Book Reviews

Diane Bornstein. *Mirrors of Courtesy*. Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1975. Pp.158. \$10.

The metamorphosis of the knight into a courtier or gentleman is a problem central to medieval and renaissance ideas. It touches upon changing social behaviour; economic, political, and diplomatic history; literature and court festivals; heraldic institutions; the art of war; and evolving ideals of education. The subject is European in scope, although Miss Bornstein concentrates upon English sources which, she says, have not been studied. She may have written this before the appearance of Claus Uhlig's fully documented *Hofkritik im England*: though she does, in fact, cite other books published in 1973 and after. Her volume is meagre—just over 30,000 words—and unequal to the magnitude of her theme.

The book purports to deal with courtesy literature written, or translated, in England during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. However, since—as the author acknowledges—much of this material is international, she has to discuss writers such as Christine de Pisan and Castiglione, though without setting them within the contexts of French and Italian society, or of changing English attitudes towards Continental cultures. Guazzo, for example, is mentioned without reference either to the purpose of his work in relation to that of Castiglione, or to his reception in England. Neither Lievsay's study of Guazzo, nor Javitch's critique, is used. Edward IV's *Black Book* may have been compiled through a "desire to vie with Burgundian standards of opulence" (p. 64), but we learn nothing about those standards or about Olivier de la Marche's account of the household of Charles the Bold. No attempt is made to show how different courts functioned at different times, although such material is not uncharted; and, specifically on England, Gervase Mathew's *Court of Richard II* provides a sensitive treatment of medieval ideas.

Miss Bornstein explains that, because many of the relevant texts "remain in manuscript or in early printed editions," she has "provided summaries as well as substantial extracts" from them. In fact the only manuscripts cited are those which provide the illustrations; and these citations are merely descriptive. Nothing is said of the relationship between Lansdowne MS. 285, Pierpont Morgan MS. 775, and the surviving manuscript corpus of heraldic commonplace books, which is crucial for the history of chivalric ideas.

Some central courtly traditions are similarly ignored. The knight's changing role was largely owing to the evolution of warfare, but this is discussed briefly and inaccurately. During the later Middle Ages, we are informed, "when the cross-bow and the long-bow deprived cavalry of its shock power, the tactics of Vegetius again became ideal for armies" (p. 30); and "ancient and medieval warfare had enough in common to allow *De re militari* to have a strong influence on war in the Middle Ages" (p. 33). Such statements scarcely accord with what is known about medieval armies; and it seems unlikely that classical models were having much practical effect on military behaviour until the late sixteenth century. A related problem arises from a reference to Castiglione's view of war as "a form of courtship and performance"—illustrated by his suggestion that the courtier should always try to separate himself from the main army to perform individual deeds of bravery—an ideal suitable for those "likely to spend more time in the lists than on the battlefield" (pp. 118-9). Yet a glance at Froissart, Monstrelet, and other chroniclers reveals a host of

knights behaving in this way and frequently jeopardising armies, and losing their lives, by so doing.

Silence shrouds the history of heraldic institutions, the international orders of chivalry, and that increasing fantastication of heraldry which afflicted England as well as the rest of Europe during the latter part of the sixteenth century, while the duel of honour—touchstone of changing attitudes towards courtesy and violence—is dismissed in a couple of misleading sentences. That the duel was not simply a “risky social game rather than a battle, one that could be satisfied by ritualistic verbal formulas and gestures” (p. 59), is shown by Frederick Bryson’s study of such duels in sixteenth-century Italy. Actually, the duel was often the recreation of psychopathic killers; and the number of nobles slain on the duelling field was regarded in France as a national disaster. The tournament, too, receives scanty treatment. Neither its composite nature nor its international rules are examined; its development from military exercise into court spectacle is barely suggested; and the work of Frances Yates and of others who have treated these subjects is not utilised.

The role of courtly love in medieval society and literature receives a solitary sentence; and, apart from a reference to Castiglione, nothing is said of the philosophising of this tradition in the Renaissance. Yet such material is central to our understanding of the ways in which chivalry changed character while maintaining continuity of forms and themes. Neither Andreas Capellanus nor C. S. Lewis appear to have existed for Miss Bornstein.

