

and Empire, and he convincingly demonstrates that the force of Isabelle's personality may have influenced these events in turn. Field also makes frequent reference to historiography on a wide range of subjects, ranging from Franciscan poverty to aristocratic women's marriage patterns.

Field's exploitation of the historiography is particularly satisfying with regard to gender history. As he points out, a key factor enabling Isabelle's agency was her ability to straddle court and convent, living as a laywoman but retiring to her foundation for a life of contemplation. Field argues that Isabelle's lay status allowed her to retain the power accorded to a princess, leaving her outside the hierarchical discipline of the Church and in a position to wield the considerable political resources of the Capetians in order to realize her vision of a Franciscan female community. The book might have been even more successful in this regard if there had been more discussion of gendered approaches to money and patronage. Isabelle seems to have made major donations, making me suspect that part of her power came from her access to and control of money. Especially given Field's interesting observation that Isabelle did not stress poverty, more attention to female

patronage as a form of power would have been welcome. It may be, though, that the sources' limitations did not allow for more exploration of this topic.

A wide range of scholars will benefit from this book, certainly including Capetian specialists and Franciscan scholars, but it will also be of considerable interest to those with an interest in the question of women's agency. The book also has strong teaching potential. Issued in paperback and available from Amazon, *Isabelle of France* would make a useful assignment for undergraduate classes on women and power or religion.

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Carolyn Larrington, *King Arthur's Enchantresses: Morgan and her Sisters in Arthurian Tradition*. I. B. Tauris, 2006. Pp. 264 + 13 color plates.

Considering that Marion Zimmer Bradley's *The Mists of Avalon* appeared in 1981, it is surprising that there have been no book-length studies of Morgan le Fey until now. Although collections such

as Thelma S. Fenster's *Arthurian Women* have offered insights into the enchantress tradition, they are necessarily limited, with essays typically focusing on one character in one narrative. Therefore, Carolyne Larrington's thoroughly researched *King Arthur's Enchantresses* is a welcome addition to Arthurian studies. Larrington explores the characters of Morgan le Fey and her sisters (related by vocation or by blood) and the ways in which these characters challenge masculine hierarchy from their earliest appearances in the mid twelfth century to modern times.

After providing brief context for non-medievalists, Larrington devotes four chapters to the medieval Morgan drawing attention to how the mid twelfth-century enchantress, initially a beneficent healer, devolves over the next two centuries into a malevolent force. For the most part, Larrington's approach is chronological and straightforward. The first four chapters address Morgan's interactions with Merlin, Arthur, and other knights. Larrington contrasts Morgan's healing powers with Merlin's prophetic powers in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Vita Merlini*, pulling in classical antecedents. She then interweaves other medieval narratives to show how they begin

to malign Morgan's character. In her second chapter, Larrington argues that conflicts ensue when family ties are complicated by marriage, and therefore probes into medieval marriage and the resultant power struggle between men and women. Of interest to feminist scholars is Larrington's discussion of relationships between women, particularly Guenevere's attempts to curb Morgan's passionate (and hence threatening) behavior. In addition, Larrington provides a lucid discussion of the requirement of literacy to perform magic, as well as the physical unattractiveness, which is often both caused and cloaked by feminine sorcery.

Larrington also explores the impact of feminine independence on the chivalric world, primarily through Morgan's interactions with Lancelot and Gawain. Certain enchanted places, typically created by Morgan, indirectly remove men from the chivalric world through the primary motive to prevent desertion of the beloved, and Larrington recounts the ways in which current scholarship considers these locations to be gendered feminine. She argues that such places challenge traditional ideas of masculinity in that knights are prevented from performing deeds to earn the regard of their

beloveds. However, Lancelot overcomes the enchantment, and his subsequent interactions with Morgan provide a vehicle for Larrington to discuss the meaning and obligations of a “true lover.” In her fourth chapter, Larrington turns to the Tristan narratives and fourteenth-century accounts to explore encounters with other knights, noting that these versions present Morgan as needlessly antagonistic toward the chivalric world. Larrington continues her discussion of how Morgan, now joined by the Lady of the Lake, challenges the precepts of *fin’amors*; however, she notes that Morgan is reduced to a foil to the benevolent Lady of the Lake, and that additional episodes depict petty quarrels with other enchantresses. While Larrington’s observations in this chapter are intriguing, her brief comment that Morgan’s debasement is due to medieval misogyny seems simplistic (p. 96), ignoring the complex gender discussions noted elsewhere by other scholars.

