Thomas G. Duncan, ed. *Medieval English Lyrics and Carols.*
Rochester: D. S. Brewer, 2013. xiv + 466 pp. $45. ISBN: 978–1–84384–341–2.

It is good to have in hand this new edition of Thomas G. Duncan's two-volume Penguin edition, *Medieval English Lyrics, 1200–1400* (1995) and *Late Medieval English Lyrics and Carols, 1400–1530* (2000), though its appearance also serves as a reminder of how often Penguin has allowed some of its most interesting and useful titles, particularly from its medieval and Renaissance series, to go out of print. Duncan has taken the opportunity to revise his introduction and commentary, but has largely retained the Penguins' texts and annotations, so that, following a revised introduction, the present edition comprises two main parts, each corresponding to one of his two now-out-of-print Penguin editions.

The introduction in particular is noteworthy for a thoughtful consideration of stanzas and meter, which, as Duncan rightly points out, are often overlooked, and which usefully allows for "hypothesis and personal judgment" (44) in their determination. Other more distinctively literary-critical matters, like tone, voice, and intention, are dealt with more summarily. Duncan's commentary on individual lyrics combines detailed textual criticism with extended and useful identification of historical and social allusions, though its linguistic and manuscript considerations will be of most use to advanced students, who would not require the degree of textual modernization here present, and who might usefully have been directed to a greater range of critical sources. Throughout, the student is encouraged to follow the editor along closely, rather than to engage the lyric itself.

The most problematic aspect of this edition may be its editorial principles, which worked well enough in Penguin editions aimed at a general audience, but are less obviously indicated in a text intended for students, even when supported by academic commentary and annotation. Certain of these practices are unexceptional, even normal, in an edition intended for undergraduates, as when thorn and yogh, i/j, u/v, w/v, qu, qw, etc. are modernized. A difficulty emerges, however, when Duncan simply reproduces his Penguin texts in part 1, which contains lyrics of the thirteenth and early fourteenth century, but which are presented in "the spelling and grammar of late fourteenth-century London English" (52), effectively offering the student texts that appear in no known manuscript. As Duncan notes, there is precedent for this practice in E. J. Dobson and F. L. Harrison's edition *Medieval English Songs* (1979), but it has not been widely followed, and current practice, particularly in academic editions like this one, is to accord a higher degree of respect to manuscript readings than is observed here, while making generous allowance for specific emendation.

Theory somewhat dwarfs the actual editorial practice in this context, but the editor defends his procedure thus: "Dialect variants are sometimes of literary significance, as in rhyme or in alliteration. In the main, however, the linguistic diversity of the lyrics [as is preserved in manuscripts], while of interest to philologists, only constitutes a needless barrier between the modern reader and the Middle English poems as poetry" (47). The contrary argument will be apparent,

though I cannot develop it here, except to suggest that adequate glossing (such as is present here) would allow for the preservation of original manuscript readings, and that there is nothing at all amiss in encouraging students to engage and understand the variety and diversity of medieval texts generally. The role of the editor is not to make everything new, or to sweep variation away.

Every edition calls out for revision at some point, and apart from reconsidering part 1, the editor may wish, in the next printing, to add references to the *Digital Index of Middle English Verse,* and its now more-or-less indispensable numbers; to include rather more ballads than now appear, the more so since the battle over the existence of Middle English ballads — "Judas" and "St. Stephen" are here called "ballad-like" (44) — is now effectively ended; to add a glossary, so as to obviate the need for some of the more obvious glossing and to encourage students to acquire as many sight words as possible; and finally to extend, even greatly, reference to literary criticism, which is limited, and confined largely to British sources.

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