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Reviews

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impart supernatural abilities. Smith sees this as a merging of pagan and Christian ideology: the dead's powers are a combination of the author's worldview and the necessity of fulfilling certain thematic requirements.

Chapter 3 continues in a similar vein, but focuses on the process of wish-fulfilment, which can be either beneficial or harmful to heroes. Through an in-depth study of certain sagas Smith shows how the dead are placed there to mould (for better or for worse) the evolution, accomplishments and transformations of heroes such as Cú Chulainn and Grettir. Our understanding of this is aided by two flow charts at the end of the chapter.

The final chapter moves away from the dead's role as wish-fulfillers to a more complex understanding of their uses. Smith discusses this through the paradoxical situation that occurs in several sagas, when the dead seek to exploit the power of a human hero, rather than the other way round. Smith claims that in these sagas the dead are no longer used for wish-fulfillment but exploited for a 'singular intent: the glorification of the human condition' (p. 136). The distinction is an interesting one, but Smith does not go far enough in explaining why exactly this might be the case.

However, for the most part this book is a strong, thought-provoking piece of work. It is unfortunately brief, at times superficial (for example, it does not take into account much consideration of medieval Welsh literature or wider Celtic genres such as Arthurian romance) and has a similarly under-developed bibliography. Yet it fills a much-needed gap in the scholarship on a subject that has recently been as silent as a grave. The strong comparative Norse/Celtic angle is of special interest and serves to highlight just how similar the cultural attitudes to death were in medieval Scandinavia and the British Isles. Indeed, Smith seems to have a good grasp of both literatures, which makes him a welcome rarity. This book should open up new avenues for research, and due to its simple organizational layout and concise prose it would also provide eminently suitable for an undergraduate reading list. As such it is both thorough and relatively accessible to the layman. In conclusion, leaving aside a few relatively minor quibbles, the author should be commended for illuminating an increasingly popular yet so far under-researched field.

DORIAN KNIGHT UNIVERSITY COLLEGE LONDON

Janie Steen, *Verse and Virtuosity: The Adaptation of Latin Rhetoric in Old English Poetry*. Toronto Old English Series. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008. xii + 238 pp. ISBN 978-0-0802-091574. £45

Anglo-Saxonists are peculiarly lucky that so much of their subjects' literature has survived, much more so in that it has survived in more than one language. For too long, though, the literary output of the Anglo-Saxons has been divided, at least in the minds of those who have concerned themselves with its study, into two distinct spheres. Despite the overwhelming likelihood that Old English and Latin were written, in the main, by the same people; despite the significant and still largely unexplored interdependencies between the two languages on almost every level from the philological to the philosophical; and despite the relative frequency with which one was used to render the other in translation, or was written beside it, above it, below it or around it, the two distinct camps into which scholars of Old English and Anglo-Latin have divided remain stubbornly uncooperative. Old English has tended to catch the attention of students of English literature in whose intellectual backgrounds the looming figures of Chaucer, Langland and the Green Knight have long since scared off the likes of Ald-

helm, Bede and Alcuin. Anglo-Latin, on the other hand, has historically been the preserve of fugitives from university Classics departments for whom Aeneas and Cicero have proved more enduring companions than Beowulf and Wulfstan. Only relatively recently has the pioneering work of Michael Lapidge, Andy Orchard and their students made a compelling case for studying 'Anglo-Saxon Literature', both Latin and Old English, as a whole. Their work has illuminated many intriguing and, as yet, unexplored possibilities within the subject. A particularly pertinent issue remains one of cross-contamination: what impact did knowledge of Latin diction, vocabulary, poesy, rhetoric etc. have on Old English, and *vice versa*? Janie Steen's book is an attempt to address an important part of this question, and very welcome it is too.

Following a useful discussion of the nature of Classical and 'traditional' rhetoric, *Verse and Virtuosity* goes on to offer original readings of the Old English poems 'The Phoenix', 'Judgement Day II' and two Old English riddles (35 and 40, which are direct translations of two of Aldhelm's *Enigmata*); the book ends with a discussion of the poetry of Cynewulf. The poems and the riddles, which are all Old English translations of Latin works, provide rich pickings for Steen. In her analysis of 'The Phoenix', she discusses the extent to which the Latin poem's resonant Classical imagery and numerous rhetorical flourishes were recognised, understood and sensitively rendered by its Old English translator. With 'Judgement Day II', she looks at how the Old English translator grappled, not always successfully, with the powerful rhetoric of a more explicitly Christian poem. In examining the riddles, she highlights an interesting contrast between Riddle 35 (whose translator has gone to some length, she argues, to shear his verse of its Classical overtones and locate it securely within the frame of the Old English poetic tradition) and Riddle 40 (whose translator was less uncomfortable with Classical allusions). The culmination of this book is a discussion of the poetry of Cynewulf. Here, rather than examine the precise relationship between a particular Latin text and its Old English translation, Steen has the opportunity to discuss the understanding of Latin rhetoric on the part of an author who was responsible for a number of poems, none a direct translation. In demonstrating the skill with which Cynewulf was able to meld Latin rhetorical techniques with 'traditional', Old English poetic conventions, Steen reminds us of the elegance with which one of the language's very few known poets composed his work.

