

Romancing Treason: The Literature of the Wars of the Roses. Megan G. Leitch. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015. x + 218 pp. \$90.

Megan G. Leitch documents the prevalence of treason in English romances written during the Wars of the Roses, a period she defines as between 1437, the start of Henry VI's majority, and 1497, the capture of Perkin Warbeck. She argues that in "an environment seething with betrayals" (38), treason forms an important part of the English "cultural imaginary" (3) and allows writers to work out concerns about civil strife and unstable government. They do so by reworking motifs of treason less prominent, or even absent, in their source material, whether it be in French or English, "in order to reshape social conduct" (136). Thus, in the French, Guinevere is charged with adultery, but in Malory she is charged with treason. Leitch also shows how English writers depart from their sources to introduce formulaic phraseology about treason from English law. Leitch sees treason as both vertical (against one's king or lord) and horizontal (betrayal of one another, or of the "commonweal"—an abstraction increasingly invoked after 1450). Treason is the opposite of chivalry and is open to correction by the "law of arms" (4). The writers' concerns are therefore primarily ethical and secular, and they show less confidence than their predecessors that justice will be dispensed by divine providence.

Leitch's study is well researched, well argued, and consistently well written. She supports her case with reference to a wide range of texts great and small, familiar and less well consulted—on differences from French sources, for example, not just Malory but also Peter Idley. While on rare occasion this reference seems merely like the compiling of a list, and betrays its origin as a doctoral thesis—an impression that is not helped by the overly generous proliferation of hierarchical subheadings—most of what it presents is not only warranted but hugely informative. The strength of Leitch's study lies partly in its range, which spans from the prose romances of Thebes and Troy, after Lydgate, to *The Squire of Low Degree*, to the verse and prose *Melusine*, to the full gamut of Caxton's prose works, as well as those of Malory. Her discussion of Malory, in chapter 4, is sustained, and brilliantly sheds new light by its very insistence on seeing his work in a larger, national context. (The chapter also contains splendid insights into Hardyng's *Chronicle* and its attempt to answer Scottish claims on behalf of Mordred's legitimacy against a usurping Arthur.)

There are three areas in which Leitch's work could be seen as vulnerable. One is her use of theory, which seems to me too light: if the terms *discourse* and *mentality* are worth invoking at all (as she does in chapter 2), they need more pressure to be applied. For all the detailed gestures to non-literary sources, there could be more space given to the notion of treason as a discourse both literary and extraliterary, and, possibly, to questions about the increasing use of prose rather than poetry in this discursive context. Second, Leitch's use of the word *secular* begs several questions. No sooner, discussing Malory, has she proposed "a secularist attitude" (114) than she notes that "even in the cradle, Mordred is

aligned with Judas" (115). There is more to be said about the interplay of religious and secular. Third, and most important, Leitch is perfectly aware that a focus on treason as such is not specific to the period she has chosen, and so turns back for brief looks at Ricardian poetry (does the Chaucer of *Troilus* or the "Man of Law's Tale" or the "Monk's Tale" really have less interest, or a less secular interest, in treason than these texts?) and the earlier English romances of the fourteenth century, notably those of the Auchinleck manuscript, in which she claims that treason "is more part of the furniture than the architecture" (63). As it stands, this looks like special pleading. There is more to be said in these areas, but future work will be much in Leitch's debt. She has opened a conversation that was needed, and she has done so admirably.

Not least, her literary-historical claims of interaction between the late medieval and the early modern are thoroughly persuasive. When we next read *King Lear*, even keeping in mind work by Michael Hays and Alex Davis on its chivalric antecedents, we will be more conscious than before of how much this text owes to the cultural imaginary of the fifteenth century for its unsparing portrayal of treason, both vertical and horizontal, in a world that is bleakly godless.

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On Not Defending Poetry: Defence and Indefensibility in Sidney's "Defence of Poesy." Catherine Bates.

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Catherine Bates's *On Not Defending Poetry* makes no argument. Instead, the book enacts the rhetorical performance of an argument. That performance extends O. B. Hardison's long-familiar identification of two competing voices in the *Defence* (one neo-classical, the other romantic) into what Bates calls a new and radical deconstruction of Sidney's poetics. One voice (A) defends the orthodox, instrumentalist, and bankable use of poetry as a culturally valuable science; the alternative voice (B) is variously described as delirious, radical, queer, aesthetic, self-loving, masochistic, and abject. Subject to interrogation, voice A fractures under the weight of idealism's contradictions, disclosing its complicity in the "interests of capitalist ideology," including militarism, colonialism, sexism, and other ills routinely ascribed to Western metaphysics; by contrast, voice B emerges through textual miscues and symptomatic slippages to contest idealist economies in ways sometimes associated with the marginalized and the oppressed, and sometimes (eschewing instrumentalism altogether) with perversity, jouissance, and self-abuse (x). In short, Bates's book sets out to rescue Sidney B from Sidney A by "projecting" onto A's argument the "radicalism" of a "contemporary professor of English," even if "radicalism" seems an odd descriptor for a politics so commonplace (x–xi).