

she needs to trust her argument. Her central concern with the relationship between medieval readers and the Carthaginian queen is by itself elegant, illuminating, and often fascinating. That's all a reader asks.

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Frakes, Jerold C. *Brides and Doom: Gender, Property, and Power in Medieval German Women's Epic*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994.

Frakes offers close readings and a feminist-Marxist analysis of three thirteenth-century texts: the *Nibelungenlied*, *Diu Klage*, and *Kudrun*. This narrative trio is found in a manuscript from the fifteenth century known as the *Ambraser Heldenbuch* (now in the Oesterreichische Nationalbibliothek in Vienna). The texts in question have been classified by scholars as Middle High German "heroic" literature, despite the fact that the texts focus to a large degree on female characters, and that the original titles—if extant—acknowledge women as the main characters. Frakes agrees with Inga Wild's (1979) perception of the thematic unity of these texts, an argument based on their placement in the Ambraser manuscript and on the ethical antithesis to the male Dietrich heroes of the surrounding texts presented by these women-centered texts. To describe them, Frakes borrows Wild's term "Frauenepos" (women's epic). In the closing chapter, Frakes parallels this term to the genre "Frauenroman" (women's novel), giving a valuable critique of the term's application and significance.

Frakes also focuses on conventional scholarship which defined the genre of heroic poetry and then molded its understanding of these three texts to fit the concept. As a feminist analysis, Frakes' "conscious political project" (5) does not attempt to read, from a twentieth-century perspective, the female characters as proto-feminists, nor to attribute an "original" meaning to the texts. Rather, he addresses gender relations as an element in the political formation of the societies represented in the narratives, and simultaneously points to the ideological attempts of modern masculinist critics to overlook or deny the sexual politics inherent in the texts. Frakes' analysis is furthermore a Marxist one in that he posits property to be the basis for power, and argues that the narrative gender relationships are articulated through property control; the *Nibelungenlied* is then a tale of how men rob women of their property, *Diu Klage* supports this view by defining the guilty (Hagen) vs. the innocent (Kriemhild) in the Nibelungen epos, and *Kudrun* is a tale of women as the property of men.

As a philological endeavor, *Brides and Doom* aims to break through the preconceived notions of meaning that we as readers bring to a text, and assists us in experiencing an encounter with an unexpected otherness. In Chapter 3, Frakes introduces his textual analysis by situating the topic of gendered property relations in a theoretical and historical context. He draws on work by P.R. Sanday, M.G. Smith, Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo, Gayatri Spivak and others, to discuss the status of women in the public sphere, the problematics of applying the public/private model to medieval society, and ahistorical notions of family and kin relations. An overview of the multiple medieval forms of marriage settlements and their changes over time provides a historical basis for the narrative context of several types of male-female relationships and their related property issues in the *Nibelungenlied*. Frakes convincingly demonstrates that the patriarchal double standard inherent in the text—the Nibelungen male characters recognize female political and public action and seek to deny its implications by relegating it to a fictional “private” arena—has been duplicated by a masculist scholarship that has trivialized or demonized political action taken by the female characters. Frakes here makes use of Spivak’s term “clitorality” in referring to a female character’s independent action for her *own* purpose and desire (i.e., Brünhild’s forceful refusal of sex with Gunther, or Kriemhild’s decision to marry Etzel, discussed in chapter 4). It is within this context that critics have understood the non-conformist woman as a pseudo-male or a mythical demon. In chapter 5, Frakes explores the similarities of Kriemhild and Brünhild to the clichéd Western construct of the Amazon. Along with focussing on courting and marriage in chapters 4 and 5, Frakes also grapples with the medieval literary rhetoric of *Minne* and the topos of the bridal quest, which he sees as being parodied in the *Nibelungenlied* in the incessant domestic treachery and ultimate disintegration of the family-clan in unions originally destined to *solidify* feudal/family ties.

Frakes’s study of *Kudrun* (chapters 6-8) is read through the lens of the *Nibelungenlied*. It is not a point-by-point comparative analysis to the issues articulated in the *Nibelungenlied*. Rather, he examines *Kudrun* as a radically different conception of a single problem: the potential for a woman’s independent control of her own life. The open intertextual relation between the two is thus a political one (rather than narrative or thematic), in which the *Kudrun*-poet is understood to be a critical commentator of the *Nibelungenlied*. Frakes supports this argument by pointing to systematic oblique rhymes, quotations, and parallels that become understandable only as departures from the *Nibelungenlied*’s perspective. *Kudrun* recognizes and problematizes the *Nibelungenlied*’s potential for restructuring gender roles by rejecting it and suppressing direct reference to it. The issue of female property is suppressed, and instead, *Kudrun* points to female *as* property, which, along with class/status consciousness, is a basic element of “wiving narratives” (“Brautepen”).

Frakes masterfully dismantles the conventional scholarly consensus that in *Kudrun*: a) the female characters are powerful, independent, or sovereign (in contrast to the “weak” *Nibelungenlied* women), and b) the heroine Kudrun effects a large-scale transformation of a society based on barbarism and violence (Germanic) to one based on courtly/civilized conflict resolution (Christian). His analysis reveals the class and gender bias of masculinist literary criticism. Frakes also reconsiders the traditional views of Gerlinde (as a manipulator of Hartmut) and Hilde (as a ruling queen), finding that they have been misjudged in order to exonerate their male counterparts from responsibility for their actions. This is an important and pioneering study for Nibelungen-scholarship and for medieval German studies as a whole. It will be of interest to scholars of literature, MHG philology, and history alike.

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Guerin, M. Victoria, *The Fall of Kings and Princes; Structure and Destruction in Arthurian Tragedy*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995, xi + 336 pp.

In *The Fall of Kings and Princes*, Victoria Guerin explores the medieval concept of tragedy as it is constructed in the story of King Arthur's incestuous paternity of Mordred. The thirteenth-century *La mort le roi Artu* is the earliest text that explicitly identifies Mordred as the son of Arthur's sexual liaison with his half-sister, but Guerin claims that the incest is obliquely referred to in earlier texts, including Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*. Although Geoffrey identifies Mordred as Arthur's nephew, Guerin suggests that the author's reference to a “particular matter” about which he “prefers to say nothing” is in fact a reference to Mordred's incestuous birth (10). She aims to show that the development of the character of Mordred in the prose Lancelot-Grail cycle is the first explicit *written* version of a much older part of the Arthurian tradition that Geoffrey of Monmouth and Chrétien de Troyes knew and incorporated into their narratives.

In a first chapter Guerin shows how the particular development of Mordred in the thirteenth-century compilation becomes a vehicle for the medieval author's exploration of notions of fortune, individual freedom, and tragedy. She notes that Mordred turns into an evil character only *after* he learns of his incestuous parentage. This change of character permits Mordred to become a focus for the fear and hate which might have been directed toward one or more of the members of the love triangle formed by Arthur, Guenevere, and Lancelot.