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Sir Thomas Malory, *Le Morte Darthur*. Ed. by P. J. C. FIELD. (Arthurian Studies 80). Cambridge: Brewer. 2013. 2 Vols. Vol. 1: xliii+940pp; Vol. 2: xxxi+988pp. £195. ISBN 978-1-84384-314-6.

Peter Field, a life-long scholar of Malory, is undoubtedly best placed to undertake the Herculean task (even with duly acknowledged assistance) of producing an edition of the *Morte*, which, while based on the Winchester Manuscript, carefully considers the potential value of all the surviving print and manuscript textual witnesses, as also of information from source texts, in order to produce the closest approximation to what Malory wrote that forensic modern scholarship can establish. Field's meticulous textual revisions for the third edition of Eugène Vinaver's *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990) resulted in some 2850 emendations, according to the brief Note modestly tucked into the back of the third volume (III, 1748), but he nonetheless respectfully left intact the earlier editor's critical and editorial principles. This new edition, rightly hailed by Malory scholars as authoritative, allows Field fully to exercise his considerable critical and editorial skills. Most obviously, he restores the title, *Le Morte Darthur* (where Vinaver seemed overly anxious about how medieval narrative inventiveness can correlate with twentieth-century prescriptiveness about literary form). Field is particularly attuned to (and admirably conveys) the material circumstances of both scribes and printers, and the effect of their working conditions on the texts they produce, and his revisions are characterised by common sense, exactness of detail, and regard for narrative logic. He gives due weight to Winchester, drawing on its organisation to structure this edition, but is also occasionally sceptical of 'layout', should the 'words' suggest something different (I, xxviii; see II, 686-87, for discussion of the 'May' passage, I, 841-42).

If the two volumes are somewhat unwieldy (and their cost prohibitive for many), they are well laid out; volume 1, but for an introductory exposition of editorial principle and method, a master-class in itself, presents an attractive uncluttered text, while the critical apparatus appears in volume 2, including full notes, the Winchester MS scribal marginalia, Winchester and Caxton extracts from the Roman War, Caxton's Prologue and, more unusually, information about Arthur's and Malory's coats of arms. (It may have been useful, for the purposes of a more nuanced understanding of the vocabulary, to consider the resources of the Anglo-Norman Dictionary, for, if Malory is not evidently fully bilingual, he does seem aware of insular French usage: an example is the legal slant of the term 'grevaunces' [I, 208.1].) Potentially controversial is the decision to reconstruct Arthur's Roman campaign (I, 145-90), rather than print Winchester and Caxton in parallel. Some may also have different views about local treatment of pronouns of address, although this issue is carefully argued (I, xxxvi-vii). But throughout, the value of Field's approach is how it makes editorial decisions transparent, and facilitates critical debate.

This is a scholarly rather than a student edition. As its focus is primarily on the establishment of the text, there is no consolidated introduction to fifteenth-century English, nor (wholly justifiably, given the already necessarily high word-count) any attempt at a comprehensive bibliography or an overview of the critical trends in Malory studies, although the notes are a mine of information, from details about medieval ships and developments in fifteenth-century armour, to points about language. Stephen Shepherd's Norton edition of the

Winchester manuscript *Le Morte Darthur* (New York: Norton, 2004), while critically less interrogatory and interventionist, remains rather more accessible to the undergraduate reader of Malory, with its compact format, footnotes that translate difficult Middle English or explain culturally unfamiliar material, extracts from major sources, critical apparatus and essays, account of Malory's English, and affordability. Nevertheless, a student will of necessity have to 'graduate' to, and engage with, 'Field's Malory' if s/he is to undertake any significant research on this author.

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