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Jane H.M. Taylor, *Rewriting Arthurian Romance in Renaissance France: From Manuscript to Printed Book*. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2014. xiv + 278 pp. Tables, notes, 13 black and white illustrations, appendices, bibliography, and index. \$99.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN: 9781843843658.

Review by Ana Pairet, Rutgers University.

Robust scholarly interest in material history and the early print book trade in Western Europe has reenergized literary studies and created new avenues for interdisciplinary research. The inventory and study of early modern print has the potential to disrupt established generic typologies and attempts at periodization such that modern readers rediscover forgotten texts or editorial genres and discern connections between textual traditions that heretofore may have been examined independently or ignored outright. Such is the case of “romans d'armes et d'amour” [romances of arms and love] which made for a sizable share of vernacular fiction printed across Renaissance Europe.

The majority of romances printed in French before 1540 derived from such epic poems as *Quatre fils d'Aymon*, and to a lesser extent from the Vulgate and post-Vulgate Arthurian prose cycles. This substantial printed production has elicited limited attention from either medievalists or Renaissance scholars. Following Michel Simonin's view of chivalric romance as a vestigial genre that was to be rejected by literary elites, scholars of French Renaissance romance tend to approach the proliferation of narratives derived from medieval epic or romance as a paradoxical output, soon superseded by the European vogue of Greco-Hispanic romance.[1] A case in point is M.T. Jones-Davies's edited volume which examined the “survival” of medieval romances in early modern Europe, without fully addressing the taste for Arthurian narratives in the early part of the sixteenth century.[2] While historians of print have unearthed promising materials for research, surveys of Renaissance chivalric romance by Richard Cooper and by Philippe Ménard did not elicit in-depth studies or a synthesis of what is by all accounts a diverse and complex corpus.[3] The printed works grouped in the seventeenth-century under the pejorative rubric “roman de chevalerie” nonetheless played an important role in literary production in the Renaissance and after, as Françoise Vielliard has shown.[4]

No comprehensive study had been devoted specifically to Arthurian materials in Renaissance France since Jean Frappier's seminal article “Les romans de la Table Ronde et les lettres en France au XVI^e siècle.”[5] In this substantial new monograph, which examines the transformations of Arthurian materials in the Renaissance as market-driven phenomenon, Jane H.M. Taylor makes a first important step in establishing the aesthetic and economic centrality of this production. Narratives that retraced the genealogy and deeds of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table held their appeal well into the sixteenth century, until the vogue of Greco-Hispanic romances displaced them in the wake of Herberay des Essart's *Amadis de Gaule* (1540), the French translation of Garci Rodríguez de Montalvo's *Amadís de Gaula* (1508).[6] Where other scholars who explore chivalric fiction in the Renaissance have limited their studies to individual subgenres or works, Taylor draws powerful connections between medieval Arthurian cycles, neo-Arthurian Renaissance creations, Greco-Hispanic romances, and emergent genres such as sentimental romance.

Taylor charts and analyzes the material, textual, and thematic transformations, focusing on the strategies of printers and booksellers who sought to adapt Arthurian materials to changes in literary taste and to the demands of the print marketplace. The author's sources range temporally from Anthoine Vérard and Galliot du Pré's monumental luxury editions in the first decades of print to Benoît Rigaud's abridged version of *Lancelot* in 1591. Extending Michel de Certeau's metaphor of reading as "poaching" (*braconnage*) to a variety of editorial strategies, the study opens with the suggestive "Pierre Sala, Poacher." Minute comparison of two episodes of Sala's versified *Chevalier au Lion* with corresponding passages in the Chrétien de Troyes' *Yvain* sheds light on what Taylor terms the "text-management processes" (p. 14) and "interpretative manoeuvres" (p. 17) involved in textual rewriting. The chapter on Sala's now forgotten adaptation is emblematic of Taylor's method: theoretically informed readings; systematic textual analysis and side-by-side comparisons; avoidance of generic and textual hierarchies; sophisticated multifaceted analysis which engages with all aspects of textual production, from material contexts to marketing.

