

throughout of how the text repeatedly builds toward a crescendo; such analysis helps highlight the sophisticated strategies employed in its construction.

In this volume, O'Connor wisely decides to use Eleanor Knott's 1936 "best-text" edition (in the Mediaeval and Modern Irish Series) as the basis for all his quotations, though he checks all readings against the source manuscript, the Yellow Book of Lecan. He also provides his own translations of all passages cited; such attention to detail is both welcome and necessary. A full translation (perhaps as an appendix) would have been useful, but one is readily available in Jacqueline Borsje's *The Celtic Evil Eye* (pp. 269–339). Apart from the demonstrated literary sophistication of the *Togail*, perhaps the clearest thing to emerge from this volume is the great need for Máire West's forthcoming edition and translation of the saga. It is anticipated that this edition, when published, will highlight further the textual problems associated with the tale and will go some way toward clearing the ground for all engaged in study of this important narrative. Such aims have already been partly met by O'Connor's detailed study, and all those who work on the text in the future will turn with gratitude to his monograph for opinion, argument, analysis, and guidance. It is to be hoped that this fine Oxford University Press volume will inspire further such studies.

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FROM CAMELOT TO OBAMALOT: ESSAYS ON MEDIEVAL AND MODERN ARTHURIAN LITERATURE. By Joerg O. Fichte. Trier: WVT Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2010. Pp. vi + 202. EUR 24.50.

In his essay collection with the catchy title, *From Camelot to Obamalot*, Joerg O. Fichte produces an arc of Arthurian literature, culture, and significance from twelfth-century Latin chronicler Geoffrey of Monmouth to U.S. President Barack Obama. A longtime researcher of Arthurian myth, Fichte achieves what German academics often accomplish after a long and fruitful career: the collection of topically related essays into a corpus that prides itself on its intertextual and comparative analysis. His compendium aims to treat "general topics" (p. 3), such as genre, typology, historiography, the wondrous, the Grail, Utopian and Dystopian fiction, imperialism, and origination myth. This anthology comprises an introduction, six essays on medieval Arthurian literature, and six articles on Arthuriana from the nineteenth century onward. Except for the last essay, the others have been previously published, albeit some in German (numbers 2, 5, 8, 10, 11); those have been translated and thus been made more widely available to an Anglo-American audience. The essays have been reworked and updated, though not always satisfactorily; the footnotes demonstrate a limited rather than an exhaustive engagement with scholarly production since the original date of publication.

The first two essays tackle issues of genre. Even though the Introduction maintains that the first essay, "Grappling With Arthur or Is There an English Arthurian Verse Romance?" proffers "four major categories" (p. 3) of Middle English Arthurian romances, those categories are not easily detectable in the structure of the essay. The revised article argues that both the "actual" and "abstract" (p. 20) Arthurian court determines Fichte's generic distinctions. Chrétien de Troyes's works, however, are the real measurement of the Middle English verse romances in the article, as the comparisons depict the Arthurian worlds of Chrétien and how the Middle English authors follow or deviate from them. *Ywain and Gawain*,

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, *Lybeaus Desconus*, and *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle* are discussed respectively as Utopian, historical, utilitarian, and parodic. The ending appears chopped, and a conclusion that clearly reiterates these models would have been desirable. The second essay, "Fact' and Fiction in Twelfth-Century Arthurian History," continues Fichte's generic investigation, now into historiography. Fichte compares three types of scenes ("addresses by leaders before a decisive battle," councils, and dreams [p. 32]) in Geoffrey, Wace, and Layamon with rhetorical principles to prove convincingly that fact and fiction blend due to the clever use of rhetorical devices that makes historiography look like fiction and fiction look like fact.

Essays 3 and 5 deal with Middle English Gawain romances. Both genre and Gawain discussion continue in Essay 3, "*Historia and Fabula: Arthurian Traditions and Audience Expectations in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*." Contrasting the historical Brutus opening and Order of the Garter ending of SGGK to its adventure-driven Arthurian romance core, Fichte argues that in the "prismatic nature of the poem . . . *historia* is refracted by *fabula* and *fabula* by *historia*" (p. 44). He deduces that the Gawain poet wants his audience to take seriously "the complex moral issues Gawain faces during his quest, issues that cannot be resolved within the fictional context of romance but that have to be confronted in the nonfictional framework of a universally valid system of Christian ethics" (p. 55). In the very useful "The Function of the Wondrous in the Middle English Gawain Romances," Fichte delimits the wondrous as a "neutral term" that encompasses "representation, apparitions, and experiences" and sees it operating mostly in "legend, saint's life, exemplum, epic, and romance" (p. 69). Armed with two of Walter Haug's three classifications of the fantastic—"the court's changed identity and the lack of crisis" for the protagonist (p. 75)—Fichte examines eight of the eleven Northwest Midlands Gawain romances. He deduces that "Gawain's main task in these late medieval romances seems to be the integration of the elements inimical to the ethics of the court in Arthurian society" (pp. 78–79), where the "court is rehabilitated in most cases, Gawain regains his perfection, and the wondrous manifests itself in fairytale-like world" (p. 85).

