MICHAEL GLENCROSS, *Reconstructing Camelot: French Romantic Medievalism and the Arthurian Tradition*. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1995. Pp. x, 192. ISBN: 0-85992-463-1. $53.

In tracing the views of scholars and critics toward the Middle Ages in 1800–1860, Glencross shows how ideology shaped not only Romantic views of medieval history and literature but also influenced the development of medieval studies. The Romantic interest in the Middle Ages 'meant above all the construction of an idea of the Middle Ages, a reading of the Middle Ages as text' (x).

The first chapter describes the ideological uses of the Middle Ages by minor liberal and royalist writers in the Restoration period, who held different notions of the relation of literature to society, a major preoccupation of Romantic historicism. The liberal historian, Sismondi, for example, at first tended to see chivalry as 'purely a literary compensation for feudalism's evils' (5), while he later praised feudalism as limiting monarchy's despotism. In general, though, Restoration historical writing shows a shift from a confident view of chivalry to a concern with the darker forces 'conveniently represented by feudalism' (25).

Chapter Two analyzes the debate on medieval literature in 1813–1830: French 'Romantic critics find in the Middle Ages the reflection of their own imagination' (56). This debate underlies Romantic scholars' need to understand and classify medieval languages, especially Old Provençal. The work of Raynouard, A.-W. Schlegel and others, reveal two fundamental traits of Romantic literary criticism: 'the importance of the search for origins and the attachment to the role of individual genius in the literary tradition' (34).

Chapter Three, 'Towards the "Real" Middle Ages,' examines both the problematic place of medieval literature in the emerging structures of scholarship, and the professionalization of the Ecole des Chartes and the universities in 1830–1860. Glencross also describes the split in scholars' views of Carolingian and Arthurian texts: Paulin Paris, among others, saw the Carolingian epics as more moral and more nationalistic than non-French, immoral Arthurian material. Few editions of Arthurian works appeared in the first half of the century, while the *Chanson de Roland* (1837) was given paradigmatic status by aesthetic, moral and political considerations.

Three Romantic historians and their search for national identity through medieval literature are the subject of Chapter Four. The works of Quinet, Michelet, and Henri Martin reveal the conflict between the Romantic interest in popular oral poetry and the cult of the individual creative genius, which was further tied to the Romantic's obsessive need to divine a specifically French national identity. Quinet's writings show the construction of a Romantic poetics in which 'Arthur or the Arthurian hero becomes a *figura* for the Romantic hero wandering through a forest of symbols, always searching for the ideal and fleeing the real' (97), while Martin attempted 'to trace the historical continuity of the Celtic contribution to the French national tradition' (116).

The Celtic contribution played an important role in the debate on the origins and diffusion of the Arthurian material, as outlined in Chapter Five. The Celtic question surfaced first in opposing theories of Celtic vs. Provençal origins, then in opposing

claims for the two branches of the Celtic contribution, the Welsh and the Breton. Both Fauriel and La Villemarqué, according to Glencross, despite the gulf between their positions, were searching for 'the earliest and "purest" manifestations of the popular culture' (135).

New versions of Arthurian material that appeared in 1812–1860 are the subject of Chapter Six, which discusses both adaptations and translations of medieval materials and two original works of medievalism, Creuzé de Lesser's *Les chevaliers de la Table Ronde* (1812) and Quinet's *Merlin l'enchanteur* (1860). In addition new evidence is given for the importance of illustrated magazines in the diffusion of medieval vulgarizations.

The author's conclusion stresses the importance of the broader ideological context for the study of the Arthurian tradition in this period. The interaction of two factors drove Romantic medievalism: 'the specialisation of knowledge and the celebration of new values such as the national and the spontaneous' (174–75). Above all, this period is noteworthy for witnessing the growth of Celticism.

Reconstructing Camelot, based on its author's French dissertation, is an erudite work; 35 contemporary periodicals and 120 nineteenth-century texts are discussed. The study provides an excellent introduction to the subject, but the 'place occupied by the Arthurian corpus in French Romanticism…is surprisingly and disappointingly marginal' (173). While it is important to understand the reasons for that marginality, Glencross's analysis can also help us understand our own assumptions about medieval literature and society. And along the way we pick up some fascinating facts: the term *médiéval* only appeared in 1874 (64); Renan described the Celtic race as 'essentiellement féminin' (141); Creuzé de Lesser's *Les chevaliers* was 'the first and only attempt in the first half of the century to tell the story of the rise and fall of Arthur and the knights of the Round Table' (158; for other 'firsts,' see 4, 72, 79, 133, 139, 147). Thus, despite the dearth of Arthurian material, Glencross's study is an absorbing reconstruction of French Romantic medievalism.

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