
*Festschriften* are notoriously difficult to produce. Such collections are unified not by theme or even, necessarily, by period, but merely by a desire to pay tribute to a scholar whose work has had a wide-ranging impact. As a result, such volumes can often be only loosely coherent, and with essays of varying quality. Not so with this collection in honour of the noted French medievalist Yolande de Pontfarcy Sexton. The chapters in this volume may take a wide range of approaches from literary to historical, from ethnographic to semiotic, but they are unified in their focus on medieval imaginative literature, and each work is rich in both insight and detail.

The volume begins with editions and analyses of a range of Old French texts. Glyn S. Burgess’s edition and translation of ‘The Lay of Espervier’ (a poem not published since 1883) opens the collection. This lay, bordering on *fabliau*, gently parodies its own historio-cultural context, poking fun at the medieval fascination with marvels, and highlighting the dangers of misplaced credulity. Joseph Long examines the brief *Aude de la belle* episode in the Oxford *Chanson de Roland*, noting that Aude ‘represents an alternative experience to that which the epic poem relates [and] also subverts the very language of the masculine feudal ethic which sustains the narrative’ (51). He notes the contrast between the masculine imperialist language of Charlemagne in announcing Roland’s death and Aude’s assertion that Roland ‘me jurat cume sa per a prendre’ ['who swore to me to take me as his wife'] (V. 3,711). In observing how Aude here participates in the discourse of the masculine feudal ethos to describe her relationship with Roland, Long concludes that she ‘disturbs the assumptions which [...] bound that
narrative, suggesting extended possibilities for the representable, a wider semiotic and an alternative voice.’ (56). Phyllis Gaffney examines automata of youthful figures in three texts, the Pèlerinage de Charlemagne, the Conte de Floire et Blancheflor, and Mainet, asserting that their descriptions are thematically linked to the texts in which they appear, and that they ‘resonate with cultural meanings beyond their immediate location.’ (57) She probes the collocations of youth and summer, and youth and joy, as well as the force of the wind and its connection with the prophetic and sacred, and then examines such connotations in terms of the respective poetic contexts in which they appear. Tony Hunt analyses the thirteenth-century Vie de Pères, overturning the traditional distinction between clerical and courtly style, by showing how these sacred stories use both organic and bawdy imagery. Unlike other essays in the volume, however, Hunt does not provide translations of the French passages that he cites, creating a slight inconsistency in the volume as well as limiting the appeal of this methodical and eminently useful essay to readers of Old French.

The next three essays in the volume consider both Italian and Celtic literary contexts. Richard Glyn Roberts and Jenny Rowland explore banqueting scenes in Fled Bricrenn and the Vœux du Paon, suggesting a previously undiscovered link between these two texts. John C. Barnes provides a précis of horse lore in Western European mythology and culture: before the Christian era, horses are believed to be wise, articulate, and gifted with vatic powers; later, they are also depicted as foolish, arrogant, lustful and bellicose. Barnes examines Dante’s equine imagery in the Com[media] and the Convivio, where the horse is often used as an example of a general principle (such as cowardice preventing a man from pursuing noble deeds). Jennifer Petrie investigates Petrarch’s deployment of the myth of Daedalus in various writings, considering the multiplicity of significance and allusion encoded therein.
The volume continues with historical and historiographical approaches. Kevin Murray examines three early Irish pseudo-historical prophetic texts concerned with kingship — *Baile Chuinn, Baile in Scáil*, and *Baile Fínnachta* — in order to explore the ‘construction and development of an important strand of medieval Irish historiography: the use of prophecy to articulate and explain the status quo on the one hand and to back up or defend against emerging change on the other.’ (121–2). Howard B. Clark deconstructs the foundation legends of Evesham Abbey in a fascinating account of deception, forgery, and ‘ill-recorded fact’ (141). Evelyn Mullally’s exploration of Guillebert de Mets’s fifteenth-century description of Paris alongside other contemporary accounts of the city paints a picture of a romantic, nostalgic view of a city ‘in its flower’ (157).

The final essays in the volume return to the theme of marvellous travel. Éamon Ó Ciosáin explores depictions of Ireland and the Irish across a wide range of medieval French writing, geographical, religious, historiographic, literary, from the twelfth to the fifteenth centuries. Ireland is either civilised or uncivilised, Christian or Pagan, colonised or not entirely conquered. Grace Neville closes the collection with an analysis of St Patrick’s Purgatory in the accounts of French travellers from the early modern period to the present day, exploring why Lough Derg holds such a fascination for travellers and writers alike.

*The Medieval Imagination* is an impressive collection, bound together by a fascinating theme explored meticulously from a wide range of perspectives. This is one for every medievalist’s bookshelf.