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Review of *Chrétien de Troyes and the Dawn of Arthurian Romance*, by William Farina

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saint embodies the aristocratic *noblesse* that Madame Eglantyne plainly aspires to but can only “countrefete” (General Prologue, line 139): in one episode (*Wilton Chronicle*, lines 1181–1225), Edith spiritedly rebuts Bishop Æthelwold’s criticism of her custom of wearing a gown of purple silk bordered in gold and a mantle trimmed with fur under her Benedictine habit (with a hair shirt next to her skin, of course). The mantle is later miraculously preserved from damage in a fire.

While the Edith of the *Wilton Chronicle* could serve Chaucer students as an idealized foil for the flawed Prioress, the *Wilton Chronicle* also offers a strikingly parallel instance of that insouciant blend of simplistic religiosity and unsavory vindictiveness that characterizes the Prioress’s own tale. Near the end of the *Wilton Chronicle*, the poet explains that whereas on occasion Edith permits her community to suffer “wronge,” just as Christ suffered the Jews to crucify him, the saint usually punishes those who harm the convent, just as Christ avenged himself by afflicting Jewish men with monthly, menstrual bleeding and the horror of cannibalizing their own children during the siege of Jerusalem (lines 4746–61).

Dockray-Miller’s modern prose rendering of the Wilton poems for the most part reads well, with few serious lapses (e.g., *Wilton Chronicle*, line 4314, ME *stok*, ‘tree stump,’ is rendered obscurely as “a wooden timber” [p. 295]; Saint Birinus is strangely modernized as “St Byron” [p. 39]). The edition of the texts proper has more frequent problems. The editor’s practice of retaining the scribe’s habitual separation of prefixes from word-stems (e.g., *a tempt* for “attempt,” *by lovede* for “beloved,” *a vantetage* for “advantage,” etc. [*Wilton Chronicle*, lines 1547, 1562; *Wilton Life*, line 215]) contradicts her editorial policy of following modern convention, not the scribe’s, in such cases (p. 34); only the *y*-prefix is regularly attached (sensibly) to its stem in the edited text. As is also proposed in the introduction, scribal abbreviations are usually expanded silently, but *qd* (for ‘quod’) and *Jhu* (for ‘Jhesu’) are left unexpanded (e.g., *Wilton Chronicle*, lines 4726, 4747). A random check of two folios of the Cotton manuscript (212v and 255r) revealed a number of transcription errors and misreading of abbreviations: *some* (1524, 1532), *what* (1528), *zef* (1548), *monn* (1552), *prively* (1559), *Englande* (1564), *maydenes* (4722), *synnes* (4727), *gde* (4732), *upon*, *long* (4748), *eton* (4756) should be, respectively, ‘somme’, ‘whate’, ‘zyff’, ‘mone’, ‘prevely’, ‘Englonde’, ‘maydonus’, ‘synnus’, ‘gode’, ‘upone’, ‘longe’, ‘etone’. Finally, in a book of this size and cost, the scholarly apparatus should offer a more informative, less haphazard guide to the poems’ historical, hagiological, and biblical allusions.

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WILLIAM FARINA, *Chrétien de Troyes and the Dawn of Arthurian Romance*. Jefferson, N.C. and London: McFarland and Company, 2010. Paper. Pp. ix, 245; maps. \$35. ISBN: 978-0786448661. doi:10.1017/S003871341200022X

It takes some courage to publish yet another book-length examination of Chrétien de Troyes’s five romances when so many erudite studies cram the shelves. William Farina intends his, however, to acquaint the English-speaking devotee of Arthurian romance with the French antecedents of Malory’s *Le Morte d’Arthur*, specifically with “the one name [that] towers above all the rest: Chrétien de Troyes” (p. 1), whom he believes is unknown to, and therefore unappreciated by, Anglophone readers of Arthuriana.

Farina proceeds systematically to dispel that ignorance by organizing his book thematically rather than chronologically around Chrétien’s five extant romances (the subjects of chapters 1, 5, 11, 16, and 21) and studying the historico-cultural elements that influenced them in the intervening chapters. To prove that the Arthurian literary tradition is French

rather than “Welsh or Anglo” (p. 1), he begins with a chapter on the third (or fourth) of Chrétien’s five extant romances, *Lancelot ou le Chevalier de la Charrette*, which he entitles “Everybody Knows Lancelot Was French” in a nod to the stereotype of the virile, seductive French male. Following chapters survey the Ibero-Arabic “roots” of *fin’amors*; present E. K. Chambers’s and R. S. Loomis’s theories about the development of the Arthurian saga; and then chapter 4, “Medieval Feminism,” examines “one of the benchmark ideological shifts” (p. 31) produced when Chrétien melded Arthurian material with his version of *fin’amors*. The way is thus paved into Farina’s study of *Cligès*, Chrétien’s second romance, which he reads traditionally as an anti-*Tristan* but also, with the twenty-first-century reader in mind, as multicultural (because of the eponymous hero’s Byzantine and Arthurian roots) and socially responsible (given the favorable portrait of the builder Jean, whose skill allows Cligès and Fenice to live together unseen). Farina then again broadens his scope to study the confluence of ideas from Latin and Arabic sources influencing Chrétien, the sad history of the Albigensian crusade (which he calls the “desecration of Aquitaine,” chapter 7), Anglo-Norman history and the geography of the Angevin territories, and Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia*. In “Historical Themes: The Knight,” he reviews the chivalric ethos, with Gawain seen as the “exemplar” of chivalry (p. 91), and then follows established critical opinion in reading *Erec and Enide* and the later *Yvain* as a “clash between chivalry and courtly love” (p. 98). As in the other chapters on specific romances, Farina draws attention to the differences among the English translators of important scenes and pertinently shows differences in interpretation that Ruth Cline’s, W. W. Comfort’s, and David Staines’s translations could encourage the English-speaking reader to make. His examination of *Yvain* follows chapters on Malory and his work, male sibling rivalry in Norman/Angevin history, the *entrelacement* between the Crusades and the spread of Arthuriana, and the history of the Normans’ implantation in France and England. *Yvain*’s connections with Welsh traditions and the dating of the romance by Chrétien’s present-tense reference to the Sultan Noradin presumably provide the justification for studying this particular romance at this point. The failures of the Crusades, intersecting with the development of the Grail legend and Chrétien’s apparent distaste for Merlin and magic, lay the groundwork for Farina’s chapter 20 on Chrétien’s last romance, *Perceval ou le Conte du Graal*. Farina sees Perceval’s “delayed self-awareness” as a sign of his “uniqueness as a twelfth-century literary hero” (p. 181), but he does not note a similar delay in the narrator’s revelation of the eponymous hero’s name in the *Lancelot*. He could thus have usefully compared Perceval’s eventual spiritual itinerary and the socio-political trajectories of the preceding heroes. Or indeed, since Lancelot’s raising of the tomb cover and his martyr-like wounds speak to his exceptional status in the religion of love, Farina could also have productively studied the apparent development in Chrétien’s conception of the hero.