Chapter 5 focuses on Viviane, the Damoiselle Cacheresse, and the Lady of the Lake, the three women responsible for the downfall of Merlin, who is seduced by their beauty and intelligence. Larrington notes that the motivation leading to the enclosure of Merlin ranges from

hatred of the lecher, desire to preserve their virginities, and fear of losing the beloved. Although Morgan’s biological sister, the Queen of Orkney, possesses the same drive for independence as these enchantresses, she lacks magical ability. Therefore, Larrington argues in chapter six that the Queen has less impact on the Arthurian court than the enchantresses, featuring largely as a mother. Even though the Queen’s adultery with Arthur produces Mordred, Larrington follows in the footsteps of other scholars in emphasizing the siblings’ ignorance of their relationship. The conclusion of the chapter deals with the female body. Larrington points out the ways in which the sight of the Queen’s dead body impacts the social bonds between men, distancing formerly close brothers while reconciling enemies.

The story of Merlin’s enclosure by Vivien (Viviane) fascinated the Victorians; therefore, Chapter 7 begins with the impact of Robert Southey’s nineteenth-century edition of Caxton’s Malory and continues with Tennyson’s *Idylls of the King*. Larrington points out the similarities between Tennyson’s Vivien and the Victorian prostitute. This treatment prompted many artistic responses, and Larrington includes

color plates to complement her observations. The weakness of this chapter, however, is the limited number of texts under consideration and Larrington's heavy reliance on other scholars, including Debra Mancoff and Rebecca Umland. Consequently she adds little to the discussion of the Victorian enchantress.

The final chapter focuses on the twentieth-century re-emergence of the enchantresses. Larrington begins with Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, noting the similarities between Morgan le Fey and Hank Morgan, and T. H. White's *The Once and Future King*, echoing Elisabeth Brewer's excellent analysis of the impact of Freudian analysis on the female antagonists. Clearly of interest to Larrington is John Boorman's *Excalibur*, which she notes combines the various medieval traditions of Morgan to create an enchantress motivated by political self-gain and sexual desire. Larrington concludes her study with a brief discussion of Marion Zimmer Bradley's *Mists of Avalon* and the modern practice of Goddess religion. Although, as in the previous chapter, many of her comments summarize the scholarship of others, including Maureen Fries and Marion Wynne Davies, the survey of major trends pertaining to the modern Morgan

which Larrington provides will certainly spark further discussion among feminist scholars.

Because she covers so much material, Larrington is forced occasionally into a superficial treatment of her theme. Some of the versions she explores are not typically familiar to the general medieval scholar leading her to spend quite a bit of time summarizing rather than analyzing and consequently adding little to the current scholarship on these characters. For example, in her introduction, Larrington argues that Morgan and her sisters "[make] opportunities for other voices, particularly those of women, to be heard" above the chivalric world (p. 2). At the end of chapter 1, she hints at a number of interesting observations about these enchantresses' use of rhetorical skill to gain power over men. Unfortunately, neither claim is clearly illustrated or developed in subsequent chapters.

Nonetheless, Larrington's book covers an admirable amount of material and draws interesting connections with classical antecedents. One of the many strengths of her book, in addition to its readability due to its jargon-free style, is that she introduces several lesser-known Arthurian texts. It is useful to see the larger trends occurring chronologically

in medieval literature, both continental and insular, as they pertain to Morgan and her sisters. This book, therefore, is a practical survey of recent scholarship on Morgan and her sisters, and Larrington's notes and bibliography effectively direct her audiences to more in-depth research on the topic. Overall, this book is an excellent starting place for scholars of the Arthurian realm, particularly feminist scholars and graduate students interested in enchantresses and their impact on the chivalric world, and will certainly generate much needed debate about these enigmatic characters.

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Living Dangerously: On the Margins in Medieval and Early Modern Europe, ed. Barbara A. Hanawalt and Anna Grotans. University of Notre Dame Press, 2007. Pp. 173.

This essay collection takes our understanding of marginality in a new direction by examining a common theme among widely disparate marginals: the dangers inherent in living on the borderline. Editor Barbara A. Hanawalt—a prodigious scholar of medieval life and social practices—reminds us in her introduction that marginal groups include not only those excluded by poverty, gender, race, and religion, but those who deliberately violate established legal, social, economic, or religious convention. As state power increases from the medieval into the Early Modern period, tolerance of breaches decreases. The marginals considered in this book, whether fictional creations or actual people, all live under threat of disparagement, imprisonment, torture, or death.

Hanawalt and co-editor Anna Grotans have stretched the unifying theme of dangerous living to cover a broad range of essays. Nonetheless, the diverse