

norris j. lacy, ed., *Medieval Arthurian Literature: A Guide to Recent Research*. Garland Reference Library of the Humanities, vol. 1955. New York and London: Garland, 1996. Pp. xii, 471. isbn: 0-8153-2160-0. \$73.

As the annual volumes of the *Bibliographical Bulletin of the International Arthurian Society* are dangerously close to demanding a two-tome edition, periodical critical surveys of recent scholarship have become essential for individual scholars who can no longer possibly keep up to date with the developments in the complex world of Arthuriana. Aware of the possible pitfalls of attempting inclusiveness, Norris Lacy has wisely limited his volume's focus to the medieval vernacular literature of western Europe and assembled an impressive list of specialists (James P. Carley: England; Marianne E. Kalinke: Scandinavia; Keith Busby and Karen A. Grossweiner: France; Bart Besamusca: Low Countries; John T. Koch: Celtic Lands; Christopher Kleinhenz: Italy; William C. McDonald: Germany; Harvey L. Sharrer: Spain and Portugal) to provide reviews of essential trends for the major national/linguistic traditions within the last 15 to 30 years. Each of these critical discussions is accompanied by a bibliography including articles, books, editions, or translations 'that ought to be known by anyone' (p. xi) dealing with the texts in question.

As might be expected, what 'ought to be known by anyone' is very much subject to the respective authors' choices. In general, the organization of the volume into national/linguistic traditions works well, especially when Besamusca's essay identifies how much Dutch and Belgian Arthurian scholars can gain from exchanging information about Middle Dutch literature with colleagues who speak and write in other languages (an insight which will soon result in an exciting collection of comparative articles by a Romanist [Lacy], a Germanist [Haug], and an Anglicist [Riddy] on the *Walewein* in the *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandse taal- en letterkunde*). Similarly, Kleinhenz footnotes pertinent dissertations on Italian Arthuriana both from the United States and Italy, and the bibliographies of all non-English traditions demonstrate the decidedly transdisciplinary and international spirit of Arthurian studies. In Carley's 'England' bibliography, however, foreign-language titles from non-English speaking countries—with the exception of two famous names (Crépin; Fichte)—are conspicuously absent. This tendency is even more palpable in the realm of doctoral dissertations, where only English titles from English-speaking countries have been included while not a single one of the numerous deserving dissertations written in other European languages made the cut.

A controversial topic is taken up in Lacy's own concise section on 'Arthurian Translation.' Like McDonald, who reports a serious decline of training in Middle High German on both sides of the Atlantic, Lacy pronounces a universal negative verdict about current medievalists' capabilities in dealing with sources in Latin and one or two more early languages 'with comparative ease' (p. 451). Although he expresses his regrets about this weakening of philological rigor, he appears to have given up on the possibility that this tendency can be mended. His reaction is to ask the rhetorical question 'whether it is better to make texts known through translation or simply leave them unread' (p. 452), to happily announce that the trend toward translations 'has made larger numbers of medieval texts accessible to a far wider public,' and to

find consolation—quite unrealistically—in the hope that ‘perhaps the pleasures of the [scil. ‘translated’] medieval text will lead some...readers back to the original language’ (ibid.). With this conspicuous self-positioning Lacy is walking the fine line between lamenting a philologist’s resigned ‘Ubi sunt...’ and subscribing to Lee Patterson’s claim that (philological) medievalists indulge in the blissful marginality and sequestration originally orchestrated by ‘the master narrative [of modernity] first put in place by the Renaissance’ because it created for them an elitist academic hideout (‘On the Margin: Postmodernism, Ironic History, and Medieval Studies,’ *Speculum* 60 [1990], 101). However, as noble as the cry for a democratization by translation and the possibility of a market for medieval literary texts may sound, it will result in dealing with shadows instead of originals. For the short-term goal of making our field more relevant we will not only lose the waning competency in historical languages we still teach but also have to rely—in the future—on a tiny minority of specialists to inform us about what those original texts are all about. Therefore, while a stronger emphasis on translating Arthuriana can only be welcomed, the parallel abandonment of reading (and translating) from originals means a step many medievalists should be unwilling to take.

Perhaps the most significant feature of this research guide is that it identifies a new tenor in Arthurian studies toward formerly ‘secondary’ texts. Although this development is in part, as Lacy sees it, a ‘natural reaction to the enormous body of scholarship devoted to Chrétien, Wolfram, Malory, and a handful of others’ and due to a wide-spread tendency ‘to expand the canon to include texts once largely or entirely ignored’ (p. viii), it also indicates the political necessity for younger scholars to carve out niches for themselves in yet uncharted territory. A concomitant trend exemplified by the increasing bibliographic space occupied by so-called ‘second-tier Arthurian literatures’ (e.g., Hispanic, Dutch, Italian, Scandinavian) is the recognition that these texts were only marginalized because of their minor importance for their respective national traditions. Lacy’s volume prudently underlines the literary and aesthetic value of these productions by allotting sufficient space to their discussion while controlling the length of an otherwise overly dominant chapter on French Arthurian literature.

All in all, this volume is a comprehensive and well-balanced overview of recent Arthurian criticism. For old hands and newcomers alike, the wealth of discussion about topical issues as well as the ample bibliographic information will serve as reliable guides through the maze of published material in the field. Considering the current speed of critical production and the increasing influence of literary theory, a revision of this greatly helpful project may become a desideratum sooner than the closure and completeness brought about by the hefty volume suggest.

richard j. utz  
University of Northern Iowa