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Geffrei Gaimar, *Estoire des Engleis/History of the English*, ed. and trans. by Ian Short. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009. liii + 496 pp. £150. ISBN 978-0-19-956942-7.

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In its range of coverage—from the literary importance of Gaimar’s history, the first extant in the French vernacular, composed c. 1136-37 to the historical context, patronage, and socio-cultural implications of the narrative itself—the opening paragraph of the introduction of Ian Short’s edition and translation of Gaimar’s *Estoire des Engleis* is impressive, a model of clarity and of both literary and historical acumen, which doctoral advisors should show students undertaking their theses, as there is much to be learned here. The rest of the book does not disappoint.

Scholars of Anglo-Norman language and insular texts who are already well acquainted with Short’s work will not be surprised that this edition and translation is masterful in numerous ways, only some of which can be enumerated below. Oxford University Press is to be commended on its foresight in having brought out this handsomely crafted volume of this little-known text at a time when production and marketing costs of scholarly texts are often prohibitive, making it available to a much broader audience than can be easily reached by the Anglo-Norman Text Society’s series of publications. By doing so, Oxford has done a considerable service not only to Anglo-Normanists but to the broader community of medievalists and students of Continental French texts as well as in other fields.

The forty-five page introduction is broken down into four titled sections—Manuscripts, Textual Tradition, Language, and Editorial Policy—and is preceded by a general prefatory section which provides the historical contexts of the narrative, Gaimar’s identity (insofar as it can be known), his patrons, issues of literacy and the importance of this work’s appearance in the vernacular. As Short notes, Gaimar’s history, which in its extant version (minus the opening on mythical Trojan origins of British history alluded to in the epilogue) traces the history of England from the arrival of Cerdic in 495 to the death of William the Conqueror’s eldest son, William Rufus, in 1100 and which has (most likely) as its primary source the Northern Recension of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, is “in general a conscientious historical narrative” (p. ix). Written ostensibly for Ralph and Constance Fitz-Gilbert, who a number of sources indicate were “well-connected members of the minor aristocracy in Lincolnshire,” Gaimar’s history has as “its principal claim to our attention...the fact that it provides an alternative secular voice to those of the better-known monastic and church chroniclers of the twelfth century” (p. ix); that Short takes as a given the status of Gaimar’s chronicle as historical writing and thus never breathes mention of the long-standing debate on whether vernacular historical writing of this early period should be considered romance or history is additionally praiseworthy.

This secular voice served not only to educate the Anglo-Norman nobility about England’s past seen largely through a new, courtly lens, but, Short argues, it also participated in the ongoing process of Norman integration into insular history and culture. But “instead of ‘helping the Normans to become English’ [1], as if it were a stark alternative, vernacular historiography was contributing to a form of multiculturalism that enabled the many different ethnicities that constituted English society to assimilate at their own pace and in their own time...Historiography was, in this respect, a tool for a

continual process of rearticulating and redefining a wide range of cultural allegiances across several centuries” (p. xlix). Especially within the bounds of an edition and translation, Short’s having set Gaimar’s history within the larger discussion of British and European multiculturalism in the twelfth through fourteenth centuries is important and noteworthy, if only because it raises the text from the status of potentially dry chronicle (where it has languished far too long, as Short himself notes) to cultural artifact, as all historical and literary texts are.

The description of the manuscripts is exemplary in its thoroughness and attention to detail; here, there are some references to editorial policy, which are developed further in the section devoted to that topic. In the section on the textual tradition, Short discusses the relationships among the manuscripts as well as the evolving political allegiances of Gaimar’s milieu as background to issues of patronage and manuscript production, emphasizing particularly the plethora of contemporary references in the longer epilogue contained only in his base MS, British Library Royal 13. A. xxi (early fourteenth century). Although the intricacies of the relationships among the four manuscripts, three of which contain the short epilogue which the editor proposes postdates the longer, more authentic epilogue cannot be outlined here, it is important to point out Short’s conclusion that the primary differences between the original poem and the redaction composed shortly after the Battle of Lincoln in February 1141 in which Stephen was defeated, reflect “a socio-political hostility to the house of Richmond on the part of the houses of Clare [Gaimar’s patrons] and Chester resulting from their respective involvement in the wars of succession between Stephen and Matilda” (p. xxx). The level of historical detail in this introduction is valuable, as are its lucidity of presentation and trustworthiness. A stemma proposing the relationships among the four manuscripts closes this section.

The first half of the section on language including phonology, morphology and syllabification should serve as a model for prospective textual editors. The second half of this section should probably have been set off by a separate title for this is where Short takes up issues of narrative modes, the depiction of women, and treatment of the Danes (the principle non-English, non-Norman socio-ethnic group treated by Gaimar), and of the baronage. Short posits the use of three primary narrative modes which serve to structure Gaimar’s history, the “annalistic, the amplificatory, and the closely allied anecdotal” (p. xxix), focusing on the three major “proto-romance interludes” (the story of Haveloc, lines 37-818, the rebellion led by Buern Bucecarle, lines 2573-2700, and the marriage of Ælfthryth and king Edgar, lines 3587-3974) which form the principal stage on which unfolds Gaimar’s treatment of women, the Danes and courtly codes of conduct (p. xl). These three passages, also major interpolations (inserted most likely by the poet himself in the second redaction), are probably the most widely known parts of Gaimar’s history.

