as they pursue a divisive 'programme of ambition and aggression' (118) within the kingdom. Andrew King analyses how a later Anglo-Scottish political context is felt in the interpretive complexities of Hughes's *The Misfortune's of Arthur* (*c.* 1588) and *Macbeth*. In contrast, Tony Hunt argues that the *Roman de Fergus*, which is based on the historical figure of Fergus of Galloway, uses its Scottish setting to demystify the idealized world of French Arthurian romance.

The surviving Older Scots Arthurian romances, *Lancelot of the Laik* and *Golagros and Gawane*, receive excellent re-examination by Elizabeth Archibald, Rhiannon Purdie, and Sergi Mainer. Archibald's essay interrogates the relationship of the amatory and political in *Lancelot*. Rhiannon Purdie considers the problem of defining the 'national character' (96) of literary texts, and judiciously evaluates the Scottishness of *Golagros*. An essay by Priscilla Bawcutt reveals that the fragmentary *Sir Lamwell*, rather than being a Scots romance, is actually based on an English text in the 'Sir Launfal' tradition. Nevertheless its survival in a Scottish manuscript demonstrates the enthusiasm for things Arthurian in early seventeenth-century Scotland. Indeed, these two contributors are adept at revealing the extent of the interplay between Scottish and English, as well as French, Arthurian writing, despite the friction which defined that particular political border.

This collection's combination of original textual analysis with new contextual and comparative perspectives on genres as diverse as chronicle and drama ensures it a wide readership. It is an impressive volume.

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ANANYA JAHANARA KABIR and DEANNE WILLIAMS (eds), *Postcolonial Approaches to the European Middle Ages: Translating Cultures*. Pp. xii + 298 (Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature 54). Cambridge, New York, Oakleigh: Cambridge University Press, 2005. £50.00 (ISBN 0 521 82731 0).

POSTCOLONIAL APPROACHES TO THE EUROPEAN MIDDLE AGES offers a substantial contribution to the project of rethinking the medieval period from a multi-cultural but non-synthetic point of view. The idea of a postcolonial Middle Ages is no longer a new one. The past few years has seen an energetic outpouring of such scholarship by medievalists like Kathleen Biddick, Kathleen Davis, Geraldine Heng, Bruce Holsinger, Patricia Ingham, Sylvia Tomasch, and Michelle Warren. They are joined by scholars like Robert Bartlett, R. R. Davies, and John Gillingham – historians who do not (so far as I know) describe themselves as sharing philosophical concerns with Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, Dipesh Chakrabarty, and Antonio Benitez-Rojo, but whose recent books have been engaged in a similar project of reconfiguring the narratives we tell about the past, stressing contingency and multiple possibilities, rejecting unselfconscious Eurocentrism and teleogy-inducing Anglophilia. For historians as well as literary and art critics, the contours of medieval studies are very different now from their more settled shape of a decade ago.

Kabir and Williams's book arrives at a good time to assess the changes that postcolonial medieval studies have already engendered, to speculate on limitations and blind spots, and to open up possible futures. The editors accomplish this task by gathering some of the usual suspects (Suzanne Conklin Akbari, long known for superlative work combining the best of traditional approaches with newer theoretical concerns; Roland Greene, who helped bring a postcolonial and transnational emphasis to early modern studies), some new voices (James G. Harper, an art historian), and luminaries whose previous work was not explicitly postcolonial but whose essays in *Postcolonial Approaches* make it clear that

they have long been engaged in sympathetic research (Nicholas Howe, Seth Lerer). Even if the pieces gathered in the volume end up being too diverse to be housed comfortably beneath the volume's sub-rubric of 'Translating Cultures' – capacious as that phrase may be – none the less this collection distinguishes itself for the high quality of its writing, the creativity of its critical approaches, and the insight exhibited within each individual piece.

Perhaps a single line from the introduction by Kabir and Williams will yield an adequate hint of what its contributors share in their methods and aims. Examining the Christmas star as it glimmers above the Magi in an illustration from *Les très riches heures de Jean, duc de Berry*, the editors write that this celestial marvel 'radiates alternative interpretive strategies' (5). By focusing upon the crowded, diverse field of signs that composes the illustration, Kabir and Williams demonstrate that despite its pious Christianity the Magi scene cannot be reduced (or translated) into some uncomplex or unambivalent narrative. The sumptuous image radiates wonder, an exhilarating mixture of beauty and dissonance. And it is for this noise – seen and heard when the critic is attentive to alternatives, exclusions – that the contributors to *Postcolonial Approaches* seek. Limitations of space preclude my giving a full account of each contribution. To my mind, however, the strongest of the three parts of the book is the opening section, christened 'The Afterlife of Rome'. As Clare A. Lees and Gillian R. Overing pointed out in their introduction to a special issue of the *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* on 'Gender and Empire' (xxxiv, 1 (2004)), the early Middle Ages have been inadequately examined from a postcolonial viewpoint (3). The three essays clustered here help remedy that defect, and collectively argue for the importance of Romano-British history in thinking about the anxious belatedness of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. I should also add that the pieces by Nicholas Howe (on the haunting, material as well as figurative, of Anglo-Saxon England by Rome) and Seth Lerer (an awesome meditation on the patterned floor of Heorot and the work of Seamus Heaney) are especially eloquent, even moving: they both seem to hover in a rich space between criticism

and poetry. Alfred Hiatt's essay on maps, while solid, seems a bit pale in comparison. The second section, 'Orientalism before 1600', gathers an intriguing essay by Suzanne Conklin Akbari on Alexander and the construction of Western imperial identity; an innovative reading of Gower and monstrosity by Deanne Williams; and an examination of changes in the representation of Turks in fifteenth-century art by James G. Harper. 'Memory and Nostalgia', the omnibus closing section, includes a smart linking of British India to fantasies of Rome and medieval England (Ananya Jahanara Kabir); an extraordinary reading of medievalist Joseph Bédier as Creole by Michelle Warren; and an essay by Roland Greene on *La Celestina* as 'protocolonial baroque'. The volume concludes with an epilogue by Ato Quayson, an Africanist whose serious reflections on what a postcolonial Middle Ages means prevents his piece from seeming like mere window-dressing or a nervous nod to 'real' authority. Indeed, his 'Translations and transnationals: pre- and postcolonial' is a strong finish for a consistently strong, thoroughly engaging volume.

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LYNDA MUGGLESTONE, *Lost for Words*: *the Hidden History of the Oxford English Dictionary*. Pp. xxv + 273. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005. £19.95 (ISBN 0 300 10699 8).

THE history of the making of *The Oxford English Dictionary*, like the dictionary itself, is an immense subject inviting a multitude of perspectives and approaches. In *Lost for Words*, Lynda Mugglestone has, through original archival research, skilfully exposed the processes by which the first edition of *OED* (originally titled *A New English Dictionary on Historical Principles*) was generated.

One feature of Mugglestone's book that may invite a broader readership than it would