

Renaissance and Reformation Renaissance et Réforme



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

Sheena Jary

Volume 41, numéro 4, fall 2018

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1061956ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1061956ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Iter Press

ISSN

0034-429X (imprimé)

2293-7374 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Jary, S. (2018). Compte rendu de [Stanivukovic, Goran, ed. *Timely Voices: Romance Writing in English Literature*]. *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, 41(4), 278–280. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1061956ar>

Stanivukovic, Goran, ed.

Timely Voices: Romance Writing in English Literature.

Montreal: McGill–Queen’s University Press, 2017. Pp. ix, 362. ISBN 978-0-7735-5139-8 (hardcover) CDN\$110.

From translation studies to chivalry and otherworldly events, romance literature is a dauntingly vast term that has in many ways become the leviathan of medieval studies. But Goran Stanivukovic takes a different approach. As the editor of *Timely Voices: Romance Writing in English Literature*, Stanivukovic introduces a collection of essays that reconceptualize “romance” as a “strategy of writing” and as a resource that inspires new literature. Notwithstanding the two chapters that consider the Welsh and Celtic influences on romance literature, the rest of the essays examine literary texts between 1375 and 1940—a broad expanse of time that Stanivukovic justifies well in the Introduction. Stanivukovic takes care to contextualize each chapter and its significance, and his precision at defining terms fortifies the framework used to organize the chapters so seamlessly. The continuity between chapters and thematic sections is complemented by the interconnectivity between the contributors, who effectively reference each other as if in conversation.

The first section, “Narration and Transformation,” delves into the Protestant politics of the hermit, the function of narrative digressions, and the use of romance as a literary strategy to communicate God’s Providential plan. Helen Cooper outlines the religious tension that led to the Protestant revisionism of Catholic romances, specifically in regards to the character of the (evil) hermit. Stanivukovic collaborates with John H. Cameron in the second chapter, arguing that the countless digressions in Spenser’s *Faerie Queene* are both intentional and didactic, the latter being a strategic mode of writing for promoting the humanist ethics necessary for Spenser’s national romance epic. Colin Lahive closes this thematic section, arguing that Milton’s *Paradise Lost* uses romance as a rhetorical feature that draws Milton’s readers into an epic that justifies divine providence.

The second section concerns “Magic and Wonder,” which includes David Rollo’s discussion of Malory’s Merlin as the “Devyls Son” and John Carey’s inquiry into the providence of the Otherworld in romance literature. Carey departs from Hibernocentric and non-Celtic approaches to determining source texts, proposing instead the value of using medieval Irish tales as *comparanda*

to the sparsity of medieval Welsh literature, so as to lend credence to claims of Celtic influence on romance depictions of the Otherworld. Conversely, Nandini Das pays homage to the rhetorical function of the everyday, or ordinary, in medieval romance, which she credits as a source of wonder whose untellable narrative presence brings human agency, loss, love, death, and beauty to the fore. The wonder of the everyday transitions smoothly into essays by Joseph Falaky Nagy and Marcus Waithe, whose thematic commonality constitutes the third section on "Reformation and Mediation." Nagy turns readers' attention to several medieval Irish sources for romance texts and expands upon Carey's argument by extending the possibility that early Irish sources were a "staple" of western medieval romance. Waithe, on the other hand, discusses romance as the "fundamental structuring device" in his comparative reading of two texts from 1856 and 1937, both of which share elements of the uncanny in their failed "quests."

The overarching theme of the fourth section is "Transmission and Circulation." Here, Helen Moore argues that modern scholars need not question the recurring presence of Heliodorus in early modern drama, but should instead embrace his presence as examples of "repurposing" that are indeed more "dynamic" than earlier obsessions with the *Aethiopica*. Steve Mentz presents another dynamic way of framing a narrative—his central tenet being one that opposes genre on the premise that hierarchy naturally ensues. In his chapter "*Pericles* and Polygenres," Mentz argues in favour of a polygeneric system that "takes romance as its normative form," so as to craft a language to describe the diversity of romance writing and its diminished status with early modern readers. Stuart Sillars approaches a more obscure early modern text, though it is credited as a source for Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*. Anthony Munday's *Zelauto* boasts twenty-three woodcuttings that have yet to be recognized for their significance as a record of the reading and publishing practices of the period. Discounted as a romantic work of fiction, *Zelauto* serves as an example of how contemporaneous and modern readers alike create hierarchy when imposing genre.

The final section addresses "Aesthetics and Politics of Form," in which Catherine Bates contends that the "history" of romance continues to affect how Sidney's *Arcadia* is read and how the unfinished text does not allow "closure"—it is this "delay" that Bates isolates as a strategy of romance. Bates's commentary on Mary Herbert's role in the "tragic vision" of the *Arcadia* facilitates a smooth

transition to Hero Chalmers's essay on the aesthetics, ideology, and romance of seventeenth-century women's writing. Chalmers discusses how women's writing was received by readers and how the form and style of romance writing were often dismissed as "foolishness." Two centuries later, Jane Austen wrote *Northanger Abbey*, which Sara Malton argues is an example of how the tension of the "real" and the "representational," as well as fantasy and reality, unfolds in the heroine's plot as elements of romance writing.

Patricia Parker's Afterword places this collection of perspectives in dialogue, which further justifies Stanivukovic's choice to work within the wide boundaries of 1375 and 1940. The editor's Introduction and Parker's Afterword unite diverse arguments in a way that celebrates the innovativeness of romance as a strategic framework while reiterating how the interconnectivity of the essays relies not on genre or temporality, but rather on the use of romance as a writing strategy.

The accessibility of *Timely Voices* makes it a valuable resource to experts, non-specialists, and graduate students alike. "Romance" is a generative framework that continually reinvents central elements of medieval writing. Stanivukovic makes a compelling argument for the longevity of romance as a tactic—one that recognizes the potentiality of "romance" to create new spaces that transcend generic and temporal divisions. *Timely Voices* makes for a pleasurable read that creates space for new insights.

SHEENA JARY

McMaster University

Tommasino, Pier Mattia.

The Venetian Qur'an: A Renaissance Companion to Islam. Trans. Sylvia Notini.

Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018. Pp. xix, 297 + 1 ill. ISBN 978-08122-5012-1 (hardcover) US\$59.95.

Within the past several years, early modern historians have acquired a taste for interreligious and intercultural history that augments and, in some cases, corrects the treatment of linguistic and religious groups in isolation. Sweeping surveys like Nicholas Terpstra's 2015 *Religious Refugees in the Early Modern*