In their Preface the two authors acknowledge that "only a few major literary works of the classical period of Middle High German have reached a wider public" (xi). Nevertheless, medieval German literature is a storehouse full of significant, if not monumental texts from the eighth through the late fifteenth centuries, and there is no question that the academic community needs to recognize the important contributions of medieval German authors in a wide array of genres. Unfortunately, for instance, at medieval conferences across North America Germanists are practically among themselves only, whereas in other areas of medieval studies it is common practice to look, at least just a little, beyond the narrow borders and to include different voices from different languages, though not in German. A random example might be Susan L. Smith's monograph *The Power of Women*, recently reviewed here in *The Medieval Review* (TMR 96.12.14). Her selections of texts and authors include Boethius, *Aucassin and Nicolette*, Jean de Meun's *Roman de la Rose*, Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, and Christine de Pisan's *Epistre au dieu d'Amours*. I do not want to comment on the quality of her book, but rather point out the stupendous absence of German authors such as Gottfried von Strassburg, Wolfram von Eschenbach, Mechthild von Magdeburg, Mechthild von Hackeborn, Ulrich von Etzenbach, and Johann von Tepl. Each of their texts would have provided Smith with a wealth of relevant support for her thesis, and/or would have forced her to refine it in specific ways. Another glaring example would be Jesse M. Gellrich's excellent study on *The Idea of the Book in the Middle Ages* published in 1985. Certainly, one can write about such global concepts as 'the book' by examining authors such as Dante, Chaucer, and a host of medieval philosophers, but it seems strange that, in the same context, neither Hartmann von Aue's *Gregorius nor* Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Titurel*, for instance, are mentioned. Again, this is not a criticism against Gellrich, instead simply an effort to highlight a general problem in medieval studies, that is, the very timid comparative and interdisciplinary approach which needs to go beyond canonical writers such as Chaucer, Dante, and Christine de Pisan. See, for example, the fairly new journal *Mediaevistik*, ed. by the Austrian scholar Peter Dinzezbacher (1988- ). Of course, for many the linguistic barrier is prohibitive, but there are so many translations available to make such a point moot. We are all trained as specialists because of the departmentalization of the university, but medievalists, more than anybody else, are called upon to break down the walls and truly work as interdisciplinary scholars.

It goes without saying that the foregoing criticism applies, vice versa, to Germanists as well who do not know their Chaucer, Dante, or Christine.

The present literary history by Gibbs and Johnson promises to become a useful tool both for the general medievalist and for the student. It has been a while ago that such a literary history was published in English. The authors point out J. Knight
After an introduction in which the authors deal with the historical and cultural framework, the historical development of the German language, and provide a brief bibliography of important resources for the study of medieval German literature, they turn to the actual history, beginning with Old High German literature from ca. 750-1050. The subsequent sections are divided as follows: Early Middle High German Literature 1050-1170; Middle High German Literature under the Hohenstaufens 1170-1273; Post-"Classical" Literature 1273-1400, and Literature of the Late Middle Ages. The last two sections are somewhat artificially separated, as no clear historical distinction can be identified. Instead, a sharper focus on individual genres would have served the purpose better. It seems very unfortunate that the fifteenth century basically falls by the wayside, nonetheless both the South-Tyrolean singer Oswald von Wolkenstein (1376/77-1445) and the Meistersingers are briefly mentioned in the previous section under the heading "The Medieval German Lyric." One can certainly agree with Gibbs and Johnson that Johann von Tepf's Ackermann aus Boehmen (Ploughman from Bohemia) marks the end of an entire epoch. This justifies the conclusion of this book with the critical treatment of his grandiose dialogue poem. Nevertheless, I sorely miss, for example, Heinrich Wittenwiler's Der Ring, Michel Beheim's didactic poetry, the religious drama, Fortunatus, and Sebastian Brant's Narrenschiff from 1494 -- a very medieval didactic text with a profound impact far and wide. In fact, the fifteenth century, previously somewhat disregarded by literary historians, has considerably gained in scholarly attention for the last few decades (see, for example, Fifteenth-Century Studies) as it truly had experienced an explosion both in fictional and "artes" literature (see, for example, Deutsche Dichter der friehe Neuzeit (1450-1600), Stephan Fuessel, ed., 1993, and German Writers of the Renaissance and Reformation 1280-1580, James Hardin and Max Reinhart, eds., 1997). Still, the Ackermann represents a transition point in the history of German literature, probably the first text influenced by Renaissance thinking (I have explored this in an article "Der Ackermann aus Boehmen -- Ein literarisches Zeugnis aus einer Schwellenzeit," Zeitschrift fuer deutsche Philologie 110, 3 [1991], not listed here).