Essays 4 and 6 primarily deal with French romance comparisons to Middle English Arthurian texts. "Telling the End: Arthur's Death" contrasts the French *Mort Artu* to the Middle English *Alliterative Morte Arthure* and *Stanzaic Le Morte Arthur*, with some expected focus on Guinevere and Lancelot, asserting that, aside from the *Alliterative Morte Arthure*, "Arthur's death is not a central theme of the English romance" (p. 67). Essay 6, "Choosing the Right Way in the *Queste del Saint Graal* and Malory's *The Tale of the Sankgreal*," delineates the right and wrong paths Melyant, Gawain, and Bors take in the Grail quest in both works. Even though this essay originally hails from 2009, it does not provide much beyond the accepted thesis of stringent divisions between terrestrial and celestial chivalry and Malory's Anglicization of the Grail discussed so excellently by Dhira Mahoney in "The Truest and Holiest Tale: Malory's Transformation of *La Queste del Saint Graal*" in *The Grail: A Casebook*, ed. Dhira Mahoney (2000). Essay 6 does provide useful baselines for the next two postmedieval entries on the Grail.

Essays 7 and 8 deal with modern depictions of Galahad and the Grail. In "'If you achieve perfection, you die': The Treatment of Galahad in Modern Arthurian Literature," Fichte first sketches the medieval Galahad based on the *Queste* and Malory. Secondly, he demonstrates that Tennyson's nineteenth-century holier-than-thou Galahad was vociferously opposed by William Morris's version in "Sir

Galahad, a Christmas Mystery” and that Morris’s Galahad “is anchored more firmly in the Malory-tradition . . . as a lover of God, not the lover of man and as successful quester” (p. 109). Galahad received increasingly more attention in the twentieth century from novelists T. H. White, Thomas Berger, and Marion Zimmer Bradley. Fichte declares that White in *The Ill-Made Knight* portrays Galahad as “unchallenged human perfection” that “ends in death only” (p. 114). Even though Berger in *Arthur Rex* employs satire, the outcome is the same for Galahad, in a poignant contrast to Arthur, who fails but achieves glory. Marion Zimmer Bradley’s depiction of Galahad may be the most puzzling, as her neo-pagan *The Mists of Avalon* seems to valorize the Christian Grail ecstasy her novel otherwise denies. *The Mists of Avalon* are also invoked in “The Sexualization and Feminization of the Grail in the Contemporary American Novel,” an essay that expounds on “the material Grail, the role of women in the Grail procession, and on chastity” (p. 119). The tripartite article first treats these three aspects in the main medieval renditions of the Grail, then touches on Tennyson, *The Waste Land*, and *The Mists of Avalon* before discussing the two main works alluded to in the title: Walker Percy’s southern plantation remake of the Grail story, *Lancelot*, and Dan Brown’s infamous *The Da Vinci Code*. Fichte analyzes these two novels as *loci* of Holy and Unholy Grail interpretations based on sexual union as sin.

The last four essays all focus on Utopian and Dystopian aspects of the Arthurian legend, but the reasoning behind their order is unclear. Essay 11, “Epic, Empire, Gentleman: King Arthur in Tennyson’s *Idylls of the King*,” posits that Tennyson utilizes the Arthurian foundation myth to parallel the “history of the British Empire” (p. 8). This is not an inherently new thesis for an essay from 2007 that could have been tightened, as some info is repetitive within the essay and the collection. The summative Essay 10, “Utopian and Dystopian Elements in Nineteenth and Twentieth-Century Anglo-American Arthurian Fiction,” centers on Mark Twain’s *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court* and to a lesser degree on T. H. White’s Arthurian tetralogy. The epilogue mentions for the first time the Kennedy-era Camelot and the promised “Obamalot,” on the heels of the “economically and morally bankrupt Bush administration” (pp. 164–65).

