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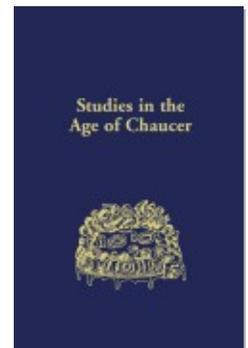
*Caxton's Malory: A New Edition of Sir Thomas Malory's Le  
Morte Darthur* ed. by James W. Spisak (review)

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JAMES W. SPISAK, ed. *Caxton's Malory: A New Edition of Sir Thomas Malory's Le Morte Darthur*, Based on the Pierpont Morgan Copy of William Caxton's Edition of 1485. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983. Pp. viii, 920. \$115.00.

This is a new critical edition of Malory's *Morte Darthur* printed by Caxton in 1485, the first since Sommer's monumental three-volume edition of 1889–91, which is still available in reprint, despite Spisak's assertion (p. vii). Vinaver once prepared such a text, based on the two extant copies of Caxton's editio princeps, but he had to abandon it in 1934, when Walter Oakeshott rediscovered the Winchester MS (now B.L. Add. 59678). The latter Vinaver undertook to edit and publish subsequently under the title *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory* (1947). The task of making a new edition of Caxton's *Morte* was initiated by William Matthews and some of his former students and soon after his sudden death in 1975 was taken up by James Spisak, who brought his predecessors' efforts to fruition with this two-volume quarto set, complete with handsome slipcase.

The present edition comprises two volumes of unequal size. The first contains an edited text of the *Morte* (pp. 1–600), based on the Pierpont Morgan copy, with emendations from the Winchester MS and de Worde's edition of 1498. The second volume provides an introduction (pp. 601–29); Notes, mainly textual (pp. 630–773); a Glossary (pp. 775–810); a Dictionary of Names and Places, including genealogies, maps, and motifs (pp. 811–54), compiled by Bert Dillon; two Appendices, consisting of the Reset Sheets in photofacsimile (pp. 855–73) and a transcript of the Winchester version of the Roman campaign episode (pp. 874–902); and a Bibliography (pp. 903–20). Strangely enough, the Contents page of each volume bears no pagination.

In Sommer's virtually diplomatic text of the now John Rylands copy, Vinaver found more than a thousand mistakes, ranging "from a confusion between *f* and *f* to a complete distortion of the original" (*Works*, 1973, p. cxvii), in spite of the former's claim that "Caxton is reprinted page for page, line for line, word for word, and, with a few exceptions, . . . letter for letter" (1:viii). In a similar way my own collation of Spisak's text with the Scholar facsimile of the Morgan copy has unearthed innumerable inauthentic readings, which are found on almost every page of the text. These range from mere omissions of the final *e* to homoeoteleuton, the latter resulting

in nightmarish lacunae, although Spisak declares that “none of the vocabulary has been changed, and the spelling has not been modernized or normalized” (p. 627). Pages 40 and 189, for instance, carry the following mistakes: 40.3 and 6 *hondred*] *honderd*, 40.5 *Hondred*] *Honderd*, 40.9 first *the kynges*] *the kynges and knyghtes*, 40.13 *shoulders*] *sholders*, 40.22 *Kyng*] *Kynge*, 40.24 XII] XIII, 40.40 *both*] *bothe*, 189.1 *Syr Caradus*] *Syr Percyuale with Syre Caradus*, 189.7 *with*] *wyth*, 189.14 *Knyghte*] *Knyght*, 189.24 *When*] *Whan*, 189.28 *when*] *whan*. However, it is a relief to see “the hoole book” (p. 599.35)—one of the most crucial phrases in the *Morte*—transcribed accurately in this edition.

There is no doubt that modern paragraphing, punctuation, and capitalization and the use of quotation marks for dialogue, all of which Vinaver justifiably employed, have served to make his text as readable as a modern novel. Spisak’s approach, on the other hand, lies somewhere between that of Sommer and that of Vinaver. In Spisak’s text neither quotation marks nor genitive apostrophes are used, although he intended to “provide an authentic text of Caxton’s Malory *in readable form*” (p. 627; italics added). He gives his own reasons for not using the former, but with such modern devices the text would certainly have been made more accessible, particularly for the ordinary reader who would not be familiar with fifteenth-century prose.

In Spisak’s Introduction we find little influence of Vinaver’s formidable contribution to Malory scholarship. Spisak gives a succinct account of several important problems concerning Caxton’s Malory: Caxton’s interest in Arthuriana, the authorship, bibliographical details of Caxton’s *Morte* and its relations to de Worde’s second edition, the question of who revised the Roman war episode, Malory’s sources and the order of the composition, and a note on the present edition. In each case he takes advantage of recent researches, made notably by Matthews and the contributors to *Aspects of Malory* (1981), but the editor’s own views are always tantalizingly brief. He stands, perhaps understandably, with Matthews in holding to a controversial theory that Malory himself revised the Roman war episode in Caxton’s book 5. It is to be hoped that we shall be able to see Matthews’s hitherto unpublished paper (read in 1975) in print before long, since this revision theory, together with a difficult problem concerning the order of composition in Malory, certainly deserves further study. Spisak does not touch on the language of the *Morte* and makes only a passing mention of Angus McIntosh’s dialectological analysis which was published in *Medium Ævum*

(37[1968]). Although a review article, it is too significant to be excluded from a bibliography.

