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# REVIEWS

William W. Kibler and Leslie Zarker Morgan, eds. *Approaches to Teaching the Song of Roland*. NY: The Modern Language Association of America, 2006. 317p. & CD-ROM.

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The Old French *Chanson de Roland* belongs to the world classics of Western literature, and it is one of those texts that regularly appear on the reading lists of undergraduate and graduate classes at North American universities. Under the competent leadership of the two editors, Kibler and Zarker Morgan, a large number of North American Romanists have come together to address this fascinating epic poem both from a philological and a historical and so also from a didactic and pragmatic point of view. As the series editor emphasizes, all books published in the series "Approaches to Teaching World Literature" are "intended to serve nonspecialists as well as specialists, inexperienced as well as experienced teachers, graduate students...as well as senior professors" (ix). In order to gain a solid understanding of the major approaches to *Roland* in academic classes in North America, the editors have solicited broad-ranging feedback from all regions of the United States (and also Canada in one case; plus three contributions are from British scholars), and the resulting articles make up the present volume. Despite its Anglophile focus, the discussions and interpretations are of great value for all scholars and general readers alike interested in this famous Old French epic.

The volume is divided into two major sections, the first one concerned with materials, the second with background information and pedagogical approaches. Philologists will very much welcome the excellent survey of the manuscript tradition and of the relevant research literature by William W. Kibler, whereas Leslie Zarker Morgan focuses on modern media through which the text has been preserved to us, whether in print media or audio-visual media, such as film and music. The latter is discussed in greater detail by Margaret Switten, who also explains the content of the accompanying CD-ROM with readings and musical performances (mostly varying attempts to reconstruct the accompanying music for the performance of *Roland* and the music instruments that could have been used, plus contemporary musical examples).

The articles in the second section concern a wide range of individual topics relevant for the understanding of *Roland* and the literary-historical context, pertaining

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both to the historical conditions, feudalism, military history, and technology. Some of the problems rest, of course, in the difference between the time when the historical events took place (8th century) and when the epic was composed and written down (early 12th century). Surprisingly, Barbara Stevenson's interesting study on postcolonial approaches to the *Song of Roland* is also included in the first section, whereas it really should have been placed in a much later section dedicated to this aspect exclusively. It might have been helpful if Stevenson and Kinoshita, who offers a postcolonial reading of the text, had been asked to correlate their work, which then would have allowed the reader to grasp how theoretical perspectives come to bear in the modern classroom.

The reception of *Roland* in Italy, Spain, and England was significant, but so also in Germany, which is mentioned only in passing in two unrelated articles, whereas the other versions are discussed at length by Jane E. Everson, Matthew Bailey, and Kimberlee Campbell. Modern reception theory (Medievalism) plays an important role as well, which finds its reflection in Mark Burde's article, though he limits himself to the nineteenth century (see, however, Zarker Morgan's comments on modern cinematographic versions). Students will particularly welcome the short articles on major characters and episodes, and so also those offering critical readings. The section on the epic's text, language, and poetic technique certainly belongs into this volume as well, but it requires more intellectual acumen to follow the specific arguments developed here.

At the end, after the notes on the contributors, we find an extensive bibliography (throughout, there is no critical apparatus!) and a welcome index (not exhaustive, however). The quality of the readings and the musical performances on the CD-ROM are of excellent quality and give a very good sense of how hard modern scholars have to struggle to gain a solid historical understanding of how this epic poem might have been presented musically to its medieval audiences. Unfortunately, the description of the various tracks remains somewhat hidden in Margaret Switten's contribution (36-39).

Undoubtedly, the pragmatic approach to teaching dominates this volume, which is also its explicit purpose. Nevertheless, many times the contributors obviously enter into some rather particular debates about their own approach/es without having a chance to illustrate the complexity of their positions in light of the relevant scholarship. Nevertheless, the background information, the samples of how to approach this text in the academic classroom, and the handful of critical readings make this book a most welcome aid for all those who are in charge of teaching this "classical" medieval text at the university level. ✨