REVIEW

Eva von Contzen. *The Scottish Legendary: Towards a Poetics of Hagiographic Narration*. Manchester Medieval Literature and Culture. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016. Pp. x, 268. ISBN: 9780719095962. £80.00.

The *Scottish Legendary* is a compilation of saints' lives based on Jacobus de Voragine's *Legenda aurea* (c. 1260s) written in Scotland in the last quarter of the fourteenth century. As an Older Scots oeuvre, it is roughly contemporary with John Barbour's *The Brus* (1370s), the earliest historical account written in Scotland in the vernacular and in verse form. Despite its status as one of the oldest extant literary works in Older Scots, the *Scottish Legendary* has received limited scholarly attention, with the exception of Melissa Coll-Smith's doctoral dissertation (University of Oxford, 2012). Eva von Contzen's *The Scottish Legendary* is a crucial addition to the study of medieval Scottish hagiography and Older Scots literature: narrativity can be used to further explore how the poetics of narration in other Older Scots works create a uniquely distinct "Scottish voice" in late medieval works.

Von Contzen's overarching thesis is that when narrativity is applied as an analytical framework to the study of the *Scottish Legendary*, it shows how the poet-narrator strikes a careful balance between didactics and entertainment. Contrary to rhetoric, which is the "eloquent and persuasive use of language," narrativity in the *Scottish Legendary* is an "implicit programme" that, through regular and consistent use of forms, permits the poet to perform instruction and hagiographical discourse (p. 32). The Introduction and Chapter 1 provide the theoretical rationale that underpins the study and expands on how the *Scottish Legendary* differs from other hagiographical texts, in particular from the *South English Legendary*. The monograph's main argument, which is examined in the rest of the chapters, investigates the use of narrative for this dual purpose from the perspective of various textual elements. The monograph carefully considers the duality of the narration's secular and hagiographical aims in each of the six chapters, and it is precisely

this narrative secularization that makes the *Scottish Legendary* so distinctive and so effective at instructing its audience.

In Chapter 1, von Contzen analyzes the poet-narrator's digressions from the original source, the *Legenda aurea*, arguing that they encapsulate the poet's focus on the function of specific passages over the fidelity of a literal translation. Chapter 2 examines the duality of the role of the poet as a teacher and narrator, and how these roles are conflated in the text. The author's voice is attuned to his lay audience: in the text, the poet-narrator serves as a "guiding device" that minimizes narrative confusion while it ensures that the audience can enjoy the text (p. 66). The "thin line between instruction and entertainment" is apparent in the poet-narrator's methodology, and it follows the desire to provide a guide to improved moral behaviour (p. 81). Chapter 3 examines the *Legendary's* use of direct discourse as a dramatic and gendering device, which is a result of the poet-narrator's use of tropes associated with secular literary genres. Direct discourse connects with secular audiences better, and it attributes gendered dialogue to each legend: female saints' actions do not exceed the power of their words (authority), while male saints display both powerful and extraordinary actions (authority and power). Gendering the discourse allowed the poet to dramatize the narrative, using the saints to educate the audience about proper Christian behaviour.

Chapter 4 analyses the role of *auctoritas* in the *Scottish Legendary* and its narrative usefulness. *Auctoritas* is found in the text in the use of Christian scripture and authors, becoming another example of how the *Legendary* blends hagiographical and secular narrative devices to both educate and entertain its audience. Chapter 5 examines the narrative representation of consciousness and interiority in the legends, a representation that allows the audience to empathize more directly with the inner workings of each saint. The narrative often relies on the use of romantic and other secular literary tropes to represent the saints' interiority to make their lives more accessible to the audience. It is clear from von Contzen's analysis that the poet-narrator has a strong command of the function of literary tropes and genres to elicit specific responses from the reader.

Chapter 6 is one of the most important chapters in the book, particularly for Older Scots literary scholars. It examines the intersection of time, space, and Scottishness in the *Legendary*,

particularly its lack of an overt sense of nationalism that often characterizes other Older Scots works. Nationalism shapes the political discourse in Barbour's *Brus* and in Andrew of Wyntoun's *Orygynale Cronykil*; however, the *Scottish Legendary* is devoid of political narrative. Instead, the *Legendary* expresses Scottishness in a more subtle manner. For example, miracle accounts for St Ninian and St Machar, the two Scottish saints included in the *Legendary*, include the specific names of witnesses and their place of origin, providing a perspective into everyday life in Scotland (pp. 195-6). Both legends cast English characters in a negative light while highlighting their potential for salvation: "not all is lost for the English—they are certainly deserving of receiving divine grace, but they have to make an extra effort" (p. 196). Anglo-Scottish relationships are peripheral in the *Scottish Legendary*, yet they are present enough to hint at how the animosity between these two kingdoms permeated these relationships with local saints. However, the *Legendary's* Scottishness is found more in its use of the vernacular and how it caters to local audiences rather than in an explicit articulation of anti-English nationalism.

Narrativity permits von Contzen to examine how the *Scottish Legendary* differs not only from the *South English Legendary*, but also from other Older Scots literary works. This is why Chapter 6 is, to this reviewer, one of the most valuable in the monograph: the *Scottish Legendary's* tangential engagement with Scottishness and Anglo-Scottish relations contrasts sharply with the treatment of Scottish identity in works such as *The Brus* and the *Orygynale Cronykil*. Von Contzen's monograph is further enhanced by the inclusion of an appendix that examines questions of authorship, content arrangement, and language in the *Legendary*, offering a more thorough look at the technical aspects of its composition. This book is an important and highly recommended contribution to the field of medieval Scottish vernacular literature.

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