John Watkins, *After Lavinia: A Literary History of Premodern Marriage Diplomacy*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2017. xii + 274 pp. Notes, bibliography, and index. $59.95 U.S. (hb). ISBN-10. 1-507-0757-4.

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Seeking to untangle the political relations of European polities in which war trajectories were often linked to peace-making marriages, John Watkins, Professor of English at the University of Minnesota, embarks upon an impressive tour of literary history to show how marriage acts served transnational diplomacy. On the literary front, he reminds, many great writers who shared similar rhetorical skills were engaged in diplomatic service. On the diplomacy front, the practice melded so well with literary output that the fields of literature and international affairs developed in a cross-disciplinary manner. In the many discussions of "relations between states," Watkins says, the histories that chronicle marriages are informative. But, he also insists, the "fictional works" that were written about "imaginary marriages" are "as valuable as the ones associated with real marriages" (p. 10). How to square fiction and history, imaginary stories and lived ones? Watkins lays down a caveat. His study is not a history of the way transnational marriages aided peacemaking in Christian Europe. Rather, it is a "literary account" of the "discourse" that developed about the relation of marriage practices to diplomatic negotiations.[1] This is an erudite literary history which historians will learn a great deal from even though they may find some of the conclusions puzzling.

John Watkins recalls the ancient literary paradigm that encapsulated notions of interdynastic marriage: Virgil's poem, the *Aeneid*, where the dutiful marriage of Aeneas to Lavinia enables warring Trojan and Latin peoples to shed national rivalries and peacefully unite as Romans. So what happened "After Lavinia"? According to Watkins, "from the moment of its mythic Virgilian origin, the history of European marriage diplomacy was inseparable from the history of literary genre." And he wishes to track the "moments when these parallel histories intersected to reinforce, expand, exalt, and ultimately undercut the value of marriage as an instrument of peacemaking and alliance formation" (pp. 10-11). A caution: this designation of historical accounts of lived events and fictional ones imagined as "parallel histories" may give pause.[2]

In *Part One: Origins* (the Middle Ages), chapter one, Watkins looks at Germanic kingdoms after the fall of Rome--"After Lavinia"--where an Ostrogothic chronicler--Jordanes--writes about

Gothic-Roman relationships featuring Virgilian interdynastic marriage alliances that quell ethnic differences and secure lasting peace.[3] Here marriage diplomacy is useful for organizing political relations. An example, Theodoric the Great (454-526), who married daughters across dynasties, is eventually able to strengthen the prized Roman order. Still, as time passed, different opinions appeared. The Lombard historian--Paul the Deacon (700s)--put forth conflicting views of Virgilian interdynastic marriage.[4] He contrasts two foreign princesses so wed: one--Rosamund (a Gepid)--is a Dido-like queen whose foreign ways threaten to subvert society. The other--Theudelinda (a Bavarian)--is a Lavinia-like foreign bride who brings good to her adopted land. He also recalls two kings (late 700s)--Desiderious (a Lombard) and Charlemagne (a Frank)--for whom marriage diplomacy served political interests. Though Pope Stephen III opposed Charlemagne's marriage to a foreigner. In fact the Frankish-Lombard alliance was a disaster. Charlemagne repudiated his Lombard wife, Desiderata, invaded her home lands, and thenceforth married only women from Carolingian kingdoms: Hildegarde, Fastrada, and Liutgard. In Watkins' opinion, Paul's narratives actually treat the question of whether or not transnational marriage diplomacy is a suitable vehicle for negotiating with hostile neighbors. In the meantime, the Virgilian marriage paradigm took on new clothes.

