

ELIZABETH ARCHIBALD and A.S.G. EDWARDS, eds., *A Companion to Malory*. Arthurian Studies, 37. Cambridge, U.K.: Brewer, 1996. Pp. xv, 262. ISBN: 0-85991-4437. \$53.

This collection of original essays by mostly Canadian and British scholars aims 'to render Malory's achievement more accessible to modern readers' (xv), apparently mainly 'students' (xi). Its 'quite straightforward' plan includes the rubrics of contexts, art, and 'posterity' (that is, reception) and a bibliography. The need for such a volume is obvious. In the more than thirty years that I have been studying Malory, an increasing sophistication has permeated the study of the *Works*, and, while questions of textual provenance and authority continue to resonate (see ARTHURIANA 5.2 and 7.1), more fruitful attention to the (words of the) text in whichever version moves on at an astonishing pace.

Also increasingly, such trendy critical modes as feminist/gender/cultural studies have made their moves on Malory (Alas!, some will say, even into ARTHURIANA!)—not necessarily a bad thing except for a concomitant tendency toward self-referential jargon. The present volume contains essays on the 'Tales' themselves, (its contributors are agreed on the Vinaver rescension), on the MS and edition controversies, and on style and sources as well as on political and social contexts, chivalry and women, but is refreshingly free of such jargon.

Part 1, 'Malory in Context,' includes Carol M. Meale's "'The Hoole Book': Editing and the Creation of meaning in Malory's Text,' Richard Barber's 'Chivalry and the *Morte Darthur*,' Elizabeth Edwards's 'The Place of Women in the *Morte Darthur*,' Felicity Riddy's 'Contextualizing *Le Morte Darthur*: Empire and Civil War,' Terence McCarthy's 'Malory and His Sources,' Jeremy Smith's 'Language and Style in Malory,' and P.J.C. Field's 'The Malory Life-Records.' Meale's essay is an admirably economical discussion of the only extant Malory MS, the structural and critical debates occasioned by its editing by Eugene Vinaver and its relations to its printing by William Caxton, and (as is true with other aspects of Malory studies) the essentially 'open-ended nature' of the arguments. Barber's discussion of chivalry is learned but less pointed: discussion of the Germans Gottfried and Wolfram, great poets but unknown to Malory, detracts from exploration of 'the Anglo-French' tradition he admits was the formative one. He ignores, moreover, persuasive counter-arguments to his reading of the Grail Quest as 'a didactic weapon in the hands of the church, perhaps a Cistercian monk' (28), not only by Jean Frappier forty years ago ('les Cisterciens n'écrivaient pas des romans') but by Jill Mann later in this very book: 'the Grail romances use religion as a means of exalting the dignity of the knightly class' (208). Similarly, in her sometimes perceptive article on Malory's women, E. Edwards depends upon a single specimen of feminist criticism—Catherine La Farge's 'The Hand of the Huntress: Repetition and Malory's *Morte Darthur*'—without recognizing other recent work on his treatment of gender.

A more inclusive and, indeed, excellent essay is Felicity Riddy's, which uses a dual examination of history and literature to show how Malory's 'narrative of empire and civil war' was both 'inherited' and 'invested with new meanings' (55), ultimately derived from Geoffrey of Monmouth's 'life written backwards' (61) through

intermediate representations of society and fiction into the *Morte's memento mori*. Also broader in scope than is usual is McCarthy's study of sources: his Malory was a much better-read 'expert...in control of his task of re-creation' than is usually assumed, but as a 'traditional writer' free to follow his sources 'slavishly if he so chooses' (81). Similar emphasis on the author's 'deeply conservative' (113) values, apparent in the (somewhat neglected) 'Englishness' of his style as well, emerges from Smith's close study of language, although this reviewer regrets his positing of Malory as 'simply the ideological mouthpiece of his intended noble audience' (113). Field's biographical account of the Malory life-records, supplemented with a select bibliography, usefully divided into 'Printed Records and Calendars' and 'Scholarly Debate,' is a reminder (if any of us needed it) of how much all *Morte* aficionados owe to this energetic and meticulous scholar.

Part 2's 'The Art of the *Morte Darthur*' offers treatment of the eight tales of Vinaver's edition themselves in six essays (discussion of the first two as 'Beginnings' and of the 'Gareth' and the 'Lancelot' are combined). As with the 'Context' group, results vary. Elizabeth Archibald's study of Arthur's rise to kingship— and emperorship is well organized, but blurs some distinctions: Torre's mother's account of her sexual encounter with Pellinor is not solely of rape (141) but rather the intriguing "half be force he had my maydynhode" (*Works* 62); there is still some question about how many Ladies of the Lake there are (143); and Tristram is not 'never actually one' (145) of the Round Table but, as Helen Cooper notes in her contribution to this volume, joins it after Lancelot brings him in (200). Barbara Nolan's assessment of the next two tales is aimed at showing how the 'compositional separateness' of the stories of Gareth and Lancelot 'contribute...to the whole book's tragic effect' (154), conflating their heroes' triumph with Malory's 'triumph of generic traditions' (180)—an interesting aperçu which lends itself to further study. In Helen Cooper's analysis of the 'Tristram' we have not only an eloquent connection of this most misunderstood of Malory's works with contemporary affairs—'an implied appeal to those who wielded political and military power at any social level to use it for good' and 'a recognition of the political turmoil in which he and his readers had played a part' (198)—but a valuable appendix on the maligned tale's structure.

Recently working on the Grail story myself, I had all the more admiration for Jill Mann's treatment of this—another much maligned—Malorian composition. Starting from the Frapperian insight cited above, she suggests a reading which connects the 'religious mystery' of the 'body and blood...as consecrated symbols of Christ's redemptive suffering' with the knightly experience of 'hazarding [the] body in combat and shedding blood'—his own and others'—as a touchstone to chivalric worth (208), situating 'the full realization of wholeness beyond earthly experience' (220). C. David Benson's discussion of Malory's last two books, the *Morte* proper so to speak, ratifies the 'real immortality' for Gawain, Guinevere and Lancelot as residing in their 'never more heroic, loving, and generous [acts]...as they leave' their world (238).

A.S.G. Edwards's 'Reception of Malry's *Morte Darthur*' is broad but somewhat perfunctory, although well documented. Documentation is perhaps my chief quibble with this mostly satisfying book, but it is an important one. Even 'highly selective'

lists (253) owe something to their readers when the book's title is as broad as this one. Such readers would benefit, first, by having chapter bibliographies such as Field provides here and the late Beryl Rowland had her contributors supply for the analagous *Companion to Chaucer Studies*. It is not enough to refer readers to footnotes to 'individual chapters' or not to cite essays in collections separately. Second, students of Malory deserve to have citations, under 'Bibliography and Reference Works,' to *The Arthurian Encyclopedia*, *The Arthurian Handbook*, and the annual bibliographies of the International Arthurian Society, which offer a full and continuing context to their studies.

But I am hopeful that its editors will incorporate such amenities into subsequent editions of what is already a much needed tool for all Malorians, and will attend to the few typos I found for instance on pp. 142, 224, 248, 249 (a sentence fragment) and 95 (a missing *de* in the French quotation about style). There is, meanwhile, enough meat here to whet the appetite of all who love the *Morte Darthur*.

MAUREEN FRIES

State University of New York at Fredonia