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Aisling Byrne and Victoria Flood, eds., *Crossing Borders in the Insular Middle Ages, Medieval Texts and Cultures of Northern Europe 30* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2019). Print, viii + 332 pp., €80.00, ISBN: 9782503566733.

Review

The volume, *Crossing Borders in the Insular Middle Ages*, edited by Aisling Byrne and Victoria Flood, is a collection of papers that investigates cultural connections in north-western Europe (Britain, Ireland, and Iceland) during the high and late Middle Ages. A special focus is reserved for cross-border translation and transmission, fundamental components of literary histories.

The studies suggest the importance of a collaborative scholarship and a considerable openness to cross-cultural material. The innovative research from international scholars, working in Celtic, Norse, and English Studies, is shown to be key to overcoming the conventional boundaries of their discipline. These contributions are a conversation between specialisms intended to facilitate comparative scholarly interests. The modern comparative literary scholarship in the Anglophone context, indeed, had little interest in Insular regions and its affirmation has encountered some political problems as Byrne and Flood explain in their introduction.

The connections between “cultures plural” (p.7) and not a singular Insular culture, not a homogeneity of cultural process, are well highlighted in the concept of multilingualism. Cultural contact and textual transmission in the Insular world open numerous questions about the problems of language contact, the stratification of minority and majority languages, and the relationship between vernacular use and national identity. The specialists, with a range of contemporary approaches, examine how these aspects intertwine and coexist in Insular literature and how they relate to the rest of Europe.

The collection tends to be organized broadly according to a geographical principle, starting with the literary activity in Wales, followed by England, Ireland, and Iceland.

The first three essays focus on the intellectual activity in Wales. Helen Fulton's chapter investigates two important anthologies of medieval Welsh literature: The Red Book of Hergest and the White Book of Rhydderch. Particular attention is given, by the scholar, to the gentry libraries and the important role played by the Welsh families in the cultural influence and the contemporary multilingualism in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Elena Parina's paper explores the translation of two medical texts into Welsh. The two texts, *Rhinweddau Bwydydd* and *Y Pedwar Gwlybwr*, indeed, are the translation of the *Flores dietarum*. Parina's analysis demonstrates the Welsh reception of the long tradition of medicine, from late Antiquity to Greek and to Arabic, but also the adaptation of their source texts for practical use, which shows the medieval Welsh scientific interest in medicine. Victoria Flood's contribution discusses the translation into Welsh of English political prophecies, *Lily, Lion and Son of Man*, into Welsh during the early Tudor period, with a particular study on the political context and the conceptualization of Welsh national identity even with the use of English material. Joanna Bellis's article examines two fourteenth-century Anglo-Latin poems: *The Dispute between the Englishman and the Frenchman* and *An Invective against France*. She explores the overuse of Latin in poetry from the Hundred Years' War and considers the multilingualism and multiculturalism mutually involving English and French in the "constructions of otherness" (p.109). The permeability of national language is the basis of Rory McTurk's contribution. It focuses on contrapuntal alliteration in *Piers Plowman* and Skaldic Poetry: a comparative approach that invites investigation beyond conventional disciplinary boundaries. The translation of the *Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle* in Early Modern Irish is explored by Erich Poppe. It appears as an excellent example of the crusading culture where connections are more evident than clashes. The Crusade literature is also considered by Aisling Byrne in her essay, including the *Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle*. Her examination considers the Irish context in

the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and how the ecclesiastical circles played an important role in the diffusion of these kinds of texts. The two contributions by Marianne Briggs and Julie Leblanc are still focused on the Irish area. Both authors investigate Irish adaptation of classical texts. Briggs explores the translation of Statius's *Thebaid* and proves that the final product differs from the source by placing itself in a more Irish context rather than a Mediterranean one. LeBlanc also examines the Irish *Aeneid*, drawing a very similar conclusion to those drawn by Briggs. In fact, there is an adaptation rather than a rigid translation in the vernacular composition, which may be considered as a product of the Irish culture. In the tenth chapter of the collection, Matthias Egeler considers the relationship between the Norse *Glæsisvellir* and the Irish literature. He argues that the Irish voyage tales found an echo in the Norse world: a very interesting comparative study where a paradisiacal land is found in several Old Norse texts, but it was derived from early medieval Irish production. Sif Rikhardsdottir's study investigates the incursion of the French and England material into Scandinavia in the mid-thirteenth century. He examines the 'cycle of cultural transmission and expansion begun almost four centuries earlier with the Viking expansion outward from the Northern peripheries of the known world to the neighbouring insular regions' (p.251). The 'emotive scripts' in the translation of the literary texts provide evidence of cultural differences in sociocultural emotive coding. Sarah Braccianti's contribution shows how Monmouth's Old Norse translation of the *Historia regum Britanniae* in the thirteenth century was a real appropriation, like Arthurian romances, which came to create the 'possibility of connecting the Trojan dynasty with the Norwegian dynasties and hence with the leading Icelandic families' (p.294). The final study comes from Sabine Heidi Walther, in which she explains the translation of *De excidio Troiae historia* into Old Norse. She highlights how the role played by Hercules in the *Trójumanna saga* is greater than its source: there is a transformation of the classical hero into a courtly hero thanks to the French influence.

The Mediterranean Sea is considered as a network of connections where different cultures bump into each other and dialogue, likewise the North Sea and the

Insular world is now reconceptualized as a cultural centre. *Crossing Borders* is a lens on the far western and on the no singular Insular culture, on the multicultural contact across north-western Europe in the later Middle Ages. By a transversal reading, it is possible to perceive a dynamic culture rich in connections both with the ancient world and with the rest of the continent in the same chronological period. The book is a laboratory where not only the contributions connect to each other, but offers new horizons and new perspectives of research.

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