Gibbs and Johnson pay particular attention to another area in the history of German literature which traditionally has been largely ignored by scholarship, but which has recently emerged as a highly fertile period. Whereas previously the so-called "post-classical" period was derided as 'epigonal,' 'unimaginative,' and 'repetitive,' all these epithets have been discarded because modern research has explored this literature on its own ground with its own aesthetic standards (see, for example, Fikionalitaet im Artusroman, Volker Mertens and Friedrich Wolfzettel, eds., 1993). Gibbs and Johnson extensively discuss Ulrich von Liechtenstein, Wirnt von Gravenberg, Konrad Fleck, Rudolf von Ems, Konrad von Wuerzburg, Heinrich von dem Tuirlein, the Stricker, the Pleier, Konrad von Stoffeln, Berthold von Holle, Ulrich von Tyresheim, Heinrich von Freiberg, etc., and this list goes on and on. They also consider at length late-medieval heroic poetry such as Dietrichs Flucht, Die Rabenschlacht, Virginal, etc., and provide a survey of shorter secular rhymed verse narratives. Remarkably, the large body of late-medieval lyric poetry is also treated in some detail.

In contrast, German medieval mystical literature is given short shrift as the authors only consider the works by Mechthild von Magdeburg, Eckhart, Tauler, and Suso. A vast body of women's and men's writing has been left out, although it is here where some of the most innovative and far-reaching new studies have been carried out. Kurt Ruh, in his monumental Geschichte der abendaendischen Mystik (vol. II appeared in 1993, not considered here), gives full credit to Mechthild von Hackeborn, Gertrud the Great, and David of Augsburg, and also included Beatrijs van Nazareth and Hadewijch -- all names which are missing here. A reference at least to names such as Elisabeth von Schoenau, Margareta Ebner, Christina Ebner, and Dorothea von Montau would have been helpful (see Peter Dinzlbaecher, Mittelalterliche Frauenmystik, 1992, not included here). Of course, there are space constraints, and this indeed wonderful volume already covers a tremendous time span and an enormous range of medieval German authors. In addition, Gibbs and Johnson provide the relevant bibliographic information after each section, which, quite naturally, has to be highly selective. A few times there are puzzling gaps, however, such as the critical edition of Mechthild von Magdeburg's works by H. Neumann and G. Vollmann-Profe (1990). With respect to Walther von der Vogelweide the authors list the collection of articles ed. by J.-D. Mueller and F.J. Worstbrock (1989), but not a parallel volume ed. by H.-D. Mueck in the same year. The modern German translation of Oswald von Wolkenstein's poetry by J. Heimrath and M. Korth (1975) is mentioned, but not the much better translation by W. Hofmeister (1989). The anonymous text Tristan als Moench was not only edited by B. C. Bushey in 1974, there is now also available a new edition and translation (A. Classen, 1994). Research on the sentimental courtly romance Mai und Beatlor did not come to an end with W. Fechter's Verfasserlexikon article from 1985; instead a flurry of new studies has appeared since them some of which should have been listed here instead of the older publications. Wernher the Gardener's Meier Heimbrecht has been revised and reedited since 1974 (9th ed.) in its 10th edition in 1993. Finally, Johann von Tepf's Ackermann was newly reedited by Karl Bertau in 1994 (latest edition mentioned here is from 1982). Naturally, these are more or less minor points and do not detract from an otherwise excellent history of medieval German literature. This is a handy reference work, written in a clear and highly readable style and based on a thorough familiarity with the material. The only real drawback seems to be the authors' decision to substitute the usual and well-proven index with chronological tables which include page references. The tables as such are certainly a plus because they provide a good visual aid and also cover events, texts, poets, and art works from the same time period. Nevertheless, the absence of an
index makes it difficult at times to find your way through this book because many minor poets and poems are not listed in the tables.