They have received the broadest critical attention as examples of “nascent romance discourse” as they can be seen to “promote a courtly ideology by means of narrative adventure, incidental description, human interest, and dialogue,” each having love as a common element (p. xl). At the same time that Short notes on the one hand that “Gaimar’s depiction of women in general is noticeable for its absence of misogyny,” he also acknowledges that women characters are “invariably, to borrow Roberta Krueger’s formulation, displaced from the centre of narrative action” (p. xli). While not all readers may readily accept the assumption of a direct causal connection between the rise of courtly ideology and women’s participation in historical and literary production which informs Short’s generalizations such as that the chivalry dawning in the Anglo-Norman world was “becoming more courteous, more refined as women’s voices [were] raised and their desires as patrons and consumers of literature [were increasingly] made known” (p. xlvi), the critical value of his aim to place the study of early vernacular historical writing within the context of cultural transformations in Anglo-Norman England and beyond cannot be overstated.

With respect to editorial policy, Short defends Alexander Bell’s edition (ANTS, 1960) against the “grossly unfair” appraisal of Dominica Legge who objected to the composite nature of the latter edition (based on MS Durham Cathedral Library C. IV. 27 [late twelfth-early thirteenth centuries] together

with the longer authentic epilogue and many emendations based on the Royal MS on the grounds that it violated Bédierist principles of faithfulness to an ideal of authenticity rather than textual accuracy. However, Short nonetheless acknowledges that although Bell's text may well represent what Gaimar's twelfth-century poem may have looked like (rejecting the later short epilogue of the Durham MS and numerous readings), "it does so at the cost of jettisoning the sort of textual authenticity that modern scholarship, for better or for worse, demands" (pp. xlix-l). Thus, Short explains his decision to edit the Royal MS because it presents an authentic witness produced at a particular place and time—and not to such a great extent an editorial creation—albeit at two hundred years remove from the original poem. In this context again, as in virtually all other respects, the editor provides genuine "transparency in reporting" so highly valued today, so that readers may judge for themselves the relative merits of the editorial principles in question. This reviewer's only reservation is in reference to the decision to not reproduce Bell's variants, which requires that readers have access to that edition; given the already substantial length of the book, omission of the variants seems curious (and is quite possibly a decision made by the press and not by Short). That said, the list of line correspondences among the Rolls' edition (Hardy and Martin, 1888-89), Bell's edition, and Short's is useful.

In terms of translation strategies (also outlined in the section on editorial policy), Short points out somewhat apologetically that "translating poetry into prose inevitably leads to linguistic impoverishment, and in an effort to minimize this" he has sought "faithfully and accurately to render not only the sense of the original but also its tone" (p. lii). Perhaps to some North American ears, the translation may be set in too consistently high a register to always convey Gaimar's tone, resonating perhaps a bit too much of the "king's English" (for example translating "la maie amie" as "my own beloved" rather than as "sweetheart" when Cuheran speaks to his wife, the translator's decision to take the linguistic and semantic high road, as it were, is a far preferable alternative to aiming too low ("honey, pet"), though a middle ground might have a times been preferable. Admittedly, terms of address such as "amis" should not be translated simply as the literal "friend" since the term connotes much more than friendship if spoken by a woman to a man, and thus in those cases, Short's translation "my love" is a happy medium. Despite certain resonances, the highly nuanced landscape of this translation undeniably supplants those that have come before, and will put Gaimar on the historical and literary map in the academy beyond Anglo-Norman studies. Clarification of names and dates are also placed in the facing-page translation within brackets, and rejected readings appear beneath the original.

In addition to the masterful introduction, the exemplary edition of the text itself and the profoundly reliable translation, the book also contains a 102-page section of notes (pp. 357-458), which in many ways form a book unto themselves, complete with references. However, since the notes are so substantial, and thus carry an importance that some may feel almost equals that of the text itself, it would have been helpful to have used a system of alerting the reader to the existence of a note, perhaps with an asterisk at the end of a line (or the beginning of a passage) upon which a note is based. Although the bibliography was not intended to be exhaustive, it is prodigious and accurate, with few typographical errors. Just as dividing the bibliography into primary and secondary sources might have facilitated ease of use, in the index of proper names, breaking down longer entries into subtopics by theme for example would have helped readers search the text more easily, rather than needing to check each line reference one by one (in the case of longer entries such as *Daneis*, 109 references or *Engleis*, 68 references). In general, however, the index of proper names is very detailed and thus very useful. To be noted in particular are the separate entries for "*Franceis*¹, Franks/French" and "*Franceis*², French-speaking Normans and Anglo-Normans" and "*Norman*¹, (Continental) Normans" and "*Norman*², Anglo-Normans" (though the term "Anglo-Norman" has often been considered a misnomer when applied to people but not when applied to the language, texts, architecture, etc., though it is ultimately the most linguistically efficient way of referring to the French-speaking English descendants of William the Conqueror).

Despite minor reservations mentioned above, Ian Short is to be praised for having produced a study, edition, and translation that may rarely, if ever, be equaled in this field or in others. Its thoroughness, accuracy, seemingly effortless lucidity, grace and sensibility, while possibly unattainable, cannot help but inspire future generations of students and scholars.

NOTE

[1] R.H.C. Davis, *The Normans and Their Myth* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1976), pp. 126-27.

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