

Camelot Regained: The Arthurian Revival and Tennyson, 1800-1849 by Roger Simpson. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1990. Pp. 293 + 16 illustrations. £39.50. ISBN 0-85991-300-7.

The Arthurian Revival in Victorian Art by Debra N. Mancoff. New York & London: Garland Publishing, 1990. Pp. xxii, 358 + 108 illustrations, 7 in color. \$86.00. ISBN 0-8240-7040-2.

The Legends of King Arthur in Art by Muriel Whitaker. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1990. Pp. x, 363 + 107 illustrations, 35 in color. \$103.00. ISBN 0-85991-306-6.

In his 1986 essay on "The Use of the Past in Victorian England," John Clive noted that his subject touched on "almost every important aspect of the Victorian age: politics, society, education, art, literature, culture, the history of ideas," and that to do it justice "would require a major book, one yet to be written." Although the book remains unwritten, the pieces are beginning to fall into place with the publication over the past couple of decades of numerous specialist studies ranging from Hobsbawm and Ranger, ed., *The Invention of Tradition* (1983), and Burrow, *A Liberal Descent: Victorian Historians and the English Past* (1981), to distinguished books on the Victorian appropriation of classical antiquity (Turner 1981, Jenkyns 1980 and 1991) and the Middle Ages (Chandler 1970, Girouard 1981, Dellheim 1982). Even more numerous have been the biographical and critical studies of individuals, including incisive work on the Classical and Gothic Revival architects, all of which will make the job of synthesizing easier but nonetheless formidable. The writer who tackles the task will need to consult the three books on the Arthurian Revival under review here, though he must cope with an accumulation of detail in Simpson and Mancoff, and the reluctance of Whitaker to think very deeply about the meaning of the Revival for Victorian England.

Simpson's *Camelot Regained* is a work of revisionist literary history which questions the claim of Tillotson (1965) and others that when Tennyson began publishing his Arthurian poems in 1832 the legends were still unfamiliar to most readers, and the related claim that Tennyson was the "father of the Arthurian renaissance" (Staines 1986). A major reason for the misunderstandings, Simpson suggests, has been inadequate bibliographies of the Arthurian tradition, a

point which readers of this journal will appreciate, given the situation in which Pre-Raphaelite scholars frequently find themselves, of trying to do historicist work on the Movement without access to *catalogues raisonnés*, editions of letters, or comprehensive biographies of many of the major figures. For the period 1800-49 Simpson has added fifty items to the twenty-seven in the bibliographies by Merriman (1973), and Taylor and Brewer (1983), which have been the source for the standard studies of the tradition. Simpson's assiduous research in the periodicals of the period has allowed him to redress the balance which he sees as having been weighted too heavily in favour of "the 'antiquarian' nature of the assumed audience for Arthurian poetry" (2), while his suspicion of scholarly preoccupation with the influence of Malory has resulted in his uncovering a "rich diversity of alternative sources" (3) available in the first half of the century.

Although Simpson's terminal date, 1849, has been rigidly adhered to in order to avoid "spilling over into the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood's sphere of influence" (4), there is much in his book for writers on the Pre-Raphaelites to ponder. Chapter 1, "The Historical Arthur," which dovetails nicely with Mancoff's book, is a fascinating account of the resilience into the nineteenth century (despite often expressed scepticism) of Geoffrey of Monmouth's extravagant assessment of Arthur, and of the increasing tendency to allegorize and modernize the legend. J. W. Ord's *England: A Historical Poem* (1834-35), for example, endows the King with the ambience and prestige of Geoffrey's hero and celebrates his court as a place of patriotism, chivalry, and heroism. As his preface emphasizes, Ord intended his poem to be an ultra-Tory polemic against the radical politics of the first Reform Bill decade. Similarly, H. H. Milman's earlier *Samor, Lord of the Bright City: An Heroic Poem* (1818), in which Arthur is hailed as a leader who will "o'rbear the vaunting Saxon," develops obvious analogies which bind the past to the present. Simpson makes amply clear that the high-minded, didactic, very public shaping of the legend that we associate with William Dyce's Westminster frescoes and Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* had antecedents in the first half of the century of which we have been only dimly aware.

In his three ensuing chapters Simpson assiduously charts the "Topographical Arthur" and the rival traditions of "The Comic" and "Fairylend Allegory" that kept the legends before the public. He demonstrates,