H-France Review Vol. 22 (May 2022), No. 81

Sofia Lodén, *French Romance, Medieval Sweden and the Europeanisation of Culture*. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2021. ix + 216 pp. Notes, references, and index. $99.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 9781843845829; $24.99 U.S. (eb). ISBN 9781800101586.

Review by Jacqueline Victor, University of Chicago.

Sofia Lodén makes the case for the value of Swedish literature within the larger story of medieval romance and the development of European identity. From one perspective, the argument is straightforward. The first Swedish literary works were translations of romances connected to the Old French tradition. By the time these Swedish translations were made, romances had circulated across numerous languages and regions throughout Europe and had come to represent a more broadly European literary form. The Swedish texts sought expressly to position themselves within this tradition. The translations adapted the romances to their new language and context through variations in key aspects of European identity, namely those involving gender, honor, and religion (with Lodén's study more interested the first two). However, each aspect of this argument opens up an interesting set of complexities that, although occasionally leaving the reader wishing for their further development, also make this book valuable to the study of romance beyond the Swedish tradition, while providing a strong argument for the interest of medieval Swedish literature within both its local and European context. Lodén writes of the Swedish translations that they "have so often been mistaken as naive" (p. 185), and in this sense, her book succeeds as a convincing corrective to that viewpoint.

Lodén begins by telling the story of how Swedish romance came into being in the early fourteenth century. This history is handled in a deft and engaging manner that alone would make this book worth reading for anyone interested in romance literature or medieval Sweden. Particular attention is paid to the Norwegian Queen Eufemia, whose daughter Ingeborg married into Swedish royalty, and who commissioned a series of translations collectively known as the *Eufemiavisor*, comprising *Herr Ivan*, *Hertig Fredrik av Normandie*, and *Flores och Blanzeflor*. (Translation is understood here in its medieval sense, as an adaptation and rewriting as much as a translation). As Lodén writes, "[b]y ordering texts in verse rather than prose, [Eufemia] broke with the Norse tradition whilst connecting with a larger European trend. Her vision seems not to have been to compose new sagas, but to create a Swedish national literature that was closer to its counterparts on the European continent" (p. 12). Lodén discusses the political circumstances surrounding these translations along with the important place of women in the history of Swedish romance. She notes that "[t]he fact that Swedish translations of romances were frequently associated with female readers--e.g. Eufemia, Märta, Elin, a nunnery--shows that women continued to play a central role for the development of the romance in late medieval

Europe, at least in Sweden" (p. 27). Along with Eufemia, Lodén introduces the reader to the Swedish bishop Hans Brask, who is linked to the translation of *Riddar Paris och Jungfru Vienna*. His travels to Rome and resulting view of Sweden "as being situated at the end of the world" informed his understanding of the role that continental literature could play in Sweden (p. 41): "His wish to translate literature from the Continent reflects his eagerness to educate the Swedes by making Swedish culture more open to influences from abroad" (p. 42). The interconnectivity of Sweden with European centers of learning is likewise established through Swedish students who went to study first at the university in Paris before eventually selecting universities closer to home at Rostock, Leipzig, Cologne, and Greifswald. The overall sense is that, while Swedish romances were produced for local purposes, these purposes included connecting Sweden to the values, power structures, and cultural production of the European continent.

This history is laid out in the introduction and in chapter one, which is also dedicated to the concept of Europeanisation and situates Lodén's work in relation to historians who have written about the development of European identity in the Middle Ages. The historian Robert Bartlett's model of center and periphery is referenced not only in relation to Sweden, but also to argue for how "[t]he opposition in romance between the court and the rest of the world--between civilization and wilderness--is adapted to different cultural and linguistic contexts and becomes an integral part of a civilising process that contributes to the 'making of Europe'" (p. 34). Most notably, Lodén employs the work of Chris Wickham in order to foreground attitudes towards gender, honor, and religion identified by Wickham as widespread across European society.[1] These three aspects, and in particular gender and the notion of honour, underpin Lodén's textual readings and her evaluation of their distinctive Europeanness. (I will return to this concept of Europeanisation).

