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the passing of the 1900 Copyright Amendment, agents who licensed the Canadian rights to British editions.

While MacLaren depicts the ingenuity and entrepreneurial spirit that saw a Canadian like William Briggs at the Methodist Book and Publishing House carve out a niche for his company, he convincingly demonstrates how the lack of a national print industry stunted the development of domestic literature. The agency system that developed following the 1900 Amendment may have stabilized the trade but it maintained 'a colonial dependence in copyright that would define modern Canada' (pp. 69–70). The lack of a national publishing industry left Canadian authors seeking out international avenues for publication, and MacLaren makes the case that another consequence was 'Canadian reading and writing were and remain inextricable from the international book trade' (pp. 13–14).

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

ALISON RUKAVINA

*Memoir: An Introduction.* By G. THOMAS COUSER. New York: Oxford University Press. 2012. v+206 pp. £11.99. ISBN 978-0-19-982692-6.

Bookstores, best-seller lists, and university syllabuses all stand as testament to G. Thomas Couser's assertion that 'this is an age—if not *the age*—of memoir' (p. 3). While the critical and commercial popularity of memoir may account for the timeliness of this book, it is the contextual approach that promises to be a boon to the target audience of 'general readers and undergraduate students' (p. vii). The book's core premiss, that 'memoir is not fiction' and memoirs 'are not novels' (p. 77), is emphasized and explicated with patience and precision. Couser has carved out a place on the reading list of any undergraduate life writing module as well as in any bibliography where the classification of genre is a concern, arguing as he does that memoir has the power to '*do* things fiction cannot' (p. 176). Although simplifications and generalizations are often employed, both by necessity and by design, the book thoughtfully introduces the theoretical foundations upon which the contemporary study of life writing rests; not least of these is the idea that selves are not *recorded* in life writing but *constructed* therein.

While the value of memoir is stressed throughout, in terms of both its socio-cultural import and its economic worth as a marketable commodity, the text is shaped around its comparative status in relation to other genres. As a result, the book becomes not an act of definition but differentiation, separating memoir from its life writing cousin(s), auto/biography, and its unreliable sibling, the novel. While Couser works hard to dismantle the genre hierarchies which surround memoir, the constant recourse to the novel in order to demonstrate what memoir is *not* reinforces the sense of co-dependency and ambiguity which is familiar to scholars of life writing but may prove disorienting to his designated audience.

Any such limitations are, however, compensated by the provision of numerous examples and asides, providing ample further reading for the new student of memoir. Readers with a particular interest in the North American tradition of memoir will be especially rewarded by the close attention paid to the narratives

of slaves, Native Americans, Protestant converts, and US Presidents. Alongside this sits a subtle exploration of contemporary memoir's inherent complexity, including the hoax memoir, such as James Frey's *A Million Little Pieces* (2003), and the 'contagious' (p. 5) misery memoir, such as Frank McCourt's *Angela's Ashes* (1996). Contentious in their respective ways, Frey's and McCourt's best-selling memoirs demonstrate the significance of meeting or breaching genre expectations. As Couser argues, since memoir is 'based on memory rather than research' (p. 19), recourse to excessive fictionalization violates both ethical and professional codes.

Couser presents this book as a writer's 'luxury' (p. vii), drawn forth from his undeniably extensive experience and pedigree in the field, rather than new research *per se*. Indeed, *Memoir: An Introduction* is so peppered with references to Couser's wider oeuvre that readers new to the subject may find it useful to approach it as a wider introduction to those works too. More markedly, such an approach inevitably leads to the sense that this is, in itself, a memoir of academic life. The presentation of the received critical account of the genre alongside his own readings and writings (Couser is working on a memoir of his father) lends the book an appropriately genre-bending air.

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CLAIRE LYNCH

*Old French Narrative Cycles: Heroism between Ethics and Morality.* By LUKE SUNDERLAND. Cambridge: Brewer. 2010. xiv+204 pp. £50. ISBN 978-1-84384-220-0.

Luke Sunderland's book provides the first in-depth examination of literary cyclicity and its aesthetics by studying separately four massive cyclical works: the epic verse *Cycle de Guillaume*, the romance *Vulgate Cycle* and *Prose Tristan*, and the gamma tradition of the verse beast epic *Roman de Renart*. To tackle this daunting corpus the author follows the 'now well-trodden path' (p. 12) of Lacanian theory applied to medieval literature. Using Lacan's notions of morality, ethics, perverse, and sublime, he focuses his analysis on heroism, which he views as a telling illustration of key aesthetic and ethical tensions of cyclical texts, and convincingly demonstrates how these tensions are at the root of the textual *mouvance* in these different literary traditions.

The *Geste de Guillaume* displays a moral structure in which heroes perform their deeds to serve 'le bien'. This endless duty works as an atemporal template or 'point de capiton'—another Lacanian borrowing—for the *geste*: it was, is, and will be performed by Guillaume's ancestors, Guillaume himself, and his descendants. Consequently 'more texts and tales can always be reproduced', which results in 'an excess of textual production—the writing of extraneous texts—that cannot be recuperated into the cycle, despite attempts to finalize it and seal it off' (p. 46).

The *Vulgate Cycle* is structured by a moral hierarchy at the top of which sits Galahad, the hero who fulfils the Grail quest but thereby causes the annihilation of the Arthurian world and of the narrative. In contrast, the ambiguity surrounding Lancelot's heroic status and the fascination he exerts upon other characters contribute to deferring the fulfilment of the quest and to generating more narrative