Focusing on editorial processes and marketing ploys used by Renaissance printers to recycle and commodify Arthurian materials, the study zooms in and out, shuttling between comparative micro-readings and material production contexts. Thus, chapter two, "Books Printed Here': The Business of the Print Shop," provides a panorama of the sixteenth-century book industry. Chapter three, "A Condition of survival': Lancelot and Tristan," examines two major landmarks in late Medieval and Renaissance Arthuriana: *Lancelot du Lac* and *Tristan*. The complete *Lancelot*, which included the *Lancelot Proper*, the *Queste du Saint Graal* and *La Mort le roi Artu*, was printed by Jean Le Bourgeois in Rouen (Nov. 1488); a second volume had been issued a few months earlier by Parisian publisher Jean du Pré (Sept. 1488). Featuring full-page woodcuts, these two luxury volumes shared Anthoine Vérard's "mise en page," which seems to confirm the hypothesis that the renowned Parisian *imprimeur-libraire*, who issued a second revised edition in 1494 in collaboration with Du Pré, may also have contributed to the *editio princeps* (p. 62, p. 86). Taylor's analysis of the layout and iconographic program in editions of *Lancelot* and *Tristan* is supported by reproductions of woodcuts and miniatures. In a similarly effective fashion, textual transformation from the manuscript tradition to the printed book is illustrated through synoptic tables comparing several manuscript versions of *Lancelot* with its printed edition of 1488. This method allows the reader to visualize a complex manuscript tradition otherwise difficult to grasp. A minor reservation with respect to the annotation system is that Taylor uses italics at times to signal sections borrowed or adapted from the source text (e.g., p. 69), and at other times to note omissions (e.g., p. 74).

Chapter four "Skimble-Skamble Stuff': *Meliadus*, *Merlin*, *Graal*" examines a lesser known "portfolio of romances 'harvested' from the Arthurian corpus" (p. 90). *Meliadus* derives from the thirteenth-century *Guiron le courtois* which printers split into two separate romances, *Guiron* (Vérard, c. 1501) and *Meliadus* (Galliot du Pré, 1528). Taylor examines *Meliadus'* prologue and ending as authorial attempts to establish "narrative coherence and completeness" (p. 96) and to operate closure on open-ended stories featuring multiple characters. (The last chapter of *Meliadus*, for example, includes an episode borrowed from the *Tristan en prose* in which Tristan's father is killed before his infant son's eyes, in contradiction with earlier passages of the romance where Tristan is already a knight.) Issues of authorial control emerge more clearly in the editorial trajectory of Vérard's *Merlin* (1498). Here, Taylor focuses on the third volume, which contained the *Prophéties de Merlin*, compiled by Vérard's workshop from at least two manuscript sources. Taylor argues convincingly that this composite edition—one that produces a largely unreadable text—is a "creative *mise en texte*" (p. 100) a notion that Roger Chartier, writing in "Du livre au lire," borrows from Henri-Jean Martin and Jean Vezin. "Mise en texte" corresponds in Taylor's words to those "strategies by which the book, as a material object, travels distinct social spaces" (p. 100), including textual and paratextual transformations such as *découpage* and rubrication in keeping with superimposed "reading protocols" that generate a "new readability." Using tables that contrast Vérard's *Prophéties* with a closely related manuscript source, Taylor shows that the role of rubrication is not to help interpret the text but rather to "impose an editorial authority" (p. 101) upon it through

segmentation and textual demarcation, an editorial strategy guided by commercial imperatives. Finally, the compendium *Histoire du Saint Graal* (1516) prepared by Galliot du Pré et al. shows how market-driven re-commodification can entail “drastic revision and rewriting” (p. 106).

In contrast with the analysis in chapter four of editorial processes geared towards “narrative efficiency,” chapter five offers two spectacular examples of cultural appropriation via “a series of editorial elisions, revisions and displacements” (p. 119): the *Roman de Giglan* (Claude Nourry, c. 1520) which amalgamates three thirteenth-century narratives (Renaut de Beaujeu's *Bel Inconnu*, the Occitan Arthurian poem *Jaufré*, and sections of the little-known *Laurin*), and the *Roman de Perceval*, a 1530 prosification of Chrétien de Troyes's romance. Taylor links the interpretative moves to a more active role of translators, printers and publishers in adapting source texts to changing literary taste and ways of reading. In the case of the 1530 *Perceval* seems also to entail a redrawing of “the ideological bounds of the original” (p. 139) through narrative adjustments and interventions of the *prosateur* that help to recenter the narrative around an exemplary and “univocal” chivalry (p. 146).