Chapters two through five are organized around thematic, comparative readings of Old Swedish versions of four medieval romances and their counterparts in Old French and other medieval language traditions. The four romances, ranging in date from the fourteenth to the sixteenth century, are *Herr Ivan*, *Flores och Blanzeflor*, *Namnlös och Valentin*, and *Riddar Paris och Jungfru Vienna*. Chapter two analyzes *Herr Ivan* through the lens of gender, focusing on the female characters Laudine and Lunete and arguing that both characters lose some of their "psychological complexity" (p. 81) in the Old Swedish, while "the role of the lion becomes more central" (p. 82), which Lodén relates to a need for a "clear and tangible ideological agenda, rather than a psychological and literary complexity" (p. 82). Chapter three shows how *Flores och Blanzeflor* more clearly delineates between childhood and adulthood than do other versions, while de-emphasizing the role of Latin literacy in aristocratic education. Chapter four turns to *Namnlös och Valentin* and explores human/animal hybridity and transformation, demonstrating how the Swedish narrative is more interested in transformation than in the complexities of hybridity. Chapter five provides a reading of the unfinished *Riddar Paris och Jungfru Vienna* that highlights the way in which the prologue positions the narrative--and the concept of love--in relation to masculinity and the courtly value system in which masculinity is expressed. The overarching narrative that Lodén draws from her readings, though the specifics vary and the textual moments she compares are insightful in themselves, is one in which the Swedish translations tended toward a more ideological and less ambiguous treatment of their themes and characters. Rather than pointing to a simplistic, naïve literature, however, these translations can be understood as serving an ideological purpose: romance was intended to communicate a continental, courtly value system to a new aristocracy.

Although the title of Lodén's book refers specifically to French romance, its textual scope is broader than this title would suggest, as Lodén offers readings of the Old Swedish romances in relation to versions from multiple language traditions. *Herr Ivan* is compared to versions in Old West Norse, Middle English, and Middle High German, in addition to Old French. The chapter on *Florez och Blanzeflor* includes comparative readings from roughly this same grouping, replacing Middle High German with Spanish and adding an Anglo-Norman version; the chapter on *Namnlös och Valentin* features versions in Middle Low German, Middle English, and French prose; and the chapter on *Riddar Paris och Jungfru Vienna* looks at two French versions and versions in Low German and Middle English, along with some discussion of the Italian tradition.

The comparative readings are balanced between the different versions and Lodén makes clear that her argument is not stemmatological, but rather rooted in a field of textual possibilities inherent in the circulation of texts: "Instead of focusing on the linear movement from source to translation, therefore, in this book I have studied the Swedish translations in relation to their various direct and indirect sources on a less hierarchial [sic] level, positioning the larger European context as the key to understanding the texts' different textual origins" (p. 180). This linguistic (and ultimately temporal) breadth undoubtedly makes this book a useful resource for anyone interested in medieval romance (Lodén's extensive footnotes, references, and discussions of manuscripts and extant versions will also prove valuable for scholars). Significantly, this comparative approach enacts a clear-sighted argument for Lodén's concept of Europeanisation: "the very essence of the romance lies in its circulation across borders--a circulation that in itself is everything but merely imagined and that must be seen as a concrete example of how medieval literature contributed to the creation of a cultural European community" (p. 32).

Of course, the title's emphasis on French romance is not without reason: the romances all either originated in Old French (whether in preserved or presumed copies) or were influential within the narrative's textual tradition. French romance enjoyed a prestige status and Lodén argues that it served an ideological, as well as literary, purpose in the Swedish context: "The idealised role of French culture in medieval Sweden can be seen as an expression of France's dominant position in European civilisation during the High Middle Ages" (p. 37). However, despite this emphasis, the Frenchness of the texts often serves as more of a productive question than an answer, and the conclusions that are drawn from this French origin do not always respond fully to the scope and interest of that question. The evidence for the specific importance of Old French romance to the Swedish versions--as opposed to other source versions in, for example, Low German--is not always clear. Similarly, I'm not sure I agree with Lodén's argument that the streamlined ideology of the Swedish texts helps us to better understand Old French romance, although I do agree that it enables us to see what kinds of values were perceived as significant or essential in Old French romance in other contexts that were closer to that time period than our own. In other words, French is important conceptually to Lodén's argument, but this importance wanes in the specifics of the comparative readings. Instead, the strength of Lodén's close readings can be most readily found in the ways in which they broaden their perspective beyond Old French to encompass a range of source materials and versions. For example, Lodén notes the close influence of German texts (Middle High and Low German) on the Swedish romances, including the use of the *knittel* verse form, and these texts, along with those in Old Norse, were direct source materials for the translations.

