

***The Legend of Guy of Warwick.* By Velma Bourgeois Richmond. (New York: Garland, 1996. P. 632, illustrated, volume 14 in the Garland Studies in Medieval Literature series, \$95, ISBN 0-8153-2085-X)**

Tim Lundgren

Volume 21, Number 2, 1999

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1087817ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1087817ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Association Canadienne d'Ethnologie et de Folklore

ISSN

1481-5974 (print)

1708-0401 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Lundgren, T. (1999). Review of [*The Legend of Guy of Warwick.* By Velma Bourgeois Richmond. (New York: Garland, 1996. P. 632, illustrated, volume 14 in the Garland Studies in Medieval Literature series, \$95, ISBN 0-8153-2085-X)]. *Ethnologies*, 21(2), 204–206. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1087817ar>

Part II, the introduction argues, provides “much needed non-Western, cross-cultural comparatives” (p. xv). The essays contributed by William Hanaway, Wilma Heston, and Ulrich Marzolph on Pakistani and Egyptian chapbooks are detailed and fascinating, but in fact no attempt is made by editor nor author to perform any cross-cultural comparison. Is the status of these Pakistani and Egyptian publications as inexpensive, popular, and academically marginalized texts sufficient cause for the inclusion of these essays in the collection? Part III strains the connection further, as attention turns to xeroxlore and holy cards. Again, each of the contributions (by Paul Smith, Michael Preston, and James Petruzzeli) is worthy in itself, but the relationship of part to whole is tenuous.

Certainly, these studies offer more than “proof” of the pervasiveness and persistence of cheap print culture, as the introduction suggests. But what *does* the juxtaposition of such diverse subjects tell us about print communication? And more significant to the present readership, what does it tell us about folklore? Can cheap print culture truly be honored and can elitist constructions of culture be dismantled *within* a pricey academic publication? What is the cultural status of our discipline’s own print culture? Although *The Other Print Tradition* manages to convey the breadth of a relatively unexplored field of study, it leaves many of these most compelling questions unanswered.

Jennifer Schacker-Mill
Indiana University
Bloomington, Indiana

The Legend of Guy of Warwick. By Velma Bourgeois Richmond. (New York: Garland, 1996. P. 632, illustrated, volume 14 in the Garland Studies in Medieval Literature