The relationship between arms and letters is touched upon at various points in this book, as is the increasing emphasis upon learning as opposed to military prowess. But there is no hint that this controversy spawned a satirical and hostile literature equal in magnitude to the manuals of courtly advice. Pauline Smith’s study of anti-courtier traditions in France is not mentioned; and, since Miss Bornstein discusses Christine de Pisan, why is there nothing on Chartier’s *Curial*, which was similarly translated by Caxton?

One might, finally, be forgiven for believing that the education of knights, courtiers, and gentlemen could be relevant to the theme of this book. Nonetheless, a reader must rest content with only a few casual remarks on the topic: though should he really be content that Sir Thomas Elyot—hardly a peripheral or uninfluential author in Tudor England—appears only in the bibliography?

Mirrors of Courtesy avoids such major issues. What, then, does it offer its reader? An introductory chapter on the Field of Cloth of Gold is relevant, though not demonstrated as such. The ensuing discussion of chivalry as the code of the soldier suggests that it helped “mitigate the practice of war”: but the medieval civil and canonist background to the problem is ignored. “Chivalry as a Social Code” (Chapter III) provides a digest of the *Epistre d’Othea à Hector*—pertinent, but hardly all that need be said on the subject. “Rituals of Courtesy” summarises some fifteenth-century courtesy books; while “Rituals of Chivalry” (Chapter V) races through knighting ceremonies, Lull’s *Ordre of Chivalry*, and the tournament. The final chapter, “Rituals of Chivalry and Courtesy in the Renaissance,” attempts to demonstrate sixteenth-century developments, and—out of forty or more printed sources which could have been utilised for this study—we are given one paragraph on della Casa, two on Guazzo, and ten on Castiglione. The discussion ends with William Segar, whose two descriptions of the gentleman (one employing the military virtues of his knightly origins, and the other focussing on “moral, social, and civic virtue”) are said to reveal the “change in social ideals and the later focus on the virtues that apply to civilian life” (pp. 122-3).

Unfortunately, every one of the latter qualities listed in Segar may be found, three hundred years earlier, in Lull.

Apart from jargon about "social structure," clichés about the "gentry," and various historical commonplaces, the reader will find merely short summaries of a limited selection of primary sources, several of which have been published in such "not readily available" collections as the Early English Text Society. Despite Uhlig's work, there is certainly room for a book on the subject proposed in *Mirrors of Courtesy*. Sadly, *Mirrors of Courtesy* is not that book.

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Natalie Zemon Davis. *Society and Culture in Early Modern France*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975. Pp. xii, 362. \$15.

Eight essays, five of which have been published during the last decade and are fairly well known, describe "the interaction between Society and Culture and the balance between tradition and innovation" in Early Modern France. A more accurate if clumsier description would be aspects of the lives of some of the non-elite in France between the late fifteenth and early nineteenth centuries, with emphasis on the sixteenth. There are many limitations imposed by the author's interests, sources and approach and most of these are admitted in the introduction. Professor Davis concentrates on the *menu peuple* and has learned much more about those who lived in the cities, especially those who lived in Lyon, than about the peasants; even in Lyon she has learned more about the practitioners of the newer and more skilled trades and their relatives than anyone else. The findings are presented as "a set of case studies" rather than as a unified essay. A comparison of this book with other recent attempts at popular history shows that Professor Davis's approach is the better one. At this time only fragments of the lives and attitudes of "the people" are known for the Early Modern period. Attempts at unified approaches such as those by Mandrou or Kamen, to mention only two, have the same result: bits and pieces used to try to sustain a full-scale theory. It would seem that European popular history in the Early Modern period is still in the article stage. But since that is the time when much of the best work is done the interested reader should put aside his desire to have everything explained and enjoy the bits and pieces being offered.

Now that all the caveats have been put, it can be said that a very vivid picture of life in sixteenth-century France emerges from this book. The city did not understand the country nor did those from different social levels understand one another. Cities were growing and with them developed an urban crisis which came from a combination of the age-old problem of poverty, as well as population growth and economic expansion. Civic leaders found ways of handling these problems from their own practical business experience and from the writings of the humanists. While the city fathers were at work the people in the cities exhibited a social creativity that changed older social forms such as informal youth groups to fit their new needs. Printing played a definite role in giving scope and depth to the experience of city dwellers.

The Reformation had a distinct influence on French cities, though it offered little to