

Malory and His European Contemporaries: Adapting Late Arthurian Romance.
Miriam Edlich-Muth.

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Miriam Edlich-Muth discusses a set of texts, each one in a different language. The oldest is the Middle Dutch *Lancelot Compilation* (1320s) in rhyming couplets. Originally in two volumes, the first volume has been lost. Book 2 concerns Lancelot, a version of the

Grail quest, and Arthur's death, plus other stories. Next is the *Tavola Ritonda* (mid-fourteenth century) by an unknown author. It is based mostly on an earlier Italian translation of the *Tristan en Prose* (thirteenth century). The other books all date to the 1470s. They include Malory's *Morte Darthur*. There is also an unnamed book listed as BN.fr.112, originally in four volumes, but the first volume has been lost. Micheau Gonnot wrote it for the library of Jacques d'Armagnac, the Duke of Nemours. What survives draws mostly on the vulgate *Lancelot* and the prose *Tristan*. His patron was executed for treason by Louis XI in 1477, and the library sold. The Munich poet Ulrich Fuetrer wrote the *Buch der Abenteurer* for Duke Albrecht IV of Bavaria. Fuetrer composed it in seven-line Titurel verse stanzas. Book 1 stresses Parzival and the Grail. Book 2 has a collection of tales. Fuetrer had written book 3 earlier, the "Lanzilet," and it concerns the vulgate Lancelot-Grail cycle, based on a German translation from the French.

In the middle section of her book, Edlich-Muth concentrates on the *Morte*, *Buch der Abenteurer*, and the *Tavola*. Chapter 3 concerns chronology and genealogy. She shows that the *Tavola* and *Buch* stress genealogy, while Malory cuts almost all of it. Behind much of Malory is the French vulgate cycle, but he excludes descriptions of time and place, while the earlier *Tavola* retains geographical detail. There is also a vagueness that marks Malory's central tales. In chapter 5 Edlich-Muth adds the other tales she had been discussing earlier and stresses character. Her discussion of Arthur is particularly interesting. In the *Annales Cambriae* (tenth century) Arthur dies in a battle against Mordred, but there is no mention of incest, nor is there in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia*. For Geoffrey, Arthur's military prowess is the main theme, which begins to diminish in the *Brut*. Wace brings in the Round Table, so while Arthur leads men in battle, he is no longer beyond compare. Here I disagree. To make your court the place where everyone wants to go, a place of heroes, who go out regularly for adventures and protect the realm that Arthur has made, is much more effective than for Arthur to insist on doing everything himself. She may be right, however, to say that Arthur's character by Malory's time is based on contradictory sources, and she is also right to argue that he is marginalized in the *Buch der Abenteurer*.

One other criticism concerns the two texts of Malory. The only one we know for certain is the Winchester manuscript. Like others, Edlich-Muth tends to prefer Caxton's longer version, which of course was the only one known for hundreds of years; but it is questionable to simply assume a lost manuscript. One must first check how faithful Caxton was in other works that he published. I don't think anyone has done this. There is a richness in this book, however, that compensates for any criticisms. I have only discussed some of the texts she presents. Edlich-Muth has widened the general perspective on late Arthurian romance, bringing in a whole range of approaches and views. For those who would like to pursue matters further, she provides an appendix with notes on the texts and manuscripts. Edlich-Muth teaches Old and Middle English at the University of Cambridge, but in the United States she would also be a major scholar in a department of comparative literature.

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