Green Knight, however, locates authorship in the poem, with Morgan le Fay, thus the 'poem moves narrative action and the plan of artistic composition to the same plane' (129). The self-reflexive tendency of medieval narrative invention finally burns itself out in the Squire's Tale. The Squire is a poet who cannot master the new materials found in the natural wonders 'rooted outside poetic imagination in technology and natural philosophy' (148).

Ratio and Invention is a highly self-conscious study which offers an internally coherent vision of medieval lyric and narrative. In view of this it is surprising that Edwards' exploration of narrative is confined to romance, for a natural extension for the work on visionary lyric would be analysis of dream narratives (as Edwards recognizes (70)). The limitations imposed could be defended on logical grounds (romance perhaps being considered 'pure narrative'), though one wonders whether the 'invention' of material has something to do with the simultaneous publication of Edwards' book on Chaucer's dream visions.

Such reflections serve to remind the reader of the ever-present, inescapable effects of real-world contexts on the nature and meanings of texts. They remind one of language, manuscripts, variant readings, problems of date and provenance ... difficulties and complications which are hardly mentioned in Edwards' idealizing account of medieval poetry. *Ratio and Invention* claims to offer 'historicism' (xii), yet displays some of the solipsistic properties it perceives in its subject, 'a world of sustained imagination intensely conscious of its own complexities and limits' (148).

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Menocal, M. R., *Writing in Dante's Cult of Truth: From Borges to Boccaccio*. Pp. vii + 223. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1991. Hardbound £33.20; paperbound £11.95.

EVEN in the best stretches, Menocal's arguments in this book seem incomplete, at times pointless. Her very last paragraphs suggest that, had she begun with Boccaccio, she would not have needed to write the rest of the book. As a result, this book seems unfinished, not fully thought through, despite its clever associations and engaging issues; it makes a reader want to curse the author, the press, and its readers for giving us a book in this condition.

Menocal attacks positivists – her fellow Hispanists? – to whom she feels superior, and then preaches the obvious. She spends paragraphs urging that the poems and essays of poets be recognized as literary criticism revealing the poet who writes it. She castigates academic literary criticism for its mechanically diachronic literary history and espouses the synchronicity of 'real' literary history, where later writers make present to themselves the works of the (distant) past: Dante can be crucial to Eliot, the troubadours to Pound, reaction against Dante and resuscitation of the troubadours to Petrarch. Who is she writing for? To whom are her positions a revelation?

Menocal's book moves around Dante's rejection of troubadour-stilnovisti poetry, or lyricism, first announced in the *Vita nuova* and re-figured in two kinds of scenes in the *Divine Comedy*: the Francesca-Paolo story, *Inferno* 5, and Dante's surpassing of vernacular lyricists, especially Arnaut Daniel in *Purgatorio* 26. In reaction to Beatrice's death, Dante converts from the solipsistic, hermetic, musical poetry of his youth to kabbalistic poetry, to 'a poetry whose meaning and unequivocal truth exists *a priori* outside itself and its own frame of reference, a poetry preinscribed in the cosmos' (27). Dante and later Eliot write Truth, to which Menocal seems persistently hostile, as if writing Truth were easy and the results transparent to readers. As proof that the future defines the past, Menocal offers several sentimental readings of Francesca, the implicit point being that Dante could not control how his poem would be read.

Menocal's first sentimental Francescas come from the Risorgimento writer Silvio Pellico, from his prison memoir *Le mie prigioni* (1832) and his earlier play *Francesca da Rimini* (1815). Pellico intended his internationally best-selling memoir of one hundred chapters to parallel Dante's *Comedy*, but *Le mie prigioni* seems to have been read as a gossipy memoir rather than formally as a spiritual autobiography of conversion from politics and history to Christian withdrawal. In both play and memoir, Francesca or her surrogate commits no sin, but is

threatened by rape or seduction, which Menocal – following the point of view of her male writers – does not notice. What would a dose of feminism do for Menocal's patriarchal critical strategies? Menocal says that Pellico refuses to write the sin because, in contrast to Dante, he will not allow his reader sympathetic participation in sin. She admits that his restraint makes the memoir dull, nor does its pious religiosity and 'lachrymose sentimentality' recommend it. Having failed to establish the spiritual, formal, or stylistic virtues of this text, Menocal frivolously wonders whether *Le mie prigioni* is ripe for restoration or elevation to the canon, by which she means undergraduate reading lists. The chapter on Pellico finally collapses into pretentiousness.