In chapter two, Watkins assesses the later kingdoms which were members of a "diplomatic society" abiding by common conventions, including that of interdynastic marriage. He points to religious conversions secured through marriage and tracks the expansion of diplomacy entourages staffed by educated clergy. A bishop--Gregory of Tours (late 500s)--recounts a stunning event--queen Clothilde (a Burgundian) converting king Clovis I (a Frank, 500s)--thereby creating a Christianized model of Virgilian interdynastic marriage with Clovis emerging as the first Christian king of the Francs.[5] As Watkins sees it, Gregory's conversion account was primarily an adaptation of the Virgilian paradigm upholding cultural exchange through marriage, not simply a source for recounting historical events. Its real value, he thinks, lay in boosting the prestige of ancient texts, once polytheistic, now given a Christian frame. Since many writers revised their relationships to the classics, the ancients, Virgil and other Romans, became models for Christian history. So Gregory's writings mark a critical moment: the emergence of a Christianized diplomatic society in which interdynastic marriage offered a way to reconcile forces out of joint. The lesson also displays two powerful regents at deadly odds--the upright Brunhilde (of Austrasia, married to king Sigebert) and the low-born Fredegond (of Neustria, married to king Chilperic)--the first admirable queen regent murdered by the son of the second detested one. In Europe from now on, marriage to high-born women, one at a time, polygamy quashed, would become a kingly obligation. As would the appointment of clergy to the growing ranks of diplomats involved in peace making.

Watkins observes a shift in English accounts of religious conversions--with Bede an example--whereby foreign wives are shuffled to the side.[6] In Bede's primary case, the first in England, Aethelbert (of Kent) is pressed to convert by Bertha (his Frankish wife), yet most of the credit for the deed goes to monks and bishops in attendance. In later medieval times, the expansion of a Latin-based diplomatic society included a trans-European network of educated clergy well suited for work as diplomats, and they became the negotiators of marriage alliances, thus displacing the women who formerly mediated marriage initiatives independently, or with fathers, brothers, and husbands.

In chapter three, Watkins takes up literary romances, notes the vitality of Christianized marriage diplomacy during the 1000s and 1100s, and looks at its spread during the high Middle Ages. By now positive opinions on Christianized Virgilian marriage vied for place with negative ones. Some viewed foreign queens as valuable agents of cultural assimilation able to further peace. Others saw them as tragic victims of intractable ethnic rivalries pitting fathers and husbands. This uneasy balance shows in Dudo of Saint-Quentin (early 1000s) who understands the unhappy fate of princesses unable to reconcile natal and marital families.[7] Along the same lines, writers in the courtly love tradition retell stories from a different perspective: that of brides who are no longer praised as peace-making mediators but are shown as daughters whose personal passions upend dynastic strategies. Thereby opening the literary window on adulterous couplings that are politically disruptive: Isolde, Guinevere, and Fenice. As Watkins points out, the literary romances of the later Middle Ages did not always feature marriages leading to lasting political settlements. Nor did the real nuptials that were littered with problematic outcomes. For instance, a lauded marriage--Eleanor of Acquitaine and Louis VII of France--leads not to an extended peace but to a bitter church annulment followed by Eleanor's swift marriage to Henry II of England. Despite real setbacks, marriage diplomacy flourished, though soon beset by a lack of confidence in the practice that would lead to its decline during the early modern era.

In *Part Two: Wanings* (the early modern era), chapter four, Watkins deals with marriage diplomacy, print culture, and religious dissent in the 1500s and 1600s, to account for the waning of the Christianized Virgilian paradigm promising peace through transnational marriage. A major event--the Peace Treaty of Cateau-Cambrésis (1559)--ending the interminable war between Spain and France, contains a conundrum. To be sure, the treaty's Hapsburg-Valois marriage alliance observed the Virgilian format: that is Philip II of Spain and Elizabeth of Valois wed amid traditional rhetorical flourishes celebrating the peace achieved. Yet the growth of monarchical authority in these times undid that vision: the husband, in fact, shut his foreign wife out of the halls of politics. The same conundrum arose in England where struggles between Parliament (focused on national interests) and Henry VIII (concerned with dynastic ones) reset the old Virgilian dial. A split shows up: whereas French poets supported the Franco-Spanish marriage in 1559 (Phillip and Elizabeth), English writers would oppose a Franco-English marriage in 1579 (Anjou and Queen Elizabeth). Christians were no longer unified. Some writers in England regarded marriage diplomacy not as a means for staying peace but as a betrayal of the Protestant agenda. Widely circulated in print, these contests reached a large European audience.

