
Elizabeth Archibald and David F. Johnson (eds.). *Arthurian Literature XXIX*. Cambridge: Brewer, 2012, x + 242 pp., 3 illustrations, £ 50.00.

The book under review is the 29th volume of the annual journal *Arthurian Literature*,¹ which is edited by Elizabeth Archibald and David F. Johnson, two eminent researchers in medieval and especially, Arthurian literature.² The book's nine articles are preceded by a List of Illustrations, a Foreword and a List of Contributors (vi–x). *Arthurian Literature XXIX* is a well-edited volume apart from the occasional misprint and some bibliographical inconsistencies in the footnotes. Personally, I would wish for a bibliography at the end of each contribution.

The volume's contents “range from a mid-twelfth century Latin *vita* of the Welsh saint Dyfrig to the early modern Arthur of the Dutch, from Edward III's waning interest in the Order of the Round Table to the central thematic importance of Cornwall to Malory's *Morte Darthur*, and also across much of Europe” (vii). One can deduce from their titles that articles V to VIII are the ones con-

¹ For more information see <<http://www.boydellandbrewer.com/search.asp?q=journals>>.

² See, for instance, Archibald and Putter (2009) and Claassens and Johnson (2000).

cerned with Malory's *Morte Darthur*, "the most comprehensive, coherent and consecutively-written single-author treatment of the Arthurian legend until the modern period" (161). This review will concentrate on these four contributions for reasons that reflect my personal interest only.³

The first two articles on the *Morte Darthur*, P. J. C. Field's "Malory's Source-Manuscript for the First Tale of *Le Morte Darthur*" (111–119) and Linda Gowans' "Malory's Sources – and Arthur's Sisters – Revisited" (121–142) are obviously source studies. Field starts off with the three French Post-Vulgate texts of *Merlin*, two of which are possible sources for Malory's first tale.⁴ These are Cambridge University Library, MS Additional 7071 and the so-called Huth MS, London, British Library, MS Additional 38117. The manuscripts are introduced briefly (112f.). Unfortunately, however, they are neither dated nor is there a stemma given that would reveal their relationship to each other. This may have seemed self-evident to the expert author,⁵ but it might have helped the more uninformed reader's understanding of Field's train of thoughts.

Central to the article is a discussion of two earlier contributions to the topic by Eugène Vinaver (1949 & 1990) and Jonathan Passaro (2009), the first preferring the Huth MS, the second the Cambridge MS as the source of the first tale. Field offers his own analysis (115ff.), including in his deliberations two Spanish printed editions of the 15th and 16th century respectively (112). With Field conceding that "certainty is hard to find in textual criticism" (119), the discussion is interesting but not very strong. He concludes that his examples "make it unreasonable to suppose that Malory worked up his first tale from Cambridge Additional 7071" (119).

Gowans' is a complex article including well-devised comparisons of different versions of the earlier part of the *Merlin* story – e.g. she shows how a third daughter for the Duke of Cornwall came to life in some versions (123–128) –, giving quotes from an Italian and various French manuscripts. The article is skillfully written, explains relationships, disentangles the interrelations of several versions of the story and offers even more details in informed footnotes. The author's conclusion leaves space for further research: "I suggest, therefore, that

3 The other five contributions are: Christopher Berard, "Edward III's Abandoned Order of the Round Table" (1–40); Julian Luxford, "King Arthur's Tomb at Glastonbury: The Relocation of 1368 in Context" (41–51); Joshua Byron Smith, "Benedict of Gloucester's *Vita Sancti Dubricii*: An Edition and Translation" (53–100); Sjoerd Levelt, "New Evidence for an Interest in Arthurian Literature in the Dutch Low Countries in the Fifteenth and Early Sixteenth Centuries" (101–110); Bart Besamusca and Jessica Quinlan, "The Fringes of Arthurian Fiction" (191–242).

4 For a comprehensive summary of Malory's sources see p. 111f.

5 Field's new edition of Malory's *Morte Darthur* is to be published in November 2013 by Boydell & Brewer.

the number of lost *Merlin* manuscripts, the complexity of their cyclical composition, and the amount of transmission activity in England, were all greater than may have been envisaged” (142).

This thread is not taken up by the next two articles on the *Morte Darthur*. Ryan Naughton is concerned with Sir Gareth (143–160), and Dorsey Armstrong links Malory’s *Morte* closely to Cornwall (161–189). Naughton’s “Peace, Justice and Retinue-Building in Malory’s ‘The Tale of Sir Gareth of Orkney’” is a well-structured article consisting of four main parts. The author makes use of Paul Strohm’s theory of the intended audience (cf. note 8) – logically, he assumes an intended *knightly* audience. Consequently, the tale is read as an exemplum for the benefit of this audience “and not just [as] an idealized representation of knightly acumen”. By doing this “readers can see how the youth’s adventures suggest that historical knights should use any means [...] to subdue rebellious peers and subjects and thus (re)establish and maintain peace and justice” (145). Gareth is depicted as defender of justice in the first part of the article (146–8). The second part focusses on the episode of the Red Knight and Lyonesse, and *the perelyste knyght* is unfavourably compared to Gareth (148–152). The third part pivots around the mercy Gareth shows towards the Red Knight (153–155), while the fourth part concentrates on an analysis of Gareth and his battles with the “colour-coded knights” (cf. note 4).