Menocal's sympathies apparently lie with Pound, Petrarch, Borges, and Boccaccio, not with Dante or Eliot, but her arguments seem stranded, incomplete, one side of a dialogue. She celebrates the hermetic and nonsensical lyricism of Arnaut Daniel and Pound and Petrarch's lyrical explorations of the fleetingness of beautiful things, of absence, memory, and nostalgia. She shows Petrarch and Borges interpreting Dante's swoon in *Inferno* 5 as a swoon of envy: Dante rejects lyricism because he fails to achieve the passionate satisfaction with Beatrice that Paolo had with Francesca. In life Beatrice makes no response at all to Dante. That Dante's *Inferno* 5 offers a blistering and pathos-filled critique of solipsistic love poetry and of casual sexual satisfaction would, one might think, force Menocal to some criticism of the lyricists, but not until the end of her book does she grant Dante the complexity of his text.

Menocal approves of the lyricists, but is vicious to Dante and to Eliot for daring, in Borges's terms, to write the Aleph. When Dante calls Arnaut and Eliot calls Pound 'il miglior fabbro', the praise barely conceals a murderous Bloomian confrontation of poetic son with poetic father. Menocal describes Arnaut as 'the ancestor figure emerging from the fire, praised and yet damned, ... return[ing] again, now revealed as eaten up and spat out again by Dante as a remarkably different Arnaut', and in the same sentence, describes Eliot's dedication of *The Waste Land* to Pound as 'inscrib[ing] not only the unavoidable public debt ... but the momentary escape from the unconscious of the murderous poet who sees the fatal limitations of the teacher' (129).

In the Epilogue Menocal explicates Boccaccio's subtitle for the *Decameron*: *Prencipe Galeotto*. Naming his book after Galeotto, whom Menocal mistranslates as Galahad, Boccaccio signals the impossibility of knowing Truth in this world. If Menocal is right, Boccaccio's *Decameron* responds to Dante much as Chaucer's *House of Fame* does, though Menocal mentions Chaucer only in praising Boccaccio's Griselda as 'a great reader ... admirable and imitable' because 'she suffers the story without drawing the "obvious" conclusions' (200). Menocal does not contrast Boccaccio's witty epistemological critique of Dante's Truth with the sentimental, nostalgic lyricists that are her main focus. She concludes by saying that through the play on Galeotto, Boccaccio makes us realize that 'the *Commedia* contains the seed of its own doubt' (202).

The most useful aspect of Menocal's book is the footnotes that offer a survey of criticism on particular writers or issues. The contrast between her arrogant attitude to her readers and her reverential attitude to the authorities she acknowledges, for example Guiseppe Mazzotta, should not be held against them; her reading lists are inviting. Her greatest debt seems, however, to be to Harold Bloom, whose deep faith in Freud's Oedipal family romance has given us the *anxiety* of influence and a definition of *strong* poets that makes them sound sick and weak: they have to *kill* their fathers, that is, misread them to rewrite them. Bloom's *weak* poets do not kill their fathers and he is not much interested in them. Does Bloom regard Dante and Eliot as strong poets? Why does Menocal never examine the critical strategies she is borrowing?

Menocal's style is difficult not because she has difficult things to say but because her prose is incompetent; the syntax of her long, long sentences – too long to quote in full – is usually garbled or clumsy. The copy-editor should have caught such a desperate infelicity as '... in the scene he will use to both tie and sever him to both texts he worships ...' (68); the syntactic confusion of an extra 'that' on pp. 128–9; and the sophomoric '... the history of the Italian Risorgimento is by far not one of the bloodiest of its time or any other ...' (63). But no copy-

editor could be expected to clean up prose like Menocal's.