At the same time that diplomats contested transnational marriage practices, literary figures in France generated reams of printed poems which publicly discussed affairs of state. Watkins remarks on this extraordinary French print foray: "the first printing event of its kind in Europe" (p. 124). Distinguished French poets--including Du Bellay, Ronsard, Belleau, Belleforest--express a range of opinions, Catholic and Calvinist, with much of the rhetoric-- with Ronsard, for example, praising war not peace.[8] Watkins holds that the fiery English "outcry against Anjou" (1579-1581) indicates the shift from dynastic to "state-based sovereignty" (p. 135). One example, the Protestant English writer John Stubbs publicly condemns the proposed nuptials, discusses foreign affairs, and argues against the use of interdynastic marriage to forge international alliances.[9] For him foreign wives had been disastrous for both England and France, and he indicts Eleanor of Aquitaine and Catherine de Médicis. Another example, Edmund Spenser, registers a similar hostile reaction.[10] In a

Europe besieged by religious dissent, the Politiques in France did not reject Queen Elizabeth for her Protestant bearings, while the Protestants in England reviled Artois for his Catholic ones.

In chapter five, Watkins brings up two plays of Shakespeare, *King John* and *Henry V*, which negated transnational marriage.[11] In Shakespeare's retelling of past times, interdynastic marriages fostered subservience to a foreign power and humiliated the nation. The cast of wicked, even murderous, French wives of English kings reads this way: Eleanor of Aquitaine, Margaret of Anjou, and Catherine of Valois, who supposedly threatened an imaginary English nation of yore. Shakespeare undercuts the Virgilian paradigm by refuting the former justifications for transnational marriage and shifting to a state-based model of diplomacy.

In chapter six, Watkins presents a somber depiction of the way queens, routinely denigrated, are reduced to roles as emotive divas on stage in France during the 1600s. Whereas the appearance of the English critiques of diplomatic ideals in the 1500s was propelled by the Protestant gentry and the House of Commons, the French critiques of the Virgilian paradigm came from the Crown on down during the 1600s. For instance, Cardinal Richelieu, minister of Louis XIII held that marriage alliances in treaties were ineffectual; and Louis XIV wanted women barred from political discussions. Once the medieval visions of Europe as a one peaceful Christian entity faded and war was accepted as a perpetual condition in early modern times, Watkins contends, the praise formerly accorded mediator queens as peacemakers gave way to unsavory attacks on them. "The new norm [war oriented] reduced, and in some cases even eliminated, the role of royal women, especially consorts, in state affairs" (p. 174). This was a shift that struck a chord in literary circles.

It is Watkins' contention that Louis XIV's state vision--war the political norm, women barred from politics--created a crisis in the French theater. As some literary voices discerned, the vision insulted queens and aristocratic women. So it is that Corneille treats France's turn away from traditional diplomatic ideals as a tragic necessity and links the suffering and denigration of aristocratic women to a state that has abandoned real peacemaking efforts and opted for perpetual war.[12] In this way literary figures opened up public space for commenting on the changing roles of women in French politics. To that end, Corneille and Racine wrote plays featuring the Jewish princess Bérénice, much loved by the Roman emperor Titus, yet renounced by him due to a law forbidding marriage with foreign women. Watkins points to a powerful intertextual gesture by Racine that alerts the audience to current changes in minds and mores touching affairs of state. That is, Racine does not link Bérénice to the paradigmatic Virgilian wife Lavinia whose marriage to the heroic Aeneas united Trojan and Latin kingdoms. Rather, he links her to Dido who was deserted by the ambitious Aeneas willing to abandon true love for an imperial crown![13] In the early modern era, the Virgilian interdynastic paradigm-- Aeneas and Lavinia--which had been reclothed in Christian garb to suit demands of medieval times, was again redressed in the literary mantle of faithful love bestowed upon Dido thus undoing the place in politics held by Lavinia.

Drawing his literary history to a close in the 1600s, Watkins depicts the powerful kingdom of France ruled by Louis XIV as a state under siege. There endless wars reigned and peace was no longer a goal. Historiographies celebrated nation states, rather than praising familial dynasties. Women whose marriages bound Europe into a single family were no longer saluted by writers but rather were demeaned, shut out of politics, and turned into emotive divas. All the while, the

Christianized Virgilian paradigm, rejected by centralized and bureaucratized states that steadily sidelined women, fell out of time and mind.