The virtue of this book is to present Chrétien and his romances in the wide cultural context preceding, influencing, and following his career. While it achieves this goal in a chatty, generally informed way, it does contain some errors or overstatements that could mislead the naïve English-speaking reader interested in Chrétien: Aquitaine was not, for example, synonymous with *Occitania*. More importantly, Chrétien was a *clerc*, i.e., he had acquired the schooling consistent with that of a clerk in minor orders, but he opted to work, like others, as a learned secretary in the court of Count Henri I and Marie of Champagne. The erroneous “clergyman” status Farina persists in according Chrétien during the first two-thirds of the book oversimplifies his very interesting creation of *Cligès* and *Lancelot*; why not consider the former as hijacking the Tristan myth to enhance his reputation or the latter as a tongue-in-cheek virtuoso piece?

Farina’s heavy reliance on more traditional studies of Arthurian legends and especially of Chrétien also means that the important, sometimes controversial insights offered by Joan Tasker Grimbert, Peter Haidu, Tony Hunt, Donald Maddox, L.T. Topsfield, and

Eugene Vance, to name but a few, go unrecognized in the chapters on the individual romances, which would thus have been enhanced. This is all the more regrettable because Farina comes to some interesting insights even without their help. For example, despite believing that Chrétien was a clergyman, Farina astutely observes that the scene of Lançelot's departure after his first night with Guenevere makes him more sympathetic.

With no pretense of addressing a scholarly audience, Farina's creditable, but not groundbreaking, study of Chrétien's contributions to the Arthurian material will undoubtedly bring the French author greater popularity among English readers.

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SEYMOUR FELDMAN, *Gersonides: Judaism within the Limits of Reason*. Oxford and Portland, Oreg.: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2010. Pp. xiii, 254. \$59.50. ISBN: 978-1904113447. doi:10.1017/S0038713412000231

This is a very good book. Seymour Feldman knows his subject well and has produced a text that is self-assured, well written, and graceful, with an impressive absence of jargon. Anyone interested in Gersonides should read this book; anyone not interested in him would quickly develop an interest on reading it.

The subtitle is important since Feldman thinks that Gersonides saw no disjunction between philosophy and science, on the one hand, and religion, on the other. Thus, instead of going through the tedious rigmarole of Athens versus Jerusalem that is so prevalent in discussions of the philosophy of this period in the Islamic and Jewish worlds, Feldman can cut to the chase. After discussing Gersonides's life and works, Feldman moves on to his account of creation, our knowledge of God, divine omniscience, providence and omnipotence, prophecy, immortality, and philosophical psychology, ending with an account of the Torah and the scope of religion in a rational environment. There is a detailed and very helpful bibliography.

Feldman constantly compares and contrasts Gersonides with Maimonides, quite rightly since that is what Gersonides did himself. Like so many Jewish philosophers after the twelfth century, Gersonides was entirely taken up with the intellectual challenge set by Maimonides. He was also stimulated a good deal by the thought of Averroes, and I am not sure that Feldman makes enough of that influence: many of the arguments that Gersonides offered against Maimonides ultimately derive from Averroes, and it would help the reader to understand the logic of Gersonides's position if that link had been explained. Averroes was also significant in shaping Gersonides's views on the technical aspects of philosophical logic.

Feldman tends to be a bit quick in dealing with aspects of Gersonides's apparent empirical methodology, his appeals to experience to support or disprove philosophical theories. So, for example, we are told on page 27 that Aristotle's thesis that providence is limited to the species and does not extend to individuals is disproved by Gersonides's comment that we can have veridical dreams that are helpful to us. The implication here is that Gersonides the shrewd scientist is pointing out something that the abstract philosopher could not acknowledge. Yet Aristotle was also a scientist, and he no doubt knew that it is possible for people to be helped by their dreams; but unless dreams come to us from God in some way, they would hardly be instances of divine providence.

Feldman detects a link between the theory of divine providence and Gersonides's account of creation (pp. 123–34). Because Gersonides believed in creation out of preexisting matter, it was not difficult for him to accept that the consequent world would be imperfect. Maimonides apparently could not make that move, for he believed that matter was created by God out of nothing when he created the world. Nonetheless, Maimonides