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Reviews

Copies of books for review should be sent to the Editor, *Leeds Studies in English*, School of English, University of Leeds, Leeds LS2 9JT, United Kingdom.

Contents

1054, failed crusades, and the sack of Constantinople in 1204 (pp. 147–51); contrasting with this, we are then shown the largely positive understanding of the same people and places in medieval Scandinavian thought, through earlier Old Norse sagas and historical or encyclopaedic works (pp. 151–58). In the section 'Constantinople in the *riddarasögur*' Barnes draws on examples from a range of late medieval Icelandic romances to show how they 'serve the common purpose of extolling the magnificence of Constantinople' (p. 158). The chapter ends with separate sections dedicated to *Sigrgarðs saga ok Valbrands* (pp. 171–76) and *Kirialax saga* (pp. 176–81), which both provide particularly illuminating and celebratory depictions of the Byzantine Empire.

The book ends with a brief conclusion, 'Profiling the Audience', which considers the afterlife of the *riddarasögur* through the genre's (chiefly post-Reformation) manuscript tradition. Beginning with an overview of the types of medieval audiences that may have enjoyed these romances at the time of their composition, Barnes argues that the authors of the late medieval Icelandic romances may have been 'a coterie of writers, familiar with each other's work and likely to be writing as much for their peers as for their anonymous patrons' (p. 183). Barnes then considers post-Reformation audiences, for which there is far more evidence due to the continued tradition of manuscript production. The manuscript evidence of *Dínus saga drambláta* with its three redactions is considered, as a largely representative case study on the audiences and enduring popularity of an Icelandic romance into the centuries after the end of the Middle Ages. The bibliography, separated into editions, translations, and dictionaries on the one hand, and secondary sources on the other, covers most of the bases, though Barnes modestly omits references to any of her own work, of which there is much relevant material. The volume unfortunately lacks an index; however, a listing of sagas in each chapter title, along with running headings indicating the saga under discussion on each page, attempt to compensate for this shortcoming. Overall, this is an important new work that can provide the basis for many future discussions of medieval Icelandic romance. The range of *riddarasögur* covered is impressive, although this does sometimes leave the reader wanting more in the way of discussion and analysis at the end of certain sections on individual texts. While in some cases the depth of analysis may have been sacrificed for its breadth, this leaves the book an excellent starting point for more detailed work by others; indeed, Barnes gladly acknowledges that she has here 'barely touched the surface of a group of sagas only just beginning to come under close scrutiny as individual works of literary narrative' (p. 191). Particularly as a study in English, *The Bookish Riddarasögur: Writing Romance in Late Mediaeval Iceland* opens up the genre to a wide audience, and perhaps especially to students, and experts from related fields, who may not be able to read these still largely untranslated romances for themselves.

SHERYL McDONALD WERRONEN — UNIVERSITY OF COPENHAGEN

Carolyn P. Collette, *Rethinking Chaucer's 'Legend of Good Women'*. York: York Medieval Press, 2014. 184 pp. ISBN 9781903153499.

In *Rethinking Chaucer's 'Legend of Good Women'*, Carolyn Collette, Emeritus Professor of English Language and Literature at Mount Holyoke College and a research associate at the University of York's Centre for Medieval Studies, considers how to approach a poem that has

'seemed to annoy or bore' present-day readers. She argues that, in order to view the *Legend* as more than an anomalous 'puzzle' that struggles to find its place within the broader corpus of Chaucer's work, it is necessary to change fundamentally the methodologies used to analyse it. Rather than examining its sources or reception, Collette sees the poem as part of the broader literary, philosophical, and ethical culture of fourteenth-century Europe in order to argue that the *Legend* deserves recognition as an essential step in the development of Chaucer's poetic corpus.

The book is divided into five main sections, each of which aims to situate the *Legend* within both Chaucer's œuvre and their broader cultural context. The first chapter focuses on the importance of books to the early humanism of Edward III's court and how such 'bibliophilia' may have influenced Chaucer's own creative approach to existing texts. The second explores retellings of tales of 'exemplary women' and argues that Chaucer's heroines in the *Legend* appear more 'radical' than their counterparts in the work of Gower, Boccaccio, and Christine de Pizan. The third section delves deeper into the Aristotelian ideas circulating in fourteenth-century Europe and how such concepts appear in the *Legend*. The fourth chapter compares the *Legend*'s portrayal of women's love with that of *Troilus and Criseyde*. The fifth and final section examines women who appear in the *Canterbury Tales* and argues that *Troilus*, the *Legend*, and the *Tales* constitute a progression from the tragic to the comic. Collette's argument thus both encompasses and moves beyond the *Legend* in its exploration of Chaucer's work as the product of a specific cultural milieu.

Collette's monograph provides an important and refreshing new perspective on one of Chaucer's less studied poetic works. She employs literary, linguistic, and historical analyses of a wide variety of texts in order to shed light on the *Legend* itself. Particularly interesting is the examination of Aristotelian ideas on love and moderation in relation to the *Legend* and other contemporary works. A thorough but accessible overview of these ideas as they appear in Nicole Oresme's fourteenth-century translations of the *Politics* and *Ethics* forms the basis for a convincing account of how Chaucer builds upon the works in the *Legend*. The comparison of the *Legend*'s presentation of Aristotelian concepts with that of *Troilus and Criseyde* strengthens this point further through demonstrating that the *Legend*, far from being an isolated work, is central to understanding Chaucer's innovations within a specific literary and philosophical tradition.

Despite the book's generally clear and concise arguments, some stylistic factors occasionally make points hard to follow. While most longer quotations in French and Latin are translated into English, some are not, presenting a potential challenge for those unfamiliar with either language. Additionally, at times quotations from Chaucer's work seem overly long, with little close analysis given over to many of the lines. That said, most of the examples used are judiciously chosen and contribute to the book's overall argument.

Rethinking Chaucer's Legend of Good Women provides a welcome opportunity to consider Chaucer's poem — and his other poetic works — in a seldom-discussed way. Accessible and relatively short, it paves the way for further work on Chaucer's less 'popular' works as innovative products of their time.

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