Die literarische Welt des Mittelalters (review)

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At the end of the chapter Grotans characterizes Notker’s frequent use of a German/Latin mix as a kind of code-switching. The variety chosen is fixed by the classroom domain, with the extra-added constraint of the pupil’s knowledge of Latin. As an example, Latin would be chosen for clarifying word formations and etymologies, and to drill technical terms.

Chapter four (*The St. Gall Tractate*) begins the second part of the book wherein Grotans provides individual studies on Notker’s classroom activities. The topic here is *discretio*, which is an analysis of the syntax together with the punctuation so that the reader could perform the text with optimal understanding. Grotans uses the *St. Gall Tractate* which in all likelihood was written by Notker. In it the author discusses the natural order of grammatical units (the *ordo naturalis*), the meaning of these units, and how (roughly) clauses, phrases, and sentences are constructed based on rhythmical and semantic criteria. The SGT author also provided lexical voice cues for proper intonation.

In chapter five (*Discretio in the Classroom*) Grotans shows how Notker implements and develops the SGT methodology in his classroom. For example, Notker sometimes changed the natural order of elements depending on the difficulty of the text, his pedagogical aims, and text formation strategies. In the second half of the chapter we learn about how Notker used syntactical and rhetorical punctuation to help the student distinguish phrases, clauses, sentences, and paragraphs.

Chapters six and seven (*Accentus* and *Spelling for Reading*) is a discussion of how Notker taught and represented accent and spelling in German. Linguists have long sought to explain the discrepancies in Notker’s accentual and spelling systems much to their frustration but it is important to understand that texts were to be read aloud by students, teachers, and assistants, and so, in all of Notker’s efforts, whether in syntax, spelling, accentuation, etc., the aim was always to make clear the meaning of the text as heard. This explains why, for example, though circumflexes are to be used for long vowels and diphthongs and acute accents for short vowels, there are numerous inconsistencies—so, too, with Notker’s well-known Law of Initial Consonants or *Anlautgesetz*.

There are copious footnotes and translations of both the Latin and Old High German in this book. This alone makes the book a useful resource. The extensive bibliography lists both primary and secondary literature, and the volume of primary literature that Grotans draws upon is impressive. Grotans has obviously spent considerable time in a number of archives and brings a wealth of data to support her claims. No student of Old High German should miss this book. This also represents an important contribution to our understanding of literacy in the medieval West.

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Brinker-von der Heyde’s *Die literarische Welt des Mittelalters* makes a significant contribution to the ever-widening field of the history of the book. What makes Brinker-von der Heyde’s book particularly appropriate for the present time is the connections she draws between the current medium shift from physical book to digital texts, and the medieval one from orality to a “culture of the book.” Concentrating on the
German-speaking Middle Ages from about 800 to 1500, Brinker-von der Heyde traces the establishment of the (German) book by exploring both the material and the literary aspects of book production: from the making of parchment to the adaptation and re-presentation of known texts and stories.

Each of Brinker-von der Heyde’s four chapters is subdivided into sections, making it easy for a reader to go straight to the area of his/her particular interest. Indices to people and topics are included at the end of the book, along with a glossary offering brief information on figures and texts mentioned; readers coming from fields of specialization other than the German Middle Ages will appreciate this quick reference guide (a paper equivalent of a quick google search). The bibliography includes a list of electronic resources, among them manuscript databases. The book is generous in its inclusion of pictures, though unfortunately none is in color.

In the first chapter, Brinker-von der Heyde uses both medieval texts and pictures to present various practical aspects of book production. Brinker-von der Heyde emphasizes the practical details of such production; for example, the inevitable and overpowering smell associated with making parchment meant that the production locations were usually outside the monastery or city—ideally downwind. Throughout the book, Brinker-von der Heyde reflects on how the rise of book production influenced and was shaped by medieval life. An illuminating example is how the vegetarian diet of the Carthusians resulted in the absence of a ready supply of animal skins and thus to a material “hunger for knowledge” (Bildungshunger) that the order could not satisfy without financial aid for parchment purchases (p. 14).

Brinker-von der Heyde also reflects on the development of scripts, identifying the source of paleographic conservatism in the need to ensure that the next generation can gain access to the knowledge conveyed by the last (here Brinker-von der Heyde compares computer programs that, once updated, can no longer ‘read’ older digital versions of a text). She also ponders the problems that arise when an oral text is transferred into a written medium originally conceived for a different language; she quotes effectively from Otfrid von Weißenburg on the difficulty of using the Latin alphabet to record German texts (p. 27). Brinker-von der Heyde concludes this chapter with a discussion of the “revolution of book printing.” She notes that popular literacy generally lagged behind the technological advances, a circumstance that contributed to the rise of new genres more suited to the tastes and abilities of a broader public (p. 58). Brinker-von der Heyde in particular observes the increased quantitative output of the printers and the resultant need for systematic storage, a need answered by the expansion of libraries and library catalogues.

Following this historical introduction, the first of two middle chapters explores the book as a literary, social, and political object, citing a number of historical events that made possible the rise of the vernacular book. In the twelfth century, residential courts came to replace traveling courts; as the permanent headquarters of royal families, these courts became “centers of institutional power” (p. 60).

The infrastructure that served the administrative needs at court was soon used by scribes and illuminators as well, and the fixed location of these courts provided a physical space for poets and audience to meet (p. 61). At the same time, the expansion of cities, along with increased foreign trade and the establishment of guilds, concentrated an increasingly wealthy and educated urban class that likewise provided a fertile atmosphere for the production and dissemination of literature. Complementing the discussions of broader historical changes are more detailed analyses of literary patronage; the significance of patrons is eloquently
demonstrated by the author’s observation that the death of a poet might allow another poet to finish the work, but the withdrawal of a patron was invariably the end of a commissioned work (p. 75).