Without doubt historians stand to learn a lot from Watkins' literary history as did this reviewer. Though some of them, noting the equal weight given to fictional stories and historical accounts, may find conclusions wanting. Watkins says his work is not a history of European marriage diplomacy but one that tracks the "discourse" surrounding the diplomatic practice across time. However, the stated focus on the discourse is rapidly overwhelmed by the necessity to revisit events set in a historical context. The first part of *After Lavinia*, on the Middle Ages, provides a cornucopia of valuable knowledge that illustrates the successes and failures of Christianized Virgilian marriage diplomacy owed largely to the educated clergy who practiced it. But the second part, on the early modern era, is not as compelling because the events, which are unmoored from the enormous structural transformation produced by the process of state building, overtake the intended focus on the discourse. To give just one example: a historical analysis accounting for the angry epithets directed at royal women in France during this era could assess the phenomenon differently.[14] As in my own take: those attacks on women were not concerted efforts to bar them from politics but a reaction by conservative officials in politics to the glaring historical fact that French women, officially appointed as queens regent (for minority kings) had publicly exercised state power for several centuries. For which they garnered praise and criticism: Isabeau of Bavaria, Anne of France, Louise of Savoy, Catherine de Médicis, Anne of Austria, and Marie de Médicis. While in England, Scotland, and Sweden, they ruled as sovereign queens: Mary, Elizabeth, Mary Queen of Scots, and Christina. In this historical interpretation, royal women were reviled because they boldly donned the real political mantle of authority (in life), not a literary cloak of love (on stage). Events committed to historical memory. Debates aside, historians will benefit from reading John Watkins' intellectually engaging literary history.

NOTES

[1] Watkins further explains: "Recollections of Virgilian marriage [Aenaeus and Lavinia] organize my transhistorical account of European peacemaking. Given the impossibilities of writing a comprehensive history, my analysis concentrates on texts foregrounding the development and later disintegration of a discourse of marriage as the preeminent means to restore and maintain the peace of Christendom," p. 10.

[2] For a sparkling foray into this methodological realm, see Alan B. Spitzer, *Historical Truths and Lies about the Past: Reflections on Dewey, Dreyfus, de Man, and Reagan* (Chapel Hill, N. C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), pp. 1-12.

[3] Watkins, on Jordanes, *De Origine actibusque Getarum (*or *Getica)*, pp. 30-37. Note that Watkins analyzes a large roster of writers, so this review cites limited examples.

[4] Watkins, on Paul the Deacon, *Historia langobardorum*, pp. 38-50.

[5] Watkins, on Gregory of Tours, *Historia francorum*, pp. 54-62.

[6] Watkins, on Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, pp. 63-69.

[7] Watkins, on Dudo of Saint-Quentin, *De moribus et actis primorum Normaniae* ducum, pp. 70-72 and pp. 81-84.

[8] Watkins, on Ronsard, *Exhortation au Camp du Roy pour Bien Combattre le Jour de la Bataille*, pp. 125-132.

[9] Watkins, on Stubbs, *The discoverie of a gaping gulf wherinto England is like to be swallowed by another French mariage*, pp. 136-139.

[10] Watkins, on Spenser, *Shepheardes Calendar*, pp. 139-142.

[11] Watkins, on Shakespeare, *King John*, 141-161, and *Henry V*, pp. 161-173.

[12] Watkins, on Corneille, *Horace*, pp. 175-188, *Bérénice*, pp. 196-206.

[13] Watkins, on Racine, *Bérénice*, pp. 206-210.

[14] For historical arguments that challenge Watkins' notion that women were sidelined in France, see Karen Offen, *The Woman Question in France, 1400-1870* (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 2017), chapter one, "Querying Women's Power and Influence in French Culture." See Derval Conroy, *Ruling Women: Government, Virtue, and the Female Prince in Seventeenth Century France*, 2 vols. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), for the defenders of women's ability to occupy public office; and Jonathan Dewald, *Status, Power, and Identity in Early Modern Europe: The Rohan Family, 1550-1715* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2015), for a riveting account of how aristocratic French women managed family finances, arranged marriages, fought off legal actions, and fashioned familial repute.

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