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Baker, D. C. (ed.), *The Squire's Tale*. Pp. xxvii + 273. (A Variorum Edition of The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, II The Canterbury Tales, part 12.) Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990. £40.95.

D. C. BAKER has already given us *The Manciple's Tale* (see the review, *N&Q*, ccxxxiii (1988), 512–16). The editor pays gracious tribute to his predecessors' work on *The Squire's Tale*, Thynne, Tyrwhitt, Skeat, Robinson, of course; but also, 'and, most particularly, John M. Manly and Edith Rickert for their stupendous achievement under adverse conditions, and to Dorothy Bethurum Loomis, for one of the best "student's editions" which it has been my pleasure to examine'.

The change in taste is charted well, from early admiration of *The Squire's Tale* inspiring imitation and regret that so great a poetic achievement should have remained unfinished, to a debunking sense that Chaucer is mocking Eastern romance and satirizing aristocratic values. Perhaps one dare hope that this edition will help the Tale, and us as its readers, to rise again to a higher level of just appraisal. But then, *The Manciple's Tale* too has, we were told, 'undergone a number of remarkable shifts in critical acceptance'.

There is a good account of sources and analogues, with not much of the former kind available for *The Squire's Tale*, as R. K. Root said as early as 1906. There is no agreement about the date of composition, and little unanimity in the acceptance of allegorical interpretation; though here – if I may intrude an autobiographical element – I was pleased to see mentioned my colleague at Birmingham forty years ago, the late Miss Margaret Galway and her uninfectious conviction that the Maid of Kent must be at the bottom of this and other Chaucerian concerns. We get an excellent account of attempts to complete what Chaucer left unfinished, but more space might have been given so that we could have sampled their poetic flavour better.

A very good section is devoted to 'The Suitability of *The Squire's Tale* to the Squire'. John Lane, early in the seventeenth century, is interesting on the subject, whatever one may think of his attempt to complete the Tale. What amazes the reader of these summary pages is how much more the critics of the last thirty years know about the Squire's character than Chaucer tells us of him. The relation of this Tale to others is also a source of wonderful insights. The 'Survey of Criticism' begins with star performers: Lydgate, Spenser, Milton, Warton. William Godwin's praise of 'the various fancy exhibited' in the Tale is quoted, but insufficient space is given to reveal Godwin's complex critical absurdity, so that this praise is not seen in relation to Godwin's all-embracing condemnation of Spenser and to the dispraise of Milton because 'he studied much in the school of the artificial, the colossal and the wild, and little in that of nature', till at last we were able, with Godwin, to 'turn back to the temple of nature, where Shakespear for ever stands forth the high priest and the sovereign' (*Life of Chaucer* (1803), ii.577–8); Shakespeare, I take it, is in Godwin's view, another, greater Squire.

The 'Textual Commentary' is far too short to be clear. There are strings of line references. For a variorum edition we should not need to go to Manly-Rickert to see what detail is involved. We are given, counted out, 49 line references to unique readings in the text of the Tale in MS Addit. 35286, for MS Gg.4.27 there are 54 line references, for MS Harley 7334 there is a list of 67 line references, Helmingham has 33, Lansdowne has 63, and Petworth has 38; and not a one is explained or quoted. It is even worse with the early printed texts. Though I would not wish to part with the survey of criticism up to 1900, when it comes to more recent appraisals of the Tale I would gladly give a wilderness of critical monkeys, such as is let loose in the introduction and notes, for one golden ring of interconnected textual problems fully explained. The list of a hundred Hengwrt readings retained in this edition where other editors have preferred other readings is to be regarded as space (88–91) well spent. This is a grand enterprise deserving every praise, but to do it well needs time and space, expensive commodities both.

The commentary at the foot of the page is full, but sometimes information easily come by is not