Brinker-von der Heyde also shows how the production of literary texts and manuscripts legitimized claims to political authority; she cites as an example Pfaffe Konrad’s *Rolandslied*, which praises Henry the Lion for providing (on the bidding of his wife) the French source text and then also strongly implies Henry’s illustrious ancestry (p. 78). Just as text serves political ends, so do manuscript illuminations; Brinker-von der Heyde cites the well-known coronation scene in the Evangelary of Henry. The chapter ends with a discussion of the Manessische Liederhandschrift as a product of “Literaturmanagement” (p. 80), a term Brinker-von der Heyde uses to encompass the nexus of circumstances that allow for the production of a codex.

Chapter Three concentrates on reception, particularly on the question of whether the change from an oral to a written medium was mirrored by an audience’s shift from hearing to reading. Brinker-von der Heyde argues that both modes of reception survived, a view she supports in part with reference to the medieval theory that the eye and the ear are the key organs for importing impressions into the memory (pp. 96–97). The author explores relationships between word and image, emphasizing, for example, that the pictorial quality of text in many manuscripts can make a strict distinction between picture and text impossible (p. 103) and that new pictorial programs can alter the interpretation of a text (p. 104). Brinker-von der Heyde suggests that the privileging of one mode—hearing, reading, or viewing—over another depends in part on genre; for example, she argues that the primary mode of reception of “Sangspruch” was oral and public, both because the singers could adapt their perspectives to the opinions of the audience and because the oral medium allowed them to connect historically-distant events with topical developments (p. 115). Though this chapter concentrates on hearing and reading, its final section reminds the reader of the medieval metaphor of “incorporating” texts—of eating, chewing, and devouring—and stresses that the act of reading was a physical one requiring more than visual engagement.

In her last chapter, Brinker-von der Heyde turns to the question of authorship and authorial identity in medieval texts. Differences in genre influence the explicit naming of an author; for example, the lyric collections of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries are generally presented as author corpora, whereas epic manuscripts include neither author nor title. Despite the absence of explicit authorial attributions, medieval texts nonetheless often allude to or even cite other roughly contemporary texts, and it is this practice that Brinker-von der Heyde explores, suggesting that it reveals an interest in authorial recognition, (p. 143) and ultimately bears witness to an interactive literary web in which poets and patrons, poets and public, patrons and public, could all participate (p. 149).

Returning to the materiality of manuscript culture, the author briefly discusses challenges and changes of editorial practices in the past two centuries, most importantly the still-debated question of whether an editor should correct or intervene with the text as it stands in a manuscript. Here Brinker-von der Heyde returns to a central topic of her book, the shift from oral to literary culture, thereby returning to the physical and material object, the manuscript, with which she started. In the final pages, Brinker-von der Heyde reiterates her plea for understanding and analyzing the individual manuscript and its contents in its broader social-historical, material, and literary contexts (p. 161).
Displaying both detail and depth, Brinker-von der Heyde’s book presents a nuanced and complex picture of the medieval literary world. The one or two glitches this reader found (for example, the modern German translation of a Walter von der Vogelweide quotation appears to be missing, p. 113) do not detract from the overall quality and erudition of this book. This book deserves a wide audience, one that includes medievalists whose specialty is not German.

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Triviale Minne? Konventionalität und Trivialisierung in spätmittelalterlichen Minnereden is a collection of eleven essays presented originally at a conference held June 3–6, 2004, at Schloss Eckberg in Dresden. The Minnereden are relatively brief texts—between 50 and 600 verses—in which a first-person author, usually anonymous, characterizes and discusses the problems, conditions, and rules of Minne, frequently employing conventional content and language. Although Lieb and Neudeck identify a number of common features among the Minnereden in the opening paragraphs of their introduction, they note that according to modern criteria it is difficult to identify the texts as a distinct genre. The more than 500 extant Minnereden constitute the largest group of secular German texts of the late Middle Ages; nonetheless, they have garnered neither high regard nor extensive attention from scholars, circumstances that perhaps invite the designation “trivial.” The editors examine in detail the present-day multivalence of this term and its applicability to late medieval texts. The strongest evidence of the “trivial” nature of the Minnereden may be the lack of original content and frequent thematic and linguistic repetition. Other modern nuances of the term seem less relevant, e.g., the identification of Trivialliteratur with “low” literature, since a dichotomy between “high” and “low” literature is barely discernible in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Although critics today view Trivialliteratur as works from the lower class, anonymous, mass-produced, and inexpensive, the image is one to which the Minnereden hardly conform, especially given that they were transmitted almost exclusively in manuscript form. Concluding their semantic discussion, the editors recall the Latin root of “trivial” and its relationship to the trivium, emphasizing the pivotal role of rhetoric, one of the artes triviales, in the late medieval texts. Unlike the poetry of the High Middle Ages, shaped by a social elite personally engaged in the courtly love experience, the texts of the later generations were written by aficionados of the courtly love tradition, educated individuals acquainted with the art of Minne as well as those interested in learning about it, who edited and modified familiar material to reflect a novel understanding of it. The Minnereden were texts intended to be read, not songs to be sung, and were composed from the perspective of a waning courtly culture.

Lieb and Neudeck briefly characterize the grouping of the essays. The first four analyze typical repetitions and in particular the poetics and rhetoric of the language of love found in selected Minnereden. The subsequent four offer insights into the broader cultural context of the works, especially the social and linguistic framework that informs them and the evolution of the socio-literary circle in