

ROSS G. ARTHUR and NOEL L. CORBETT, trans. with notes and commentary, *The Knight of the Two Swords: A Thirteenth-Century Arthurian Romance*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996. Pp xviii, 188. ISBN: 0-8130-1439-5. \$39.95.

The Knight of the Two Swords' subtitle, 'A Thirteenth-Century Arthurian Romance,' is telling; this poem, which Ross G. Arthur and Noel L. Corbett are the first to translate into English, is thirteenth-century in its encyclopedic nature, Arthurian in its rich reference to the broad range of the Matter of Britain, and a romance in the wealth of motifs and ideas it draws from that narrative tradition. A double romance, like Chrétien's *Le Conte de Graal*, it tells the stories of Gawain and of the Knight of the Two Swords, who between them have a vast number of adventures of every medieval kind (with the exception of meeting dragons). Within the poem's 12,353 lines, the heroes encounter numerous damsels, some in distress; fight countless battles; and handle far more than the two swords the title suggests.

However, this poem is not absurdly paratactic; these stories serve to show Gawain's progress towards a more selfless version of knighthood as he learns to fight for others rather than for personal gain, while the Knight of the Two Swords moves from young and unproven to mature and worthy of his final name. As these two characters develop, other themes are revealed; the romance comments on the social tensions between warrior knights and the monarchy, demonstrating the necessity of proving one's right to hold his or her status. Challenges to the social order, issues of property rights and inheritance, and the dangers of military threat are all treated within *The Knight of the Two Swords*. In addition, the poem considers more traditional romance themes such as love at first sight, knightly courage, and ideals of man- and womanhood. All together, the poem focuses on the knight's need to demonstrate his value through the acceptance of the responsibilities of his courtly rank.

As a result of the variety contained within *the Knight of the Two Swords*, it is a valuable addition to the library of available medieval texts, and would prove itself useful in a number of Medieval Studies courses; the enormous detail of courtly life, notably thorough and elaborate descriptions of clothes, rooms, and food, would even enhance historical examinations of the period. The multiple encounters between men and women in the poem make this text valuable for considerations of gender in the Middle Ages. And the wealth of romance themes and motifs would add considerably to a course on Romance. The translation is eminently readable and the story accessible; Ross and Corbett made a wise choice to translate the poem into prose, as it eases the reader's sorting out of the complex story.

The one problem with this text lies in its production; the translators note in their brief but comprehensive introduction that the three versions of the poem in medieval French—two editions and one the unique manuscript—that '[n]one of these sources is readily available or easy to read' (xv). This being the case, I wished that Ross and Corbett had chosen to provide a facing-page edition. This poem raises many interesting issues for scholars of medieval literature, who will then have to go to some length to find an original-language copy from which to work. All the aforementioned areas that make *The Knight of the Two Swords* useful for a variety of classes

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also make it cry out for scholarly study—historical, gender, narrative, etc.—and an accessible French version would have aided that enterprise significantly. I would also have welcomed more notes; after the thorough and engaging introduction, I would have found further commentary valuable throughout the text. The poem suggested many historical issues and literary connections that I would have liked discussed or explained in footnotes; students of medieval literature, who are often fuzzy about historical and literary context, would benefit particularly from more extended commentary. The glossary and textual notes are useful supplements; they make this reader want more. That said, it is to Ross and Corbett's credit that they have identified and made available such a lively and rich work.

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