Naughton shows how the hero broadens his retinue of followers (155–159), and this retinue-building is convincingly linked to bastard feudalism “that reached its apogee during the Wars of the Roses” and is defined as “the disintegration of land-based feudal ties and the rise of service for pay that emerged in the High and Later Middle Ages” (156). This was certainly viewed with negative feelings by the “‘natural’ nobility” (157), and maybe even led to a decline in knightly ideals – one need only think of the ambivalent characterisation of Chaucer’s Knight in the General Prologue to his *Canterbury Tales* – or even to the disruption of social order. Yet Malory “ensures that the chivalric community of the romance is not torn asunder with rival fractions” by assimilating Gareth’s knights “into the Arthurian chivalric community” (158), which means that Arthur becomes lord over all of them.

Naughton’s main points are nicely summed up at the end of the paper (159f.). Throughout the article, the reader is carefully guided through the author’s argumentation by a close reading of Malory’s tale and a presentation of each argument according to the rulebook of academic writing. Somewhat redundantly, each part concludes with what the intended knightly audience was meant to deduce.

Dorsey Armstrong’s contribution is titled “Mapping Malory’s *Morte*: The (Physical) Place and (Narrative) Space of Cornwall” (161–189). From beginning

to end, her article is a good read. One can find a link to Naughton's preceding paper right at the beginning where Armstrong considers the topic of overlordship in the *Morte Darthur* and where the reader might catch a glimpse of an ideal knightly world from Malory's source, in contrast to his own version of the Arthurian legend (cf. 163).

The article's starting point is the conflict between Uther Pendragon, King of England, and the Duke of Cornwall though "technically Cornwall should be considered part of 'Englond'" – both in Malory's days and during the periods when most of his sources were composed (162). There we have a duke and a king but nevertheless we are left with unresolved questions of overlordship (162). Considering that the *Morte* begins and ends with the mention of 'matters of Cornwall', mostly problematic in nature, and that the middle third originates there (see below), Armstrong posits that "in this light, understanding Cornwall would seem to be critically necessary to understanding Malory's text" (162). Her theoretical tools to achieve this are postcolonial (163f.).

In part I, Armstrong explains the specific position of Cornwall on linguistic and geographical grounds. Though the region beyond the River Tamar officially belonged to Britain from the 7th century onwards – "more or less" (168) – it somehow evaded being part of it as well as it evaded open conflict with it. Part II turns from this Cornish/British microcosm to the macrocosm of medieval *mappae mundi* where Britain is habitually portrayed as being squeezed in on the edge of the known world. This was meant to heighten its position of uniqueness (170).⁶ Thus, "Cornwall was on the edge of the edge" (170), in some maps it was even depicted as a real island separated completely from the mainland by the Tamar (cf. Figure 3 at 178). The focus of part III is on an historical account of Cornwall in relation to the rest of Britain (176ff.). Significantly, Cornwall was successful in separating itself in many respects. For instance, it played hardly any military role during the Wars of the Roses (179). The problematic aspect of this in relation to Malory and the *Morte* is obvious:

In 1327 Bishop Grandisson declared that Cornwall was not only "the ends of the earth, but [...] the very end of the ends thereof". And from this edge of Britain comes the ruler who unites, centralizes, and expands that entity known as 'Britain' – at least, writers like Malory seemed to wish to imagine that he had (180).

Part IV changes the perspective: How did the Cornish view Arthur? Which claims did Cornwall lay on the legend? To answer these questions, Armstrong was helped by the fortuitous circumstance that a late medieval Cornish miracle

⁶ Here, Armstrong strongly relies on Lavezzo (2006).

play, *Bewnans Ke*, was unearthed in 2000 (180) and has hardly gained any criticism so far (note 55). It offers a fragmentary account of Arthur's exploits on the Continent (181). Throughout the text, Arthur is unequivocally identified as a Cornishman (182): "He may be King of Britain and/or England, but even as far away as Rome, Arthur is Cornish first, everything else second" (182f.).

Part V focusses on Tristram and Isold, queen to King Mark of Cornwall. Armstrong compares the Cornish court with Camelot: on a narrative level, Arthur's court can define itself against the Cornish "other". Structurally, "the Cornish material makes the *Morte Darthur*" (185) because Malory chose the French prose *Tristan* as his source, instead of the Vulgate or Post-Vulgate, whenever "he needed to provide his massive opus with a centre" (186). In Cornwall, key events find their origin that drive the story to its tragic end (187). The article closes with a look at Cornwall 500 years later and skillfully links modern matters of language policy to the *Morte* (part VI: 187–189).

Summing up, the journal's target audience are specialists in the field of medieval literature, especially Arthurian texts. The contributions within the present volume give a sound impression of ongoing research done in this field though some of them are, of course, more polished than others.⁷

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