

exploration in the fourteenth century. The material assembled in this book offers a useful general map of the subject of the Bible in English, and there is a proper emphasis on the importance of the preaching tradition in the establishment of biblical English (147). Yet even in these later chapters there is too much mere gathering of quotations and too little evaluation. If George Borrow's *The Bible in Spain* is to be used to illustrate the textual war between protestants and catholics, should not the fact that his treatment of the subject owed more to literary conceit than to a genuine zeal for proselytizing have been discussed? Oddly, the Tyndale scholar David Daniell is bracketed with Borrow and others as a manipulator of Reformation history. Long is perfectly entitled to dismiss as 'polemic' Daniell's positive views on Tyndale's translation of certain contentious Greek words (133 n. 19), but she really ought to do us the courtesy of presenting *some* argument to support her opinion.

This book's publisher might at least have favoured it with the services of a good copy-editor and proof-reader, who could have dealt with some of the execrable punctuation and syntax and removed a few of the many spelling errors and inconsistencies which perplex the reader (especially in the notes and bibliography). As for English style, the tone is set in the introductory blurb, where we read that 'this book will be of particular value to literary studies, biblical studies, medieval and theology scholars'. Ashgate have indeed served their author ill. Refereeing by established scholars should be automatic for monographs which are claimed to present 'quality research drawn from an international field of scholarship'. A potentially valuable book might thereby have been rescued.

RICHARD MARSDEN

University of Nottingham

doi:10.1093/notesj/gji153

© The Author (2005). Published by Oxford University Press. All rights reserved. For Permissions, please email: journals.permissions@oupjournals.org

DOUGLAS GRAY (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Chaucer*. Pp. xxiii + 526. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2003. £65.00 (ISBN 0 19 811765 5).

AS medieval readers knew very well, the more monumental the piece of literature, the greater

the need for explanatory glosses to render the text accessible. It was unthinkable to study Plato, Boethius, Virgil, or Ovid (to mention only a few) without their attendant commentaries; some writers, such as Boccaccio and Christine de Pizan, even thoughtfully supplied their own glosses. Chaucer's œuvre is no exception, having suffered no lack of helpful 'companions' over the years. This new volume differs significantly, however, from earlier, comparable volumes edited by Beryl Rowland, Piero Boitani, and Peter Brown. Those collections are made up of a series of essays on disparate topics pertaining to the works of Chaucer, so that the reader has not so much a 'companion' as a group of 'companions', each with a different perspective on the complex and challenging literary legacy of the poet. Even though many of its entries have likewise been provided by invited contributors, Douglas Gray's *Oxford Companion* definitely bears the singular stamp of its editor. His lifetime of erudition (Gray is the J. R. R. Tolkien Professor of English Language and Literature Emeritus at the University of Oxford) is evident both in the individual entries authored by Gray and in the overall scope and balance of the volume.

The meat of the *Oxford Companion* is a large alphabetized compilation of entries related to Chaucer's life (including contemporary writers and historical figures) and works (including reception-history and criticism). It is prefaced by a 'Reader's Guide' which outlines the editorial principles governing the volume, a chronology of the years 1327 (accession of Edward III) to 1400 (death of Chaucer), and a series of maps. The prefatory material also includes a 'List of General Entries'; while the choice of entries is necessarily somewhat arbitrary, the list none the less greatly facilitates browsing in the volume. The end matter includes a twenty-five-page list of references, which in spite of the editor's disclaimer comes close to being 'a complete Chaucer bibliography' (502). The alphabetized entries themselves are of various kinds, ranging from names and places which are identified only in brief to long, discursive entries on such broad topics as 'architecture', 'emotion', 'politics', or 'tragedy'. The briefer entries are, to some extent, redundant with the glosses and

appended commentary to be found in *The Riverside Chaucer* (ed. Larry D. Benson (Boston and London: Houghton Mifflin, 1987)), which is perhaps the most widely used teaching text for university-level Chaucer classes. The longer entries, however, are very distinguished, being almost mini-essays on the given topics. Entries based on key terms used by Chaucer, such as 'maistrie' or 'gentillesse' are particularly useful as teaching aids: one can imagine asking students to begin their essays by examining the entry on a given topic in Gray's *Companion*, and then to go on to provide a close reading of the Chaucerian passages where the topic appears.

Gray has assembled a distinguished group of contributors to the volume, although a great proportion of the more than 2,000 entries are unsigned, composed by the editor himself. Among the contributors, however, J. D. North must be singled out for special praise. His entries, pertaining to various aspects of medieval science and philosophy, stand out not just by virtue of their learnedness but by the clear and accessible language in which complicated ideas are expressed. Particularly noteworthy as well are the two detailed yet concise entries on 'criticism of Chaucer' (I: 'to the earlier 20th c.' by Douglas Gray and II: 'since 1930' by Derek Pearsall). Through skilful cross-referencing and allusions to the lengthy bibliography that concludes the volume, these entries provide a useful overview of a sprawling history of literary reception and analysis. In sum, *The Oxford Companion to Chaucer* is an invaluable handbook for the study of Chaucer, a useful resource for the teacher as well as the student.

SUZANNE CONKLIN AKBARI

University of Toronto

doi:10.1093/notesj/gji154

© The Author (2005). Published by Oxford University Press. All rights reserved. For Permissions, please email: journals.permissions@oupjournals.org

HANNIBAL HAMLIN, *Psalm Culture and Early Modern English Literature*. Pp. xi + 289. Cambridge, New York, Oakleigh: Cambridge University Press, 2004. £50.00 (ISBN 0 521 83270 5).

THE language, images, and rhythms of the Psalms of David lay at the very heart

of English literary culture during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. For Renaissance poets, the Psalms were regarded as the direct product of divine inspiration and were the oldest widely known poems of the period. They also offered an impressively diverse variety of lyric modes and metrics. From a hierarchical perspective, as Sir Philip Sidney famously explained in his *Defence of Poetry*, divine lyricism was venerated as the earliest and pre-eminent of poetic forms: 'The chief both in antiquity and excellency, were they that did imitate the unconceivable excellencies of God. Such [was] David in his Psalms...'. Furthermore, through their cultural familiarity to generations of churchgoers and readers, the Psalms provided a spiritually uplifting and aesthetically challenging medium within which to test out the potential of one's own vernacular tongue. Individual psalms, groups of favourite or thematically linked psalms, or the whole biblical collection could be translated into English versions, either as literally as possible (depending on the original qualities of the language and rhythms of the chosen source) or reinterpreted through freer renditions, described variously as 'versifications', 'imitations', 'paraphrases', or 'metaphrases'. The sheer devotional potency and personal appeal of the Psalms seemed implicitly to validate a far more subjective and interpretative mode of translation than would have been expected, say, in rendering into English familiar classical poems by Virgil or Ovid. Renditions of the Psalms into vernacular versions offered to English poets of the period a stylistically complex and culminating creative challenge. These were, potentially, the greatest poems in the language because by filtering the words of God through the very highest levels of human poetic endeavour English versions of the Psalms provided, as Sidney had argued, the ultimate validation of the art of poetry itself.

Hannibal Hamlin's wide-ranging study of this central literary form is cogently organized into two distinct sections. Following a topical and thematic rather than chronological or author-centred structure, the first four chapters trace the developing history of English metrical psalms, beginning with versions by Sir Thomas Wyatt and Thomas Sternhold