to key works, but, with a light touch, guides the reader through these complex debates without obscuring her vision. For example, she deals with the ‘individualist’/‘traditionalist’ debate in three pages, and while the analysis is not going to truly satisfy any scholar working closely on these texts, it proposes further reading for those interested, and provides a useful primer for those who, understandably, are not. Second, in focusing on individual texts, a commentator is obliged to provide narrative details for intricate plots with many characters, episodes, and seemingly fickle decisions on the part of the protagonists. A reader could get lost in these. Again, Jones deftly and succinctly provides the necessary background for understanding the texts before cutting to key concerns and contradictions. It is these, the frequently alien and multifaceted ‘issues’ of the literature, that provide the greatest pay-off for a modern audience, especially at the level of undergraduate teaching—how can these texts be used to understand medieval society? It is here that Jones, always retaining a focus on the larger issues at stake, makes the greatest contribution to scholarship.

There are occasional mistakes, responsibility for which may lie as much with the copy-editor as the author: for example, on page 150 the Canso de la Crozada is puzzlingly dated to the ‘Eleventh century (1212–19)’, and the Chanson de Bertrand du Guesclin, ‘Twelfth century (1380–1385)’. Greater discussion of the relationship between the chansons de geste and other medieval literatures, in particular Latin and Middle High German, would have benefited the readership. By presenting the chansons outside of this context, there is a danger of implicitly claiming the uniqueness, hence isolation, of medieval French literature in the wider European cultural field.

An Introduction to the Chansons de Geste is unlikely to seriously challenge, in recent scholarship, François Suard’s formidable Guide de la chanson de geste et de sa postérité littéraire (XIe–XVe siècle) (Paris: Champion, 2011), but this is evidently not Jones’s intention: her work is under half the price and a quarter of the length. Her audience is explicitly ‘non-specialist’ (p. xi). All Old French quotations are translated into English. The bibliography, with the exception of four items, is exclusively in English and French. There are, therefore, a few omissions, most notably from German and Italian scholarship, presumably for the benefit of the readership, which is assumed to have some modern French but to be more comfortable working in English. Jones’s Introduction constitutes a vital step in making the chansons de geste accessible to anglophone students, which in turn leads to greater recognition for, and use of, the genre among other fields of Medieval Studies.

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McCracken (Cambridge: Brewer, 2012) comes this book on Celtic origins, which fortuitously addresses an area where both Companions are weak. It is a good book, and everyone who studies Marie de France should read it. Those who are not familiar with this line of research may find it game-changing—and those who are will appreciate the synthesis and learn a thing or two.

Bernard Sergent sets out to recapitulate about two centuries of work on the Celtic sources of Marie’s Lais, and add to it based on his knowledge of early Irish and medieval Welsh literature. Despite a few significant omissions—usually not of scholars per se, but of particular work by scholars that would have been more relevant than what is cited—Sergent does this well. The way he divides scholars into pro-Celtic and anti-Celtic camps (p. 339) works for much of the twentieth century, but now the alternative to a pro-Celtic position is not so much outright opposition as indifference: Marie’s Celtic background is acknowledged in a vague way without a sense that the details of it can be known or that they matter. Hence, the specificity of Sergent’s attention to early Celtic texts, including his comments on ‘first-hand’ and ‘second-hand’ Celtic influence (p. 344), is refreshing and important. Going lay by lay, he finds some combination of plots and motifs in Irish and Welsh literature that could have been used to generate them all, and makes a valuable argument that medieval Brittany must have had its own forms of all the narratives referred to in their Irish or Welsh versions (p. 341).

In a rare move for a student of Marie, Sergent mentions sung narrative from Brittany (especially gwerziou̦, Breton-language ballads) collected since the Middle Ages (pp. 19–20, 345). But this is not where his main interest lies, and a full discussion of Marie and the gwerziou̦ remains to be written.

The book is not without its flaws. Since we know that only a fraction of the medieval literature in Celtic languages has survived, it seems misguided to try to state precisely what Marie’s source material was, versus what it was like. For example, Sergent is determined to relate the Four Branches of the Mabinogi to the Lais. It seems unquestionably worthwhile to compare them, but he has not sold me on the idea that Marie’s Equitan is a rewriting of the Fourth Branch (pp. 70–76), just because they share adultery and a bathtub.

Moreover, Sergent seems to insist on Celtic origins to the exclusion of others (e.g. p. 117), and this is coming on too strong. We do not always have to choose between a Celtic source and an alternative, even if the Celtic source was primary. Like Chrétien de Troyes, Marie seems to have conjoined her Celtic material with classical and Christian influences, in a way that also reflects social and political concerns of her twelfth-century milieu. This is part of what makes her Lais, and some of the other medieval Breton lays, so rich and interesting.

Overall, Sergent has written a wonderful sourcebook for anyone who wants to probe what Marie says about the ancient Bretons/Britons. It challenges us to apply an understanding of the Celtic origin of the Lais to the way we read and teach them in any context; precisely how to do that will remain at the forefront of Marie de France studies in the twenty-first century.
Reviews

A final note. Sergent is an elegant writer, but—especially with proper names, and in the bibliography—the book needed better copy-editing.

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Mathieu Boyd


This book offers a detailed and incisive re-examination of Guillaume de Machaut’s poetry through the lens of ‘apprenticeship’: that is, it reads the poems (principally the Voir Dit) as illustrating and exemplifying the processes by which one can teach, learn, and emulate the ‘arts’ of love and poetry.

Chapter 1 describes a progression in Machaut’s conception of ‘good love’ across his œuvre, from irrational, desire-centred carnality to the fully formed Bonne Amour articulated by Esperance in the Remede de Fortune. Chapter 2 explores the various problems and complications that might afflict ‘good love’ under exceptional circumstances or in the course of a long-term, long-distance relationship. Both the Fontaine amoureuse and the Voir Dit arrive at open-ended but optimistic conclusions, primarily thanks to the stability and consolation with which the women rebuke and correct their lovers’ doubts. Having focused on the art of love in the first part of the book, Douglas Kelly turns, in Chapters 3–5, to the art of poetry. Toute Belle is carefully located in and guided through a ‘script’ of poetic instruction, whereby she draws on her existing knowledge to imitate, emulate, and surpass her master Guillaume. Chapters 4 and 5 delineate Machaut’s various lessons on the correct (and incorrect) use of exempla and the debate mode.

The final part of the book takes us beyond the arts of poetry and love. Chapter 6 examines the work of three of Machaut’s successors to show how apprenticeship can be expanded and developed to encompass a wider range of arts and sciences. Chapter 7 focuses on the idea that the reciprocal, dialogic relationship between master and apprentice exemplifies a kind of melodic harmony that is central to the ordering principle behind good love, good poetry, good social relations, and indeed goodness as such. The afterword reflects on issues of truth and fiction, suggesting that it is often dangerous to speak openly about real-life corruption, but that fiction can work to amend such corruption by promoting good, harmonious love.

This book will be essential reading for any Machaut scholar. Kelly’s decision to examine these poems through the lens of apprenticeship is a brilliant one, yielding many fascinating interpretations. For example, it alters one’s reading of the Voir Dit in all sorts of productive ways to see its hero’s anguished jealousy as a didactic fiction designed to test the apprentice’s moral, rational, and literary faculties. Kelly’s astonishingly detailed, but always very readable, descriptions of the various ‘scripts’ that govern the ‘ordonnance’ of Machaut’s œuvre, and of each individual dit, will be of incalculable value to future scholars seeking to navigate the works of this formidable medieval magister.