Victoria Flood and Megan G Leitch, eds, *Cultural Translations in Medieval Romance* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2022). Print, viii + 282 pp., £80.00, ISBN: 9781843846208.

Review

Cultural Translations, which includes thirteen chapters, explores 'the subject of translation, both linguistic and cultural, in relation to the composition, reception, and dissemination of romance across the languages of late medieval Britain, Ireland, and Scotland' (p. 1). Viewing translated medieval romance as a 'cross-border' and 'cross-linguistic' body of medieval culture worth further research, the book explicates the potential intellectual reverberations of transmitting and reimagining medieval romances 'in new linguistic, cultural, and social networks' (p. 1). Moreover, the book reviews the points of contact between Latin and Welsh sources and French and English romance while stressing their embedded atmosphere of cultural interchange and intellectual influence. It also highlights the involvement of the romance genre in establishing 'the Matter of England' and expressing some of England's sociopolitical interests and concerns.

The first chapter by Helen Fulton traces the history of the creation of 'romantic Wales' in different medieval Welsh, French, and English romances. Acknowledging the involvement of several romance authors in establishing the image of Wales as a space of 'mystery, adventure, [and] love', Fulton argues that Wales is entirely romanticized as 'a challenging site of otherness' before 1300 (p. 25). After 1300, this

image is contracted geographically and culturally, as the parts of Wales dominated by England are viewed as 'the *terra nullius* of the English romantic imagination' (p. 39). Futon attributes the pre-1300 image to the cross-cultural dialogue between the Welsh and the Normans and the post-1300 image to 'the loss of the native Welsh aristocracy […and] the rapid onset of urbanization and anglicisation around the costs and borders of Wales' caused by the English conquest of Wales by Edward I (p. 34).

The second chapter by Jessica J. Lockhart views the 'narrative motif known as the Erroneous Watchman Device' as the point of contact between Welsh narratives represented by *Branwen uerch Lyr* and Latin Arthurian romance tradition represented by *De Ortu Waluuanii Nepotis Arturi* and *Hisotra Meriadoci Regis Cambrie* (p. 45). Lockhart proposes that Latin texts have borrowed this motif from Welsh material, which suggests that Welsh riddles, motifs, and 'riddling language' constitute an integral part of Latin Arthurian romances whose reading 'requires alertness to the diversity and complexity of the enigmatic traditions from which the poets draw' (p. 64). Likewise, the third chapter by Victoria Flood emphasizes the mutual influence between Welsh literature and Insular languages, e.g., French, arguing that 'the supernatural imaginings of late medieval Welsh poetry might owe to romance paradigms, rather than vice versa' (p. 66). Underlining points of resemblance and divergence between the Welsh tradition of romance found in Dafydd's poetry and the French romance tradition of Charlemagne, Chretien de Troyes, and Guillaume, Flood

concludes that 'Dafydd's poetry presents cultivated points of intersection, the work of an author thinking across Welsh and French poetic and cultural contexts' (p. 84).

The fourth chapter by Helen Cooper studies the several changes made to an octosyllabic French original translated into a fourteenth-century alliterative English poem titled *William of Palerne* (also known as *William and the Werewolf*), which in turn got translated into a sixteenth-century Irish prose piece titled *Eachtra Uilliam*. Underlining the level of incongruity across the three cultures and 'the extensive similarity of all the versions across [the story's] long and varied reception history' (p. 87), Cooper concludes that although the poem is hard to fit in any standard genre, 'the most consistent elements in its attractiveness are the thrill attaching to any story that has a werewolf as a major character, and the sympathy with which the young lovers, and not least Melior, are treated' (p. 100). Similarly, the fifth chapter by Carl Phelpstead stresses the cultural dialogue between Old Norse and French. Phelpstead argues that the Old Norse *Guruns strengleikr* is a rewriting of a lost Old French lay. Tracing the history of the lay journey from French to Old Norse, Phelpstead concludes that '*Gurun* allows a Norwegian audience to make sense of a new world of courtly values […] it provides us with a valuable insight into the way in which textual translation was part of a broader process of cultural transmission and assimilation' (p. 116).

