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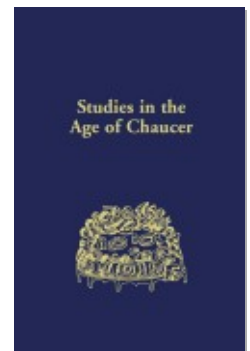
Malory's Grail Quest: Invention and Adaptation in Medieval Prose Romance by Sandra Ness Ihle (review)

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curious applications of literary terms. The volume might have been proofread more thoroughly.

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SANDRA NESS IHLE, *Malory's Grail Quest: Invention and Adaptation in Medieval Prose Romance*. Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983. Pp. xii, 199. \$22.50.

Sandra Ness Ihle's *Malory's Grail Quest* is a good study of both Malory's "Sankgreal" and its source, the Vulgate *Queste del Saint Graal*. Owing much to the influence of Eugène Vinaver, Ihle reviews in her opening chapter theories concerning the relationship of medieval architecture to literary theory and in the following chapters compares Malory's conception of the Grail with that found in his source, discusses the structure of the French *Queste*, and points out major differences between the *Queste* and Malory's "Sankgreal."

Although its title emphasizes Malory, this book is equally important as a study of his source, since 55 of its 167 pages are devoted exclusively to the Vulgate *Queste*, and most of the rest involves comparisons of the two works. The opening discussion of architecture and medieval literary theory is, in fact, more applicable to the *Queste* than to Malory, and in the chapter on the structure of the *Queste* manuscript, Ihle makes most use of this material. Although Malory's work, she believes, is closer to the "Totality" of Romanesque style than it is to the "Partiality" of the Gothic, she does not stress architectural influence upon Malory (pp. 27-28). This, I feel, is wise, for, although she makes a good case for the influence of Gothic architecture and rhetorical treatises upon the thirteenth-century Cistercian author of the *Queste*, such material is not as applicable to Malory. The chief rhetorical device that Ihle finds him employing in his adaptation of the *Queste* is abbreviation, a technique practiced by generations of earlier Middle English romance

writers; and Malory was probably influenced more by these writers than by rhetoricians and architecture. Moreover, Ihle's conclusions about Malory are common-sense observations based upon a comparison of his "Sankgreal" with its source, and she would probably have reached most of these even if she had never looked at the *Poetria nova* or considered any architectural similarities.

But Ihle's conclusions, however she reached them, are worthwhile, and her book is one that will be of value to students of both the Vulgate *Queste* and Malory. This study contributes to a better understanding of the structure of the *Queste* and gives a clearer idea of what Malory was attempting in his "Sankgreal." Her remarks on Malory's conceptions of the Grail and chivalry, his characterizations of Lancelot and Guenevere, and his attitude toward blood ties can lead to better interpretation of Malory's other tales as well. Some of the points she makes are not new, and other scholars have noted that Malory was uncomfortable with the *Queste's* condemnation of Arthurian chivalry, but few have covered the subject in so much detail. And although Vinaver was aware of a number of the changes that Ihle discusses, his belief that the "Sankgreal" was the "least original" of Malory's works, "to all intents and purposes a translation of the French *Queste*" (*The Works of Thomas Malory*, 2d ed. [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967], 3:1534), has undoubtedly caused many readers to underestimate Malory's achievement. Ihle's book, although handling Vinaver's views with great respect, gives a clearer notion of what Malory was attempting.

Although Ihle does not consider whether the "Sankgreal" is part of a larger whole (p. 172, n. 6), some of her conclusions will interest those concerned with the relations between Malory's various tales. For example, she notes that, for Malory, Lancelot's instability is "his main fault, a fault not mentioned in the *Queste*" (p. 153). Anyone seeking links between the "Sankgreal" and other tales could argue that Malory's emphasis upon instability prepares for Lancelot's turning back to Guenevere at the beginning of tale 7 and for Guenevere's fear at the end of tale 8 that Lancelot, in spite of his promise to lead a holy life, "woll turne to the worlde agayne" (3.1253). Ihle further notes a reference in Malory's "Sankgreal" to Lancelot's ultimate salvation (p. 153), a reference not found in the

source and one that could have been added to anticipate the end of tale 8. She points out that the final scene of the "Sankgreal," "in which Lancelot expresses to Bors his undying friendship and loyalty," is an addition that gives the story "what can almost be termed a happy ending" (p. 164). The addition also, however, emphasizes a return to the world of the Round Table and therefore prepares for Bors's role as Lancelot's confidant in the final tales.

Although she is not concerned with the relationship between Malory's "Sankgreal" and his other tales, one statement about the relationship of the French *Queste* to the rest of the Vulgate Cycle is debatable. Ihle writes: "Because of the *Queste's* centrality to the entire cycle—it is the high altar, as it were, of the cathedral—it throws its meaning backward and forward; all must be referred to it. In the light of the Grail, the values and ideals of the *Lancelot* proper undergo reevaluation and . . . can be seen as morally bankrupt" (p. 104). But the parts of the Cycle, though related, were written by different authors, and it is not certain that the rest of the Cycle should be judged in accordance with the views of the Cistercian author of the *Queste*. For example, approaches to salvation in the *Queste* and its sequel, the Vulgate *Mort Artu*, differ markedly. Although in the *Queste* the Arthurian court is condemned and knights are encouraged to withdraw from the active life, in the *Mort Artu* Lancelot develops gradually from a sinner into a saint while living in the world; he withdraws to a monastery only after he has done all that he can do as a Christian living an active life. The author of the *Mort* thus presents a different approach to salvation, one that contrasts sharply with the approach advocated by the *Queste*, not one that is to be understood in light of it. It seems equally doubtful that ideals of chivalry found in the Vulgate *Lancelot* such as those of Galehot or those taught to the young Lancelot by the Lady of the Lake are to be understood in light of the *Queste's* condemnation of chivalry. In fact, one could conclude from Ihle's study that it is easier to read Malory's other tales in relation to his "Sankgreal" than it is to read other parts of the Vulgate Cycle in relation to the *Queste*.

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