This broadening out brings us back to the concept of Europeanisation. This concept seems strongest and most convincing when it is enacted in Lodén's comparative readings and when it

is considered in light of Sweden's position relative to the European continent. Lodén's own definition is intentionally limited to the circulation of texts: "By 'Europeanisation' I refer to the emergence of Europe as a cultural identity that may be defined in terms of the dissemination of a number of literary texts, forming different traditions" (p. 44). Lodén also makes it clear that she views this Europeanizing process through the lens of a nascent Swedish aristocracy seeking to establish its status in relation to their European counterparts. Nonetheless, I find myself wondering if the definition that Lodén provides also contains within it the possibility of drawing other kinds of lines, or of pushing the concept of Europe beyond its current borders, both affirming and raising questions about the cultural identity of the entity we now call Europe. In particular, several important aspects seem to be missing from the book's discussion of Europeanisation: the concept of alerity against which group identities are often defined; internal differences in cultural identity within Europe; the role of Christianity in European identity formation among the aristocracy and dominant groups; and the circulation of medieval European literature in languages and regions that are not considered "European" or had an ambiguous relationship to "Europe" (as was the case with *Floire et Blanchefleur*).[2]

Lodén affirms some of these points, for example when she writes that "The actual term 'Europe', however, remained mostly associated with geography throughout the Middle Ages, whereas 'Christendom' covered a wider range of places" (pp. 32-33). She thus observes the importance of Christianity within Europeanisation and, although she chooses not to deal with religion directly because it has already been written about amply elsewhere, it nevertheless stands out as an absence. Similarly, Chris Wickham's identification of gender, honour, and religion as three key aspects of European identity in the Middle Ages is employed without explicit consideration of what he means when he refers to this identity as comprising attitudes to these aspects, rather than the aspects themselves. What attitudes towards gender, honour, or religion made them specifically "European" in contrast to how these concepts--important across all cultures--were viewed in other areas of regional identity? As Wickham writes: "All claims to an essential European, and only European, unity are fictional even today, and in the middle ages they would have been fantastic. So: medieval Europe is simply a large differentiated space, seen across a long time period. It is also well enough documented to allow some quite nuanced study. This is not a romantic image at all, and is intended not to be. But this space and time holds some enthralling material all the same. It is my aim to give it shape."[3] Lodén's own approach provides an excellent way to give some shape to European identity through her insistence on looking closely at how romance circulated in the Middle Ages and how it was (re)interpreted in different contexts. Textual circulation thus maps out a shared European cultural identity, but it also has the potential to reshape this identity through its connection to networks beyond Europe, or of unequal concentration or status within Europe.

Though the question of Europeanisation needs to be answered on a larger scale, this book makes a convincing case for the usefulness of the concept and for the value of Swedish literature to our understanding of romance. Lodén notes that there is not much scholarship on Swedish romance, and she hopes her book will inspire more. I hope so as well, and Lodén's own work offers an inspiring and accessible model that thinks broadly while remaining true to its local context.

NOTES

[1] Chris Wickham, *Medieval Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016).

[2] There are many examples of this idea in scholarship on the Middle Ages. See for example: Sharon Kinoshita, *Medieval Boundaries: Rethinking Difference in Old French Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006); David Nirenberg, *Neighboring Faiths: Christianity, Islam, and Judaism in the Middle Ages and Today* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014); Geraldine Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018); or Cord Whitaker, *Black Metaphors: How Modern Racism Emerged from Medieval Race-Thinking* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019).

[3] Wickham, *Medieval Europe*, p. 6.

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ISSN 1553-9172