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Emily Dolmans, *Writing Regional Identities in Medieval England: From the Gesta Herewardi to Richard Coer de Lyon* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2020).  
Print, xiv + 235 pp., £60.00, ISBN: 9781843845683.

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*Review*

In *Writing Regional Identities in Medieval England: From the Gesta Herewardi to Richard Coeur de Lyon*, Emily Dolmans examines representations of English identity in romance and historiography from the twelfth and fourteenth centuries. Focusing on cross-cultural counters in Latin and Anglo-Norman texts, Dolmans argues that English identity is plural, multiple, and diverse. The role of borders and borderlands is central to Dolmans' study: she suggests that 'England and English identity are defined by their borderlands', but also notes that Englishness is 'most vigorously challenged' in these contact zones (p. 13). *Writing Regional Identities* is structured chronologically and each chapter focuses on a different region of England, moving from the local and the regional to the global and the transnational.

Chapter one examines the story of Hereward and the significance of Ely in the *Gesta Herewardi*. In contrast to previous scholarship, Dolmans contends that Hereward is a local rather than a national hero; indeed, she points out that 'Hereward's insurgence is motivated by the Normans' oppressive treatment of his family and neighbours, and his actions are always impelled by local events' (p. 35). Dolmans shows how Hereward's story is 'ingrained within the landscape' of Ely (p. 38), and she compares the topographical descriptions in the *Gesta Herewardi* to the *Liber Eliensis* to indicate how writers constructed Ely as a symbol of pre-Conquest England, with the marshes dividing the region from the rest of the country. This re-assessment of the *Gesta Herewardi* is thoughtful, cogent, and persuasive, and Dolmans clearly demonstrates how Hereward's rebellion against the crown is presented as a conflict between the margins and the centre.

Chapter two analyses the construction of English identity in Geffrei Gaimar's *Estoire des Engleis*. Dolmans contends that 'Gaimar creates an idea of Englishness that is intimately connected with regional matters and local stories, accessible to all peoples living in the areas in which he was writing, regardless of whether they were ancestrally Anglo-Saxon, Anglo-Norman, or Anglo-Danish' (p. 65). This chapter focuses on various intercultural exchanges between the English and the Danes; it also situates these stories within the wider context of the Viking invasions of England from the ninth century and the legacy of the Danelaw in Lincolnshire. Dolmans carefully draws out the differences between the story of Havelok in the *Estoire* and the *Lai d'Havelok* to demonstrate how Gaimar gives local stories national significance. She also suggests that Havelok's story anticipates the reign of Cnut in the *Estoire*; however, the relationship between the reigns of the two kings could be discussed in more detail, which would further strengthen the main argument of the chapter about the interconnected histories of England and Denmark.

Chapter three considers the tension between national unity and regional identity in the Anglo-Norman romance, *Fouke le Fitz Waryn*. Although the text is set in Shropshire, and documents the history of a prominent Marcher family, Dolmans challenges the dominant view of *Fouke* as a border story. Instead, she argues that *Fouke* constructs a regional Marcher identity that connects – rather than divides – the English and the Welsh. Dolmans suggests that the March could be considered a 'Third Space' as it disrupts binary oppositions and destabilises national identities (p. 105). The chapter examines how local histories, folklore, and national mythologies are reshaped to unite the English and the Welsh within this Marcher context; it also contains some excellent and detailed analysis of the landscape that shows how *Fouke* navigates the Marcher territories, erasing the boundaries between England and Wales to create a 'borderless Britain' (p. 102).

Chapter four, 'Englishness Outside England: Embracing Alterity in Medieval Romance', focuses on the Anglo-Norman romances *Gui de Warewic* and *Boeve de Haumtone*. This chapter moves away from texts set in England to focus on the

representation of English identity abroad. Dolmans argues that *Gui* and *Boeve* construct 'multi-layered English identities that are at once dynastic, local, national, transnational, exotic, and religious' (pp. 133–134). She also suggests that these texts grant their audiences 'imaginative access to the world beyond England's shores' (p. 134). The chapter primarily focuses on the structure of the two texts as exile-and-return romances, examining how English identity and ideas of belonging are re-oriented abroad. The argument of this chapter is well-executed through a close comparison of the two texts, but some consideration of the relationship between the Anglo-Saxon past and the Anglo-Norman present in these romances would have further demonstrated the complexities of English identity.

Chapter five, 'England at the Edge of the World', examines English identity in a global context. The chapter focuses on two Alexander romances – including Thomas of Kent's *Le roman de toute chevalerie* and its Middle English translation *Kyng Alisaunder* – as well as the Middle English romance *Richard Coer de Lyon*. Dolmans asserts that these three texts 'present English identity in constant negotiation with the outside world' (p. 165). In the first half of the chapter on the Alexander romances, Dolmans shows how England is constructed from the perspective of the hero as a place of marvels beyond the borders of civilization. Meanwhile, the second half of the chapter on *Richard Coer de Lyon* considers the representation of Richard I as a cannibal with demonic ancestry who becomes 'a character of unbridled foreignness and emphatic Englishness' (p. 183). These texts are linked by their focus on marvels and monsters, but further discussion of their Crusading contexts could have improved the structure of this chapter.

*Writing Regional Identities* shows how borders both reinforce and destabilise English identity. In her analysis of the texts, Dolmans assesses how English identity was reconfigured and rewritten within different regional contexts; however, the overall structure and argument of this study could be more cohesive. Each chapter is presented as an individual case study, and the transition from local to global in the final two chapters is considerably different from the earlier chapters that focus on

specific places. Yet in terms of content and style, *Writing Regional Identities* is an engaging and thought-provoking study that illustrates the international, transcultural, and multilingual nature of medieval England.

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