

Victor Skretkowicz. *European Erotic Romance: Philhellene Protestantism, Renaissance Translation and English Literary Politics*.

The Manchester Spenser. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010. vi + 394 pp. £60. ISBN: 978-0-7190-7970-2.

Scholarly interest in early modern English prose fiction has long explored humanism, the transmission of ancient texts, and the use that English writers made of models from abroad. The transformation of classical Greek romance by writers like Sir Philip Sidney and Lady Mary Wroth connected English literary culture to a pan-European intellectual network. For scholars of the subject, the work of Victor Skretkowicz has been invaluable. As editor of the Oxford edition of the “*New*” *Arcadia* (1987) and author of numerous essential articles on the Sidney circle, Greek romance, and the politics of humanist translations, he has clarified the intellectual and human processes through which a classical and European tradition found a home in English literature. This book, published posthumously, represents the summa of his research in this field.

Skretkowicz advances two related claims. First, he shows how Greek prose romance, especially Longus, Achilles Tatius, and Heliodorus, circulated in many languages throughout Europe as part of a “pan-European Protestantism” associated with figures such as Philip Melanchthon, Jacques Amyot, Hubert Languet, and in England with the Sidney circle. The literary landscape of this Philhellene network occupies the center of this book, and Skretkowicz’s careful, exhaustive exploration of multiple translations of *Daphnis and Chloe*, *Clitophon and Leucippe*, and *An Aethiopian History* will make a splendid resource for future work in the field. Skretkowicz’s argument about these narratives, however, is not limited to their circulation and transmission as displays of humanist rhetoric. He also explores what he calls “the Renaissance eroticization of heroic literature” (20). This second claim about the shifting meanings associated with love and heroism sometimes gets less space in this volume than the careful detailing of international humanist connections, but it provides a powerful lens to reconsider these influential romances. Scholars might also develop this second claim to explore less elite writers in the English tradition.

The book’s first section deals with the travels of Longus, Achilles Tatius, and Heliodorus around the Continent and in England. Especially in the cases of Longus and Achilles Tatius, the book carefully shows how different translators reacted to,

and in some cases redacted, the sexual material in the Greek texts. Regarding the infamous dialogue comparing heterosexual and homosexual pleasure in *Clitophon and Leucippe*, Skretkowitz notes a wide variety of approaches before Anthony Hodges's 1638 translation solved the problem by omitting reference to young men entirely (91). The chapter on Heliodorus emphasizes the high esteem with which both Renaissance and modern critics hold this text; Skretkowitz joins many critics in lauding and exploring the dizzying narrative sophistication of the *Aethiopian History*.

The final four chapters explore Philhellene erotic romance in England, in Sidney's *Arcadia*, Shakespeare's Roman plays and romances, and Mary Wroth's *Urania*. In the Sidney chapter, Skretkowitz demonstrates his mastery of familiar territory. The Shakespeare chapter, the only one not exploring prose narrative, takes up the late romances most obviously indebted to Greek romance as well as earlier Roman plays including *Coriolanus* and *Julius Caesar*. The discussion of the birth of the Roman empire as a critique of the French wars of religion is enlightening (238), though for me the most eye-opening section concerns *The Winter's Tale* and Shakespeare's adoption of the "style royal" that Amyot used to translate Heliodorus into French (257). Skretkowitz argues that the play connects itself to elite Philhellene romance against the popular tradition of its primary source, Greene's *Pandosto*. The chapter on the two parts of Wroth's *Urania* emphasizes the romance's fantasy of "European integration" (272), explores Wroth's engagement and competition with Cervantes (299), and concludes that her texts represent "asymmetrical Baroque mannerism" (334).

A prefatory note explains that Professor Skretkowitz died while the book was in production. There are places where a certain roughness creeps in, or when the clarity of argument diminishes as the book works through an especially ornate set of narrative complexities. In a tangible sense, however, this book represents the apogee of its own topic, international, multilingual humanist scholarship. It will provide a valuable resource to future scholarship.

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