

## Review of Goran Stanivukovic, ed. *Timely Voices: Romance Writing in English Literature*

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GORAN STANIVUKOVIC, ED. *Timely Voices: Romance Writing in English Literature*. Quebec: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2017. Pp. 376. \$110 (cloth).

The fourteen critical essays in *Timely Voices: Romance Writing in English Literature* comprise the most recent addition to a now substantial body of critical work on literature and romance and proceeds largely in the wake of this scholarship. In its lengthy introduction, Goran Stanivukovic follows Northrop Frye, Patricia Parker, and Barbara Fuchs, among others, in conceiving of romance as a process or "resource" (Frye uses "mode" and Fuchs prefers "strategy"). Stanivukovic is concerned with the portability of romance when conceived as resource and its influence on other texts; a significant number of chapters are interested in influence and transmission between cultures (Joseph Falaky Nagy; John Carey) and historical periods (Helen Cooper; Nandini Das; Helen Moore; Marcus Waithe). The majority of essays in the collection take narrative as their subject and how romance as a resource or strategy works in "the three main genres" (10): prose, poetry, and drama. Two chapters discuss visual material in the form of fifteenth-century engravings (Das) and sixteenth-century woodcuts and engravings (Stuart Sillars). The collection ends with an afterword from Patricia Parker, author of a similar cross-period study of romance, *Inescapable Romance* (1979). Parker's afterword acts as a review of the entire volume and offers a useful and comprehensive overview of related scholarship.

The volume is helpfully divided into five sections grouped around related concepts rather than chronology. Such a structure helps to connect texts across periods, and makes a strong case for romance as a transhistorical category (or resource). In part 1, "Narration and Transformation," Cooper traces the ideological and narrative function of the hermit from medieval into Early Modern romance; John H. Cameron and Stanivukovic analyze narrative

digression in *The Faerie Queene* (1590); and Colin Lahive explores Milton's "handling of this most contested of literary types" (91)—romance—in *Paradise Lost*.

Part 2, "Magic and Wonder," contains three pieces on magic and wonder in medieval and Early modern romance. David Rollo considers "the relationship between writing and the supernatural" (114) in Malory's *Morte D'Arthur* (1485), in particular Merlin; Carey asks "[h]ow 'Celtic' is the Otherworld of [medieval] romance" (141), tracing Irish and Welsh influences in Middle English "Matter of Britain" romances; and Das takes the "everyday" as her focus, deftly tracing its effect on romance narratives from the late fourteenth-century *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* to Albrecht Dürer's sixteenth-century engravings. In part 3, "Reformation and Mediation," a pair of essays explore the adaptation of medieval romance and the relationship between past and present. Nagy proposes "to expand the range of early Irish texts we can legitimately examine as *comparanda* to medieval European romance" (183). Waite's chapter on the legacy of medieval romance questing in William Morris and David Jones is *Timely Voices*' most contemporary chapter, albeit interested in medieval influences on modern texts.

Part 4, "Transmission and Circulation," offers three interesting chapters on romance and mediation. Moore traces a path from the fourth-century *Aethiopica* to a "Heliodoran moment" (224) in mid-seventeenth-century drama; Steve Mentz draws on Bruno Latour, Jacques Derrida and Édouard Glissant to argue for Shakespeare's *Pericles* (1607) as a "polygeneric Renaissance romance" (240); and Sillars reads the text and accompanying woodcuts of Anthony Munday's *Zelauto* (1580) to suggest that the work thus becomes "almost a metafictional contemplation on the romance genre" (276). The three essays in Part 5, "Aesthetics and the Politics of Form," deal with endings. Catherine Bates offers a close reading of Sir Philip Sidney's *Arcadia* (c. 1580); Hero Chalmers and Sara Malton provide the volume's only two chapters on women authors, discussing mid-seventeenth-century women's

writing in relation to gender and romance (Chalmers) and the uses of romance in Austen's *Northanger Abbey* (Malton).

Readers will undoubtedly find the individual chapters useful, and the careful attention paid to romance both in and across periods is welcome. The cross-period organization of the collection is innovative and provides an excellent model for future literary studies. However, there are some limitations. While the book's description highlights its chronological reach—"From the fourteenth-century ... to ... an epic poem written in 1937"—there is a heavy emphasis on medieval and early modern material: of the fourteen essays, only two deal with post-1700 works (Waithe; Malton). Stanivukovic offers as a reasonable justification for this orientation that early modern English literature constitutes "the golden age of romance writing and printing" (13), yet this does somewhat limit the collection's claims to show "how English literature evolved ... across time" (31) in relation to romance. It is difficult, as the editor notes, when dealing with a subject as broad as romance to cover all potential topics and periods; however, the predominantly premodern remit of the collection could have been more clearly signposted (acknowledging the limits of editorial control over design elements, the bicycle illustration on the cover is somewhat misleading in this regard).

I would also have welcomed more substantial engagement with issues of gender, culture, and scholarly reach—some particularly "timely" topics in the study of romance and English literature more broadly. Despite the strong association between romance and women, at least in the modern era, only two chapters focus on works by women. Furthermore, while Stanivukovic claims the collection's discussion of "cultural spaces outside England ... chart[s] new critical directions" (4), this is limited to Irish and Celtic sources, indicating a missed opportunity to consider English romance in more global terms. Finally, while Stanivukovic claims that the book "takes cognizance of the renaissance in the study of romance that has been particularly underway since the 1990s" (10), there is no reference in

any chapter to the wide range of popular romance scholarship published since the 1980s, aside from a brief mention Barbara Fuchs' *Romance* (2004) and a single footnote reference to Janice Radway, author of the influential *Reading the Romance* (1984), in the introduction. This body of scholarship has provided many valuable studies of romance, narrative, and genre, and an engagement with these works would have strengthened the remit and reach of this nonetheless comprehensive book.

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