

*Höhepunkte des mittelalterlichen Erzählens: Heldenlieder, Romane und Novellen in ihrem kulturellen Kontext.* Hans Sauer, Gisela Seitschek, and Bernhard Teuber, eds.

Beiträge zur älteren Literaturgeschichte. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2016. xix + 396 pp. €62.

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The volume at hand goes back to a series of lectures held for the Center of Medieval and Renaissance Studies at the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität Munich. Centered on momentous works of narration throughout the Middle Ages, the individual contributions each review one particular opus that is considered a part of world literature or a pinnacle of the respective national literature. Although a significant attempt is made to integrate more literary texts from different regions, the volume's main focus is Europe.

As a general structure, the anthology is arranged into sections of languages or language regions, beginning with narrations in Greek and Latin (the anonymous *Ruodlieb* and the epic of *Digenis Akritis*), while the individual articles all follow a more or less analogical composition, addressing often similar aspects or research questions. Historical context, genesis, tradition, circulation, and the general content of each opus are usually explained in the form of short summaries. Whereas the authors examine signature research issues or research tendencies specific for each narration, such as the implications of the heroic and courtly world in case of the *Nibelungenlied* or the negotiation of power regarding the tale of *Genji monogatari*, this common setup guarantees contentual coherence and conciseness. In doing so, the structural arrangement mirrors the overall objective of the volume to show that medieval storytelling is not limited to Europe. By incorporating a brief reflection by the editors on what narrating in the Middle Ages consists of, while outlining potential idiosyncrasies of the respective language regions, both the diversity and the commonness of medieval narrating might have been highlighted even more. Consequently, the anthology would also shed some light on the interdisciplinary question whether and to what extent the chronological designation of the Middle Ages is based on a geographical perspective.

The anthology covers—besides the forementioned Greek and Latin works—Celtic, Germanic, and Romanic literatures and literature of the fourteenth century, as well as literature from Russia, Turkey, China, and Japan. One significant, although known, problem becomes simultaneously apparent and is mentioned throughout the short introduction: the problematization of the Middle Ages as an epochal term, respectively the vagueness thereof. While this period encompasses the time from 500 to 1500 BCE in Europe, China and Japan categorize this time according to imperial dynasties and consider the Middle Ages to be the period between 300 and 900 BCE. Furthermore, the corpus of selected oeuvres not only represents the variety of genres, but also profiles the prevalence of languages as well as the specifics of prose and verse during this time.

In total, understanding itself as an extended overview, the volume is worthwhile reading and contains contributions that are meant to be exemplary studies, invigorat-

ing further research and follow-up reading. Thus, the anthology addresses students as well as researchers and lecturers in search of incisive summaries on particular literary works.

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*After Lavinia: A Literary History of Premodern Marriage Diplomacy.*

John Watkins.

Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2017. xiv + 274 pp. \$59.95.

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*After Lavinia* is an original study of the literature, history, and diplomacy of premodern marriage practices. Besides its declared focus, the book's wide breadth of historical, social, and literary details is applicable to a vast array of disciplines. Watkins examines the institution of royal marriage and the role of royal brides within the political and legal structure of premodern dynastic order and follows its slow demise as the rising modern nation-state increasingly emphasized bureaucracy and rationality.

The originality of the book lies in Watkins's search for a pattern that would reveal how changes in practice correspond to altered political and social circumstances. Watkins's methodology for the assessment of marriage diplomacy as a pan-European instrument of alliance draws in part from the English school of international relations theory, merged with his own literary and social analysis. This approach allows an evaluation of the success, failure, development, and disintegration of marriage practice and a consideration of the shift in foreign policy from dynastic to national state interests. Although the concept of a society of states that share common interests may not directly apply to premodern dynastic societies, Watkins suggests that early European diplomacy found its common ground in a shared canon law and the idea of a world where royal conversions would lead to a sort of Christian commonwealth, a *res publica christiana* rooted in interdynastic marriages.

In the first part of the book, Watkins examines marriage practices and their literary sources from Virgil to medieval romance. Royal brides were symbols of alliances and active facilitators of peace, with the unique ethnogenic ability to merge bloodlines of two different reigning families through procreation. Early premodern queens were also agents of conversion, bringing rulers to Christianity and expanding Christendom's diplomatic reach. At the same time, they brought both endogamy and monogamy as a condition of royal marriages, increasing their own power within the court as sole royal spouses. Watkins aligns diplomacy with literature, recognizing that the role of poet and diplomat often merged in premodern Europe, and that marriage itself was a fundamental narrative element in dynastic epic. Although the earliest fictions may contain as much myth as history, they are invaluable indicators of rituals, ideology, and practice, as well as of the author's preconceptions.