Throughout her engaging exploration, Taylor notes the difficulty of tracking changes in literary taste through a discontinuous series of adaptations as well as that of assessing intentionality upon each rewriting. Chapter six, “Satyric Scenes in Landscape Style: *Amadis de Gaule*” takes on directly the “publishing phenomenon” that triggered the “sudden demise of Arthurian romance around 1540” (p. 161). Flaunting its novelty through innovative typography and layout, Herberay des Essarts' French translation (Denis Janot, 1540) proved a spectacular success. Much like Marian Rothstein for whom *Amadis de Gaule* is emblematic of a 1540s “paradigm shift,” Taylor takes interest in “the social dynamics that reshaped romance” (p. 153).^[7] The inclusion of the “near-Arthurian” *Amadis de Gaule* lends to the study remarkable depth and scope in that “*Amadis* is a tissue of allusions and reminiscences, a hybrid which coalesces to form a new host text” (p. 153). Pierre Bourdieu's notion of a “culture-making” network of literary producers (p. 162) is cautiously invoked to wrestle with the ideas of “change of taste” and “literary preference” (p. 161). The closing chapter “Fruitlesse Historie: Maugin's *Tristan*, Rigaud's *Lancelot*” examines two Arthurian works from the second half of the sixteenth-century: Jean Maugin's “florid” *Nouveau Tristan* (1554), which was published “at the height of the Amadis craze” (p. 184), and Benoît Rigaud's drastically abridged *Lancelot* (1591). While unsuccessful, these two experiments attest to the “market-dexterity” of writers, and, more particularly, of *marchands-libraires* as they adapted to shifts in class, and perhaps gender, bias” (p. 184).

Three appendices supplement Taylor's analyses of textual and paratextual transformations. Particularly useful, if idiosyncratic, is a chronology of sixteenth-century publications that allows Taylor's reader to compare the editorial trajectories of Arthurian and non-Arthurian romances (*Ogier le Danois*, *Mélusine*, *Quatre fils Aymon*, *Huon de Bordeaux*, *Pierre de Provence et la belle Maguelonne*, and *Amadis*), a comparison that the study itself does not dwell upon.

Theoretically informed, well documented, and comprehensive, *Rewriting Arthurian Romance in Renaissance France* provides a much-needed map with which to navigate a prolific textual production that was seen as anecdotal, in part because it did not fit traditional histories of literary culture in the Renaissance.

NOTES

[1] Michel Simonin, “La Réputation des romans de chevalerie selon quelques listes de livres (XVIe-XVIIe siècles),” in *Mélanges Charles Foulon* (Rennes: Institut de Français, Université de Haute-Bretagne, 1980), pp. 363-70.

[2] M.T. Jones-Davies, ed., *Le Roman de Chevalerie au temps de la Renaissance* (Paris: Jean Touzot, 1987). Studies of earlier transformations of the genre include Jennifer Goodman, *Chivalry and Exploration: 1298-1630* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1998), and Caroline A. Jewers, *Chivalric Fiction and the History of the Novel* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000).

[3], Richard Cooper, "Nostre histoire renouvelée: The Reception of the Romances of Chivalry in Renaissance France," in Sydney Anglo ed., *Chivalry in the Renaissance* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1990), pp. 175-238. Philippe Ménard, "La réception des romans de chevalerie," *BBLAS* 49 (1997): 234-73.

[4] Isabelle Diu, Elisabeth Parinet et Françoise Vielliard, eds., *Mémoire des chevaliers: édition, diffusion et réception des romans de chevalerie du XVIIe au XXe siècle* (Paris: École des Chartes, 2007).

[5] Jean Frappier, "Les romans de la Table Ronde et les lettres en France au XVIe siècle," *Romance Philology* 19 (1965): 173-93. Frappier's overview was based on C. E. Pickford's survey, "Les éditions imprimées des romans arthuriens en prose antérieures à 1600," *Bibliographical Bulletin of the International Arthurian Society* 13 (1961): 99-109.

[6] Chivalric romance has often been approached through the paradigm of *Amadís* which was itself an avatar of the genre, as Taylor's study suggests. Sylvia Roubaud-Bénichou, *Le roman de chevalerie en Espagne: Entre Arthur et Don Quichotte* (Paris: Champion, 2000); Luce Guillerm, *Sujet de l'écriture et traduction autour de 1540* (Paris: Aux Amateurs de livres, 1988); Paula Luteran, *Theory of Translation in the Sixteenth Century: Analyzing Nicolas Herberay des Essarts' Amadis de Gaule* (Lewiston, Maine: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2005).

[7] Marian Rothstein, *Reading in the Renaissance: Amadis de Gaule and the Lessons of Memory* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1999). See also Marian Rothstein, ed. *Charting Change in France around 1540* (Selinsgrove, Penn.: Susquehanna University Press, 2006).

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