This collection of articles reflects various approaches to the topic ‘Word and Image,’ the title of the session in which they were presented at the XVIIth International Congress of the Arthurian Society (Bonn, 1993). Most treat the relationship between the text and the visual material which accompanies it; several authors study the text with respect to its cultural context.

Four authors focus on the Lancelot-Grail cycle. Susan A. Blackman’s ‘A Pictorial Synopsis of Arthurian Episodes for Jacques d’Armagnac, Duke of Nemours’ provides extensive supporting information for her argument that Armagnac’s collection of Arthurian romances (Paris BN 112, 113–116, and 117–120) constitute ‘an exhaustive and largely non-repetitive visual synopsis of Arthurian episodes that emphasizes the completeness of the narrative’ (p. 3). Carol R. Dover, in “‘Imagines Historiarum’: Text and Image in the French Prose Lancelot,’ examines how several manuscripts visually present the episode of the split shield. Dover convincingly argues that the visual representation of the split shield enables the reader to understand the personal, sentimental importance of the shield for Lancelot as well as the written ‘objective’ story which the scribes recorded at Arthur’s request. As the title suggests, Alison Stones’s ‘The Illustrations of BN, fr. 95 and Yale 229: Prolegomena to a Comparative Analysis’ seems preliminary to an eventual analysis. Her detailed, technical discussion of the two texts reveals a great deal of experience with the topic and presents a useful method for approaching such texts. Fourth, Lori Walters’s ‘Wonders and Illuminations: Pierart dou Thelt and the Queste del Saint Graal,’ focuses on manuscript Paris Arsenal 5218 to show how the illustrations in a text can convey the place and historical moment which produced it. Walters argues that this manuscript’s unique combination of a full version of the Vulgate Queste with historical annals reflects the theological interests of Pierart dou Tielt and fourteenth-century Tournai.

Two articles treat works by Chrétien de Troyes: Carleton W. Carroll’s ‘Text and Image: The Case of Erec et Enide’ and Michèle Vauthier’s ‘The “Roi Pescheor” and Iconographic Implications in the Conte del Graal.’ Carroll examines the illustrations to two manuscripts of Erec et Enide (Paris, BN 1376 and 24403) and concludes that sometimes the illustrations follow the text closely and sometimes they do not, a conclusion that does not seem to make good use of Carroll’s expertise with this romance. Vauthier’s discussion centers on the relationship between the iconography of Chrétien’s Conte del Graal and the spiritual state of Chrétien’s patron, Philippe d’Alsace. Vauthier’s familiarity with the text, the Biblical traditions to which Chrétien likely refers, and medieval iconography make her discussion intriguing, though the quality of her prose often detracts from her ideas.

Two other articles treat the Tristan story: Jacqueline Thibault Schaefer’s ‘The Discourse of the Figural Narrative in the Illuminated Manuscripts of Tristan (1250-1475),’ and Stephanie Cain Van D’Elden’s ‘Discursive Illustrations in Three Tristan Manuscripts.’ Schaefer’s discussion attempts to fill a void she identifies in the study of Tristan manuscripts—insufficient analysis of how the illustrations ‘narrate
the myth’ (p. 175) and thus indicate reception of the romance. She concludes that at least a few episodes inspire illustrations which are specific to the romance: Tristan’s madness, Iseut’s attempt to have Brangien killed, the lovers’ life in the forest, and the death of the lovers. Van D’Elden limits her examination to three manuscripts of the verse Tristan (Munich BS Cgm 51, London BL Add. 11619, and Cologne SHA W 88) and underscores how the visual messages transmitted through the illustrations do not always match the suggestions of the written text. She concludes: ‘the viewers of these three pictorial cycles could choose an interpretation based on their own understanding of the written text, their memory of a written text, or an oral retelling of the story; or they could rely on the discourse of the illustrations’ (p. 294).

The remaining essays treat three widely varying topics within the domain of textual illustration. Donald L. Hoffman’s ‘Seeing the Seer: Images of Merlin in the Middle Ages and Beyond’ uses the elaborate fourteenth-century manuscript London BL Add. 10292 as a basis for which to study how the depiction of Merlin evolved, perhaps in response to the Counter-Reformation in Italy and the Puritan movement in England. Elizabeth Mazzola’s paper, ‘The Implied Arthur: Mass Publics and Splintered Subjects in Spenser’s Faerie Queene, Book II, ‘focuses on the “image” which the written text presents and discusses the connection between Spenser’s work and his understanding of ‘public discourse.’ Martine Meuwese’s ‘Arthurian Illuminations in Middle Dutch Manuscripts’ discusses all the illuminations suggested by the title: the illustrations in four manuscripts. Since these manuscripts represent different Arthurian works, it is difficult for the author to articulate a strong conclusion.

This volume displays the unevenness common to a collection of reworked conference papers. In addition to discussions which cover many facets of the volume’s topic, the reader will find prose of varying quality, treatments which range from narrow to broad appeal, and some efforts which scarcely justify the limited conclusions. Nevertheless, the articles by Dover, Hoffman, Van D’Elden, and Walters are well written and treat topics of reasonably broad appeal. Those by Blackman, Stones, and Vauthier offer useful models of how to approach their topic. As a collection, the volume reminds us that Arthurian literature offers scholars tremendous variety, even within a topic such as ‘word and image.’

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