Possibly the linguistic outlier but definitely the most interesting article in the collection is Essay 9, “The End of Utopia: The Treatment of Arthur and His Court in Contemporary German Drama.” Within the span of ten years, two Arthurian plays were produced in the still divided Germany: Tankred Dorst’s *Merlin oder das Wüste Land* (Merlin or the Waste Land) in West Germany (1979) and Christoph Hein’s *Ritter der Tafelrunde* (Knights of the Round Table) in East Germany, just before the fall of the Berlin Wall (1989). Both plays reinforce the “mythic potential” (p. 135) as well as the political and ideological dimensions of the Arthurian motif cycle that authors can apply ubiquitously in all time periods and languages. According to Fichte, Hein’s play is meant to mirror “a deficient present” (p. 135), the East German communist state, while Dorst’s work dramatizes Utopian visions of perfect and failing societies. A valuable part of the updated essay is an epilogue that discusses these playwrights’ political visions in the aftermath of German reunification.

The last and not previously published essay concentrates on the origin of the hero and the golden-age myth from the earliest medieval versions to the election of President Obama. The Obama section, although mentioned in the title, only comprises five pages of the collection and discusses the media’s preelection hailing of Obama as a “son of Camelot” (p. 198). The term “Obamalot” now has

an entry in the online *Urban Dictionary*, although the definitions have expanded (<http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Obamalot>). This Obamalot analysis illustrates the timeless and cyclical character of the Arthurian legend.

Overall, Fichte could have provided more organizational help through a more cogent ordering of the essays, which are not chronological, but not thematic either; the collection could have benefitted from thematic subsections as it concentrates on fact, fiction, genre, and history in the first part, and Utopia and Dystopia in the second. The individual essays themselves do not always situate themselves into the current scholarly discussion, often open *in medias res*, and have a metatextual quality, questioning and defending inclusion of certain articles. Essay collections can be uneven in quality but usually contain valuable nuggets; here they are the articles newly made available in English.

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LANGLAND AND THE ROKELE FAMILY: THE GENTRY BACKGROUND TO *PIERS PLOWMAN*. By Robert Adams. Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2013. Pp. 147; 7 b/w illustrations. \$50.

Scholars of *Piers Plowman* have long been frustrated by the absence of evidence about its author. The best clue comes from a fifteenth-century note in a Dublin, Trinity College manuscript of the poem: "Memorandum, quod Stacy de Rokayle, pater Willelmi de Langlond, qui Stacius fuit generosus et morabatur in Schiptone under Whicwode, tenens domini le Spenser in comitatu Oxon., qui praedictus Willelmus fecit librum qui vocatur Perys Ploughman" (transcribed on p. 19 of Adams's book). Not much, admittedly, on which to construct an author's biography. Undaunted, Robert Adams deftly steps into this seeming evidentiary void and gives us the first full-length study of the Rokele family in late medieval England. Extending and qualifying previous studies of this family (e.g., by Oscar Cargill, Samuel Moore, George Kane, and Ralph Hanna), Adams mines the archive to separate out the various branches of the Rokeles and to evaluate which members are most likely to be our poet. His aim, he says in the Introduction, is to detail "the range, activities, and attitudes of [Langland's] extended paternal family, over a period of some two hundred years." By doing so, Adams continues, "some features of [Langland's] complex persona and worldview may seem less puzzling or mysterious than before" (p. 16).

Adams shows that various Rokeles were prominent land- and officeholders in Essex, Kent, Wiltshire, Suffolk, Norfolk, Buckinghamshire, and greater London. Chapters One ("Some Preliminary Details"), Two ("The Rokeles"), and Three ("Prominent Rokeles of the Fourteenth Century") trace the history of this family and contain a welter of speculative connections between Langland and its various branches. Among the most tantalizing discoveries is that the East Anglian Rokeles were allied with the Butts of Norfolk, from which alliance might have arisen a personal connection between John But and William Langland, leading But to "finish" Langland's A-text—as preserved in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson Poetry 137. As Adams notes, the manuscript with the closest textual affiliation to Rawlinson 137 is Oxford, University College, MS 45, which has definitive East Anglian dialectal features. Might, then, the A-text have enjoyed an early circulation in the mutual homeland of Langland's near-relatives and that of John But (pp. 25–27)?