to complement rather than supersede the earlier efforts of Hall, Dickins, Wilson, Bennett and Smithers. The anthology itself begins with a short preface (significant because it provides the only description of the principles underlying the edition and translation of the texts), a

useful chronology and three maps, which are helpful but not without peculiarities. There is next a brief but attractive introduction which stresses the cosmopolitanism of post-Conquest England, and the hybridity of its literature. The 127 texts are then presented in thirty sections, divided sometimes by theme, sometimes by genre and sometimes by chronology. Each section has an informative introduction, supported by a corresponding bibliography at the end of the volume.

Gray has translated all Latin and French texts into fluent modern English, basing his translations on published editions. To save space, the originals are not reproduced, and regretably, no line or page references are given, making it extremely difficult to look up the corresponding French or Latin. For English texts, by contrast, he has, the bibliographical notes imply, gone back to the manuscripts, modernising lightly, principally by suppressing ð, þ and 3. Prose texts are followed by a modern English translation; verse texts are supplied with glosses in parallel. This has the unfortunate consequence of making the English poetry much more severe on the eye than any of the other texts presented; it is to be hoped that this does not blind student readers to its quality.

The real strength of Gray's anthology lies in the selection of the texts, which have been chosen with great care and skill. There are, for example, parallel selections from Geoffrey of Monmouth, Wace and Layamon which will enable students to compare their handling of Arthurian material, Geoffrey of Vinsauf's eulogy for Richard I, invoked by the Nun's Priest in his lament for the capture of Chauntecleer in the *Canterbury Tales*, and various antecedents for the plot of *Dame Sirith*. I particularly enjoyed Walter Map's description of the court from *De Nugis Curialium*, the excerpts from *Boeve de Haumtoune* and the full-text of the twelfth-

century Latin play, *Babio*. Teachers will be able to find numerous paths through material so thoughtfully assembled.

The translations themselves are fluent, engaging, and appropriate for the intended student audience. As is inevitable in a project of this size, a few errors have crept in. I know no reason to suppose the monster which swallows King Morpidus in Book III of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae* is female (113); though the charm *Wenne, Wenne, Wenchichenne* was added to a flyleaf of MS. Royal 4 A. xiv around 1150, the manuscript itself is a mid-tenth-century copy of Jerome on the Psalms (169); the extract from the Peterborough Chronicle is the annal for 1137 not 1317 (171); Wireker's *Speculum Stultorum* appears as the *Speculum Stultiorum* (229); and the Irish monk whose travels are described in the *Navigatio Brendani* is referred to as both Brandan and Brendan (220, 236). Here and there, the translations could be improved. One wonders how many students are familiar with 'refocillated' (37) or 'brattice' (142).

The weakest section of the anthology is the 'Bibliographical Notes'. These contain a considerable number of errors. On p. 576, for example, the shelfmark of the Corpus manuscript of the *Ancrene Wisse* is wrongly given as 2005 (*recte* 402); Geoffrey Shepherd is appears as 'Shephard' and Hugh White is renamed 'While'. Also problematic is the absence of several recent publications from this bibliography, for example Ian Short's edition of Gaimar (2009) and Jill Mann's *From Aesop to Reynard* (2009).

These criticisms notwithstanding, this is a wonderful and generous anthology, thoughtfully conceived and well executed, evincing throughout a powerful combination of humanity and

rich scholarship. My only quibble is the eye-watering price of the volume. I exhort Oxford University Press to produce an inexpensive, corrected paperback reprint. It will be an indispensible teaching tool for years to come.

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