MEDIEVAL LITERATURE

By David A. Wells, Professor of German at The Queen's University of Belfast

1. General

Lexikon des Mittelalters, Munich, Artemis, continues its third volume with fascicles 4–6 from Della Gherardesca to Drache. Prominent this year are substantial articles on Dominikaner(-innen), Deutsche Sprache (R. Lühr), Deutschland (by a team of authors on many aspects of the history and background to the period, cols 781–914), and Deutsche Literatur (an account, by U. Schulze, of the problems of definition and systematization, with a chronological survey, cols 740–58), while there is also much of immediate vernacular literary interest to be found under Descensus Christi ad inferos (P. C. Jacobsen), Deutscher Orden (H. Boockmann) and Deutschordensliteratur (I. Erfen-Hänsch), Devotio moderna (E. Iserloh), Dialog (P. Schmitt et al.), Dietrich von Bern (J. Heinzle et al.), and Disticha Catonis (P. Kesting et al.). Johannes Hansel, Bücherkunde für Germanisten. Studienausgabe, ed. Lydia Tschakert, 8th revd. ed., Berlin, Schmidt, 1983, 209 pp., has increased the length of this invaluable handbook since the previous edition, the number of entries now totalling 1,254 compared with 1,192. The chief additional items fall within the fields of 'Rezeptionsforschung' and 'Deutsch als Fremdsprache'. Wolfgang Beutin et al., Deutsche Literaturgeschichte. Von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart, 2nd ed., Stuttgart, Metzler, 1984, 597 pp., appears five years after its first issue (cf. YWMLS, 41:663) in a substantially revised and expanded edition. While the opening chapter by B. Lutz on the whole period to 1400 is only marginally revised, W. Beutin (1400–1600) adds a new section on the Meistergesang, and some later sections, including the baroque, are entirely recast. Twaroch, Lesebuch, shows that even our period is prey to the current fashion for regionalism in literature: all the following well-known authors and works, of which representative examples are cited, now parade proudly in the mantle of 'Lower Austrian Literature': Frau Ava, the Melker Marienlied, Heinrich von Melk, Der von Kürenberg, Walther von der Vogelweide, the Nibelungenlied, Neidhart von Reuenthal, Seifried Helbling, Helene Kottannerin, Michael Beheim. In the companion volume Twaroch, Handbuch, these and other medieval texts are surveyed and placed in their chronological and geographical context. K. Stackmann, Fest. Gipper, pp. 737–45, considers the tasks of medieval Ger. philology at a theoretical level, while no less theoretical is U. Peters, Vorträge . . . (Passau), 11, 179–98, on the role of the literature of the period as a
reflection of a collective mentality. Medieval theory itself is the subject of Zum mittelalterlichen Literaturbegriff, ed. Barbara Haupt (WF, 557), vi + 436 pp., which reprints 11 seminal essays from the period 1955–78. H. supplies an introduction, pp. 1–20, synthesizing the somewhat disparate critical approaches, and showing that what they share in common is a general emphasis on the social and communicative role of medieval literature. A particularly valuable feature of the collection is its interdisciplinary spirit, exemplified by the juxtaposition of C. S. Lewis, E. Köhler, Hugo Kuhn, H. R. Jauss, Paul Zumthor, and others. Walter Haug, Literaturtheorie im deutschen Mittelalter. Von den Anfängen bis zum Ende des 13. Jahrhunderts. Eine Einführung, WBG, viii + 408 pp., is a more innovative work than its inclusion in the series ‘Germanistische Einführungen’ might suggest. After a first chapter on the background of Classical rhetoric and the Christian aesthetic H. takes us on a largely chronological journey by way of all the major monuments which include passages on the theory of literature: in all 19 further chapters including, besides two accounts of relevant passages in Chrétien, discussions of OHG and Early MHG instances, the prologues to Hartmann’s Iwein and Gregorius and Wolfram’s Parzival and Willehalm, Gottfried, and postclassical examples from Rudolf von Ems, Konrad von Würzburg, Albrecht’s jüngerer Titurel and elsewhere. This book is a courageous venture which is full of interpretative detail and draws many threads together.

John Miles Foley, Oral-Formulaic Theory and Research. An Introduction and Annotated Bibliography (Garland Folklore Bibliographies, 6), NY–London, Garland, xvi + 718 pp., represents a remarkable achievement: a select critical bibliography containing over 1,800 entries on a truly global basis, a substantial comparative section being included among the classifications by geographical area coded against each item and elucidated in an index. The basis of the selection is the ‘solid nucleus of scholarship related to, stemming from, or in a few cases preceding and giving shape to the work of Milman Parry, Albert Lord, and their followers’. The definition results in an extremely comprehensive and practical view of the field which will satisfy the needs of the great majority of scholars working directly in this area or peripherally interested in it, although at the same time it makes for a reference tool which will become dated in a relatively short time and need frequent revision if scholarship maintains its present momentum. Since a value-judgement has already been made in the selection of each entry from over 2,500 items read, the comments are, rightly, informative rather than evaluative, and the piecemeal presentation of a mass of scholarship in summary form — the arrangement is by straightforward alphabetical order of author — is placed in a wider context by the extension of the lengthy introductory