ÁLVAREZ-FAEDO, María José (ed.) 2007: *Avalon Revisited: Reworkings of the Arthurian Myth*. Bern: Peter Lang. 270 pp. ISBN: 978-3-03911-231-9, (US) 978-0-8204-8915-5

Of all the legacies which the modern imagination has received from the Middle Ages—castles, Crusaders, Vikings, and Robin Hood—none is more alive and more widespread in the modern world than the legend of King Arthur. His story, and those of Guinevere and Merlin and Lancelot and Galahad, are continually retold and adapted in novels and films, comic-books and video-games. He has escaped entirely from the control of academics, and become "mass-market." However, although there are probably as many ways of dealing with the legendary corpus as there are attempts to do so, some broad categories of response may be observed. Often the story is "appropriated": pressed into the service of some cause or theme which is the artist's major concern, as with the medieval monastic creation of "Sir Galahad" to exemplify Christian chivalry. Or it may be "transposed": re-imagined from some unexpected angle, as with T.H. White's famous *The Sword in the Stone*, which answers the question, "what happened to Arthur *between* his delivery to Merlin as a baby, and his drawing of Excalibur from the stone?" Or it may be "parodied," its assumptions exposed to ridicule, as with Mark Twain's *Connecticut Yankee*. All these categories appear in one way or another in the collection of essays reviewed here, whose common feature is, as the editor says in her "Introduction," that "they approach the study of different reworkings of the Arthurian myth—rather than of the original Medieval texts." (19)

The most famous medieval parody in any tradition is of course *Don Quijote de la Mancha*, and Jorge Abril-Sánchez's opening essay on "The Medieval Orders of Knights" sets this in a historical

context, of a changing battlefield technology which reduced the role of the armoured horseman, though European aristocracies proved astonishingly adept at changing with the times: Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* might seem to edge in the direction of Quixotic parody, but the poet's son became a colonel of artillery. But what had the Manchegan *hidalgo* to do with specifically Arthurian romance? Francisco J. Borge's study points out that Cervantes made no direct reference to most of the great Arthurian works well-known in the Peninsula, seeming to draw most on the *Amadis* legend, as on Ariosto and Martorell. But Cervantes may have used ballads as well as books: the transformation of Alonso Quixano into "Don Quixote" is perhaps modelled on the "Romance de Lanzarote," just as his steed Rosinante derives from the *rocino* of the ballad. The final humiliation of the Don by the Duke and the Duchess is presented to him as a vision of Merlin, though again no source is known for it. Arthur was as omnipresent in the seventeenth century as in the twenty-first.

The volume's second section considers some "appropriations," notably in the service of pan-Celticism, and of feminism. Opinions here are especially diverse. In his study of "Merlin and Cunqueiro," Héctor Blanco-Uría shows how the Galician writer Álvaro Cunqueiro first used the Merlin-figure to promote his view of the affinities of the "seven Celtic countries" (85) on the Western edge of Europe, from Ireland and Man to Brittany and Galicia, but then, later in life, turned against it, seeing (correctly) that pan-Celticism, like pan-Germanicism, is "a cultural invention produced by the romantic historians of the 19th century." (88) This, however, need not affect one's appreciation of Cunqueiro's "polyphony," and his ability to re-use traditional Merlin-themes—his entrapment by women, his flight to the forest. María del Mar González-Chacón considers a more highly-politicised, and never repented Celticism in "Lady

Gregory's (Re)Vision of the Arthurian Legend," the roots of which are traced from the "Celtic Revival" of the nineteenth century into Lady Gregory's attempt to create her own literary dialect of Irish, "Kiltartan," and her rewriting of her own translations of Irish myths into a Yeatsian theatrical tradition. Lady Gregory also attempted to give her female characters a more powerful and less victimised role; and Rubén Valdés-Miyares suggests that while a "feminist" Arthuriad may seem to have taken shape only with works like Marion Zimmer Bradley's *Mists of Avalon* (1982), it has actually been latent in the tradition perhaps from its inception. In *lais* like *Guigemar* and *Lanval*, the knight makes a transit into a realm of female power; the castle of Hautdesert is governed not by Sir Bertilak but by the crone Morgan, who may also in shape-shifted form be the tempting but potentially fatal "Lady." This "subtext of female mythology" (151) seems to have survived through many reworkings from an ancient matriarachal substratum. By contrast, however, María Isabel García-Martínez, points out how modern feminist rewritings, and revisionings, of the Arthurian myth are "undercut" by the presuppositions of a modern audience, or, one might suggest, the concern of Hollywood marketing-managers not to disturb the cosy consensus of American "family values." In both the 1995 movie *First Knight* and the 2004 *King Arthur*, we have apparently assertive images of Guinevere—football-playing tomboy and leather-clad warrior-woman respectively—but both movies delete the theme of adultery, erase one point of the erotic triangle, and end with a submissive marriage, whether to Lancelot or to Arthur. John Boorman's 1981 *Excalibur* deals with an assertive Morgan by having her strangled by her own son: "the sublimity of male companionship" (as between Arthur and Lancelot) remains, she suggests, "the achievement of the American dream." (177)

Two further essays look again at cinematic reworkings, giving us our third category of "transposition." María José Álvarez-Faedo considers how far we may detect "Arthurian Reminiscences" in the *Lord of the Rings* both as text and as movie-trilogy. The issue is complicated by Tolkien's own nationalistic antipathy to the Arthurian story, precisely because he regarded it as "Celtic," like Cunqueiro or Lady Gregory above, but unlike them felt this to be alien to his urge to create a specifically English mythology. Nevertheless there is no doubt that Merlin lurks in Gandalf, Excalibur in Bilbo's Sting—or perhaps Aragorn's Andúril—while Jackson's movie-direction borrows several images from the long tradition of Arthurian film, notably the boat moving away to an unknown destination where, perhaps, the wounded hero (Arthur, Frodo) may be healed. M. Gabriela García-Teruel continues with a much more critical look at the 2004 *King Arthur* movie, a work which sets new standards in historical implausibility (the Round Table knights as Sarmatian conscripts from the steppe), and erotic censorship (Lancelot and Guinevere exchange no more than smouldering glances before he conveniently dies in battle). Yet the work stridently proclaims its truth-to-fact, and it is from productions like this that modern students are likely to derive their opinions. García-Teruel sets out a pedagogical scheme not simply for giving the students better information, but for helping them to treat all information critically. Finally, Ana Isabel Expósito-Álvarez looks at a much older graphic tradition, the manuscript illuminations of Arthurian scenes from the Middle Ages themselves. The tradition is astonishingly homogenous: despite many thousands of reworkings, "the shadows of king Arthur" have remained in some ways "immutable." (245)

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