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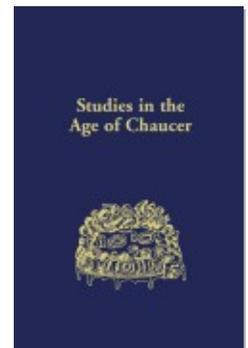
Sir Gawain and the Green Knight: A Reference Guide by Robert
J. Blanch (review)

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ROBERT J. BLANCH. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight: A Reference Guide*. Troy, N.Y.: Whitston Publishing Company, 1983. Pp. 298. \$22.50.

After the publication in 1979 of Malcolm Andrew's *The Gawain-Poet: An Annotated Bibliography, 1839-1977*, we have another annotated bibliography of scholarship solely on *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, which will be a companion volume to *Pearl, Patience, and Purity: A Reference Guide* the present editor is currently preparing. Robert J. Blanch's book is a highly personalized, handmade work reflective of his long-standing research on the *Gawain* poet. The book contains Introduction (pp. 1-12), Writings About *Sir Gawain, 1824-1978* (pp. 13-265), Addenda (pp. 267-77), and Index (pp. 279-98). His essential aim is to provide the detailed expositions of interpretative or critical commentaries upon the work: his own indirect literary criticism on *Gawain*.

In the Introduction, which was written in 1980, Blanch attempts to make a historical survey of *Gawain* scholarship up to 1978, adding a few works, such as R. E. Kasse's (1979) and W. R. J. Barron's (1980, 1981), and also shows his method of compiling the contents of the volume. Following the articles of M. W. Bloomfield (1961), R. W. Ackerman (1968), and Donald H. Howard (1971), he divides the state of *Gawain* studies into three periods: 1969-71, 1972-74, and 1975-77; explains the distinctive features of each period; and then suggests some new ways of approach.

In the "Writings about *Sir Gawain, 1824-1978*," the main body of the book, all items collected on international scale are placed in chronological order from 1824 to 1978, although the coverage of the research is substantially intended to be comprehensive through 1976 and the citations for 1977 and 78 "constitute an important sampling" (p. 10), and the sequence of these items each year is in alphabetical order by name of author, running numbers affixed to each one. (The numbers 6 and 7 are missing in p. 31.) The editor states that "all annotations are represented as objective abstracts" (p. 11). Each item has his critical note, and interesting or significant articles and books are given longer annotations. Such cases as those of Elizabeth M. Wright (1906.7), O. F. Emerson (1922.1), and H. L. Savage (1956.10) get beyond 250 words. Citations for the nineteenth century have 39 items. In 1824, Richard Price first mentioned the poem in his 1824 edition of Thomas Warton's *History of English Poetry*, but the date 1939 has more inherent significance in that *Gawain* studies started with the publication of Frederic Madden's edition of *Syr Gawayne*. As R. W.

Ackerman's bibliography indicates, Madden minutely examined British Library MS Cotton Nero A.x, Art.3 and gave *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* its title in July, 1829. Blanch informs that *Gawain* research rapidly advanced in the 1920s and 1930s and continued to develop further in the 1960s and 1970s. If the book had the date of issue on the head of each page, it might be much easier for us to consult.

This volume concludes with the Index, which is very valuable for locating authors, characters, themes, motifs, allusions, topics, and explanatory and textual notes. Blanch would have done better to have separated authors and books from other materials in it. This bibliography, however, has made a great contribution to recent *Gawain* scholarship, particularly *Gawain* criticism.

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PIERO BOITANI. *Chaucer and the Imaginary World of Fame*. Chaucer Studies, no. 10. Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, Ltd.; Totowa, N. J.: Barnes & Noble, 1984. Pp. xii, 252. £27.50, \$47.95.

The House of Fame is still often regarded with a sort of benign alarm—as if it were an energetic but ill-trained shaggy dog of a poem—but the advanced critical position with regard to its purpose and procedure has clearly shifted some considerable distance from, say, Lawlor's dismissal of much of it as "clowning," or even from Muscatine's more scrupulous unease about its "undigested" elements. Piero Boitani's initial approach to the subject does not at once transform the shaggy dog into a lithe tiger, but it does from the start insist upon the work's importance as a 'turning point,' both in Chaucer's career and in English literary culture. Moreover, it conveys from early on a confidence that the poem not only is "an extraordinary *tour de force* of language and creativity" but also has "a precise plan" (p. 14). The design Boitani traces is a complex, indeed, often ambiguous, one, reflecting, as he sees it, Chaucer's responses to a multifarious tradition of attitudes to and images of fame and glory. But by the end of this book it is fairly clear what his answer will be to the recurrently posed question whether the poem is "unfinished or in-finite."