The Notes are far from satisfactory in many respects. For example, the following notes—based on erroneous readings—should be deleted from Caxton's Contents and books 1–5: 27.11, 40.9, 43.9, 71.13, 76.21, 94.18 *he/* and *W, dW.*, 96.11, 115.26 *of/by dW.*, 133.9 and 134.19. While the listing of textual variants from the Winchester MS has been kept to a minimum—in fact, less than a minimum—Spisak promises that “all substantive variants from de Worde's 1498 edition . . . are recorded here for the first time” (p. 631). This, however, is not the case, in that, whereas Spisak lists such variants as *no/none*, *vpon/on*, and *vnto/to*, he ignores *hem/them* (*theym*), *yeue/gyue*, *wyrche/werke*, *yow/ye*, and *ye/yow*. Furthermore, there are quite a few variants of one kind or another which have escaped the editor's notice. He argues that de Worde “changes syntax very seldom” (p. 617), but Tsuyoshi Mukai (1979) offers a significant analysis of de Worde's style which refutes this. Of all the recorded variants by far the most charming is *barbours/leches dW* (p. 132.17), which is also elucidated by Mukai.

Spisak's Glossary is inevitably selective, but in the case of *flemyd* (p. 786), for example, “*pret.* put to flight 592.6” should be added; it is interesting to note that de Worde never used the word, always replacing it with “banished.”

Dillon's Dictionary of Names and Places is a masterpiece of its kind, well documented and with ample reference to the relevant literature. One only hopes that he will compile a complete list of all the possible motifs in the *Morte*. In Appendix 1, the reset sheets appear rather different from their counterparts, possibly owing to differences in photographic techniques. Appendix 2 provides some miserable mistranscripts of the text of Tale 2 in the Winchester MS, but suffice it to say that the worst is p. 884: 884.10 *tyde/ryde*, 13 *your/youre*, 15 *as/an*, 16 *that/than*, 19 *he/be*, 20 *gretewordys/grete wordys*, 28 *knyghte/knyght*, 29 *gresyl/gresly*, 36 *baffette/buffette*.

At the end of the second volume is a good Bibliography, in which R. T. Davies, “Was Pellynor Worthy?” *N&Q*, n.s., 4(1957):370 is not listed, although the editor refers to it in his note to 92.12–14, where the author's name is misspelled. I am sorry to see many articles in Japanese listed either inappropriately or inaccurately; for an almost exhaustive listing of Japanese contributions to Malory studies, one should refer to *A Bibliography of*

*Publications on Medieval English Language and Literature in Japan* (Tokyo: Centre for Mediaeval English Studies, 1983), pp. 197–206.

It is with regret to have to conclude that the scholar will have to use the present edition with caution and, according to his needs, turn to facsimiles of the Winchester MS and the Morgan copy of the *Morte*, since they serve as useful do-it-yourself collation kits.

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DEREK TRAVERSI. *The Canterbury Tales: A Reading*. Newark, N. J.: University of Delaware Press, 1983. Pp. 251. \$25.00.

Derek Traversi comes to *The Canterbury Tales* as a nonspecialist; he sees his book as contributing to criticism rather than scholarship; his “reading” concentrates on what he considers the most significant parts of the unfinished work. He views the beginning and the ending as fixed, “the twin pillars . . . within which the unfolding fresco of the action is contained” (p. 11). That action he explores in three parts, the opening sequence of *The Knight’s Tale* and the two fabliaux, the tales dealing with marriage and the question of “maistrie” inspired by the Wife of Bath, and finally a less unified set of tales beginning with the Pardoner’s and ending with the Nun’s Priest’s, where moral assumptions and the validity of fiction come into question and the relativity of the comic vision emerges. Two other essays, omitted because of limitations of space, fill out Traversi’s conception of *The Canterbury Tales*. These essays, on *The Franklin’s Tale* and *The Manciple’s Tale*, appeared in *The Literary Imagination* (also from Delaware, 1982).

It is always refreshing to have a distinguished critic turn his attention to Chaucer’s masterpiece. One expects, and in this instance one gets in every chapter, flashes of insight into the details of design, the specifics of Chaucer’s art. Traversi warns of the Wife of Bath’s need to fictionalize her marriages; he stresses the bitter ironies in the epithalamion at the start of *The Merchant’s Tale*. He is also adept in establishing the overall tone that distinguishes *The Miller’s Tale* from *The Reeve’s Tale*, *The Clerk’s Tale*