

Elisabeth Vavra, ed. *Der Wald im Mittelalter: Funktion – Nutzung – Deutung*. Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2008. 197pp. [Das Mittelalter. Perspektiven mediävistischer Forschung, 13.2 (2008)]

The most recent issue of *Das Mittelalter*, the journal of the Mediävistenverband (the German+Austrian+Swiss pendant to the Medieval Academy of America), is dedicated to discussing the importance of the medieval forest from the interdisciplinary perspectives of economics, law, geobotany, linguistics, literature, and art. Given the worldwide expansion of English as the dominant language for scholarly publication, the organization's intention to provide a 'safe' linguistic space for medieval scholarship written in German is certainly a welcome one. In this volume, however, some of the problematic consequences of this mildly protectionistic policy come to light.

The most obvious consequence is that German-speaking scholars in this volume drastically limit their use of English language resources. Thus, only eight out of the 72 titles in the editor's select bibliography are in English, and scholarship in English is seriously underrepresented in the individual contributions. While for some of these essays the geographic focus on a specific part of German speaking medieval Europe may warrant the absence of English language scholarship, others, for example Jens Pfeiffer's contribution on the *selva oscura* in Dante's *Divine Comedy* and the courtly novel, astonish in their almost exclusive recourse to scholarship in German. For this essay, as well as for Mireille Schnyder's piece on the forest as a place of contingency in medieval German narratives, Carolyn Merchant's *Reinventing Eden: The Fate of Nature in Western Culture* (2003), Robert Pogue Harrison's *Forests. The Shadow of Civilization* (1993), or Gillian Rudd's *Greenery: Ecocritical Readings of Late Medieval English Literature* (2007), to name but a few, would have provided helpful general inspiration as well as specific scholarly insight. To be sure, none of the scholars in the volume under review intentionally excludes scholarship in English, and each essay for itself presents a valuable contribution to scholarship on the medieval forest, but the volume as a whole comes dangerously close to creating a ghettoized scholarly space.

The short English abstracts preceding the German essays are meant to render the scholarship accessible to a global readership. However, English readers, if they were to venture boldly forth to consult any non-English scholarship, would find several of the abstracts more confusing than illuminating. While the German texts are expertly edited, some of the English abstracts did not receive the same close editorial attention and are as obscure as the medieval forests they describe, for example: "[Dante's wood] functions as a hermeneutic metaphor for the apories [sic] of reading and for the difficulties of an exegesis, which must leave its text a part of its obscurity" (p. 136). In such cases, English loses its status as 'Kultursprache' and becomes a language of global mis-communication, a fate it does not deserve.

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