The sixth chapter by Neil Cartlidge celebrates the value of the romance genre in bridging the gap between vernacular cultures and authoritative Latin. Delving into Walter Map's Latin story of 'Sadius and Galo', Cartlidge contends that Map's prose

'suggests a confident familiarity with the narrative conventions and implied ideology of vernacular courtly romance' (p. 118). Cartlidge complicates the argument using concepts of gender to conclude that 'it was possible, even in the Middle Ages, for courtly romance to be rewritten in ways that are anything but comfortably heteronormative' (p. 131). In the seventh chapter, Rebecca Newby explicates how the tradition of romance translation involves serious attempts to resolve the stylistic tensions of originals. Reviewing the structure of Hue de Rotelande's *Ipomedon*, Newby suggests that the presence of different cultural and linguistic translations of this story reflects 'a large effort [made by translators] to smooth the tensions of the source for their fourteenth- and fifteenth-century audiences' (p. 139). Newby concludes that the romance's multilayered structure 'encourages readers to consider the discontent between chivalric ideals and societal realities, the contradictions inherent in noble life, and the 'latent qualities of chivalric literature'' (p. 152).

Chapter eight by Venetia Bridges views the fifteenth-century English *Seege or Batayle of Troye* as a piece of *translatio studii*, a viewpoint that discharges this romance from being characterized as 'not learned' (p. 153). Emphasizing how *Seege* is 'both a 'popular' romance and also a high-status inherited narrative' (p. 154), Bridges concludes that the translation of this romance 'is governed by a wide-ranging awareness of the stylistic conventions of romance as a genre: in this sense, it is a 'learned' performance' (p. 170). In the ninth chapter, Cory James Rushton explains how popular romances have been crafted through different translation-based

interactions between texts of the same language or different languages. Using the 'critical lens […] of fan fiction' to read several romances in their biblical and Arthurian contexts, the chapter explains 'what motivates people to write and tell stories in the late Middle Ages' (p. 173). Rushton concludes that the romance's form and narrative content support the viewpoint that 'humans are storytellers by nature, and the motivations are not always fame, fortune, or rivalry' (p. 189).

Chapter ten by Aisling Byrne discusses how two Middle English romances, namely the anonymous *Horn Childe* and Lydgate's *Gy de Warwyke*, incorporate several French epic characteristics to establish 'the Matter of England' (p. 191). Highlighting how the two Anglo-Norman texts borrow their material from the *chanson de geste*, Byrne concludes that 'in engaging with epic mode, these Middle English authors do not merely carry over values and conventions that were already embedded in the Horn and Guy traditions. Rather, at various points, they highlight, expand to, and add to those conventions' (p. 206). Likewise, chapter eleven by Jan Shaw explores the value of Middle-English translation of some French romances in establishing 'the Matter of England'. Shaw examines the sociopolitical context of translating Jean d'Arras's French *Melusine* into Middle English, arguing that the changes made to the narrative 'rupture the foundation of empire, extending the blame for its fall from one man […] onto a whole lineage' (p. 210). The chapter concludes that 'reading this romance in England places the narrative within a different story context that subjects to different pressures, and it changes under these ebbs and flows' (p. 226).

In chapter twelve, Laura Ashe contends that the narrative strangeness of the sixteenth-century *The Squire of Low Degree* 'can be understood and explained as the product of the poet's cavalier deployment of tragic ballad materials inside the shell of a conventional romance' (p. 229). Comparing this romance to the *Romance of Horn* and the *Decameron*, Ashe concludes that '*The Squire of Low Degree* playfully responds to some of the eeriest and most chilling themes of ancient songs and contemporary ballads' (p. 242). Chapter thirteen by Megan G. Leitch scrutinizes the positive image of merchant characters in different romances, like *Emare*, *Sir Degare*, *Octavian*, and *Valentine and Orson*, attributing this approach to romance writers' interest in meeting the expectations of their merchant readers. The chapter concludes that 'medieval romance translates an awareness of social mobility into a critique of chivalric behavior that both admonishes knights to be more virtuous and invites the bourgeoisie to share chivalric values' (p. 262).

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