Steen's readings of these poems are enlightening and, so far as it goes, her methodology is solid and generally effective in proving that Latin rhetorical devices could be borrowed, more or less successfully, into Old English poetry. However, her purely literary approach to this subject can sometimes feel a little limited. Notwithstanding Steen's fine discussion of the mechanics by which knowledge of Classical rhetoric may (or, rather, may not) have been imported into Anglo-Saxon England, pertinent questions of intellectual history remain outstanding. Why, for instance, should these particular Latin poems have been translated into Old English? What differences are discernable in terms of reception, transmission and usage in Anglo-Saxon England between the vernacular and Latin forms of the texts? What can be said about the Anglo-Saxons' attitudes towards the act of translation in general? For that matter, is this something we can generalise about, or was the business of translating a text a specific, individual activity about which there was little 'accepted thinking' (the differences in how 'The Phoenix' and 'Judgement Day II' have been translated might point in this direction)? Perhaps most interesting of all is the question of how translations from Latin into Old English differed from those — admittedly far fewer in number — which went in the other direction, rendering the vernacular in Latin.

To be fair to Steen, these were not necessarily issues that she set out to address in *Verse and Virtuosity*; it is, perhaps, a testimony to the strength of her scholarship that it raises so many further questions. Overall, the detailed readings offered by Steen make this book a valuable contribution to an under-researched subject and also an important platform from which other scholars in the field might launch their own investigations.

BEN SNOOK KING'S COLLEGE LONDON

Laura Ashe, Ivana Djordjević and Judith Weiss, eds, *The Exploitations of Medieval Romance*. Studies in Medieval Romance 12. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2010. x + 191 pp. ISBN 9781843842125. £55

This volume of essays arises from the 2006 conference on Romance in Medieval Britain at the University of York. The titular 'exploitations' involve not only the expected sense of the exploitation of romance for political and social ends, but also the ways in which romance writers exploit existing motifs, genres and sources, as well as the exploitative actions and conventions that romance narrates, knowingly or unknowingly, from magic to class politics to the objectification of women. This range makes for a pleasingly diverse collection, and most of the contributions are lively, informative and likely to stimulate further readings and research.

Neil Cartlidge's opening essay argues that the fabliau *Le Chevalier qui fist les cons parler* exposes the commodification of sex and interest in material wealth latent in *Lanval*, which Marie de France's romance stylings tend to obscure. Corinne Saunders delineates the uses of magic in Middle English romance: often for love, mostly involving illusion, never altogether good. Arlyn Diamond's essay on gardens in popular romance repositions the garden away from its conventional interpretation as an aesthetic ideal of paradise and pleasure to reveal its social function as a feature of the arisocratic household. She observes that the aristocratic garden was designed to reveal wealth and status, but shows that in romance it in fact facilitates encounters between the wealthy, high-status lady of the house and the poor, low status man who seeks solitude in the garden by her window.

Judith Weiss and Anna Caughey both reveal an amusing incongruence in their chosen romances — *Gui de Warewic* and *The Buik of Kyng Alexander the Conquerour* — where in each case the hero's portrayal towards the end of his life is out of step with his earlier actions. Weiss sees Gui as appropriating the roles of both saint (despite not being very saintly) and pilgrim (which gives him an outsider's freedom to speak) from existing literary traditions. But she shows that the earlier part of the romance does not give him enough reason to plausibly repent at the end. Caughey demonstrates that the *Buik* falls into four generically distinct sections: first, Alexander's youth is written as mirror for princes focused on the military; next, a section on courtliness and love, from which Alexander stands aloof, follows, swiftly succeeded by the author's real focus, Alexander's travels and conquests involving a multitude of Wonders of the East. But all that has gone before is undercut by the final section, Alexander's tragic fall, which the author presents as the inevitable consequence of Alexander's many character flaws, none of which he has made obvious to the reader before this point, and which would logically seem to render Alexander inadequate for the exemplary role in which the author first placed him.

Rosalind Field and Melissa Furrow consider the relation between romance in England and France. Field presents an invaluable survey of the fourteenth-century Middle English romances derived from French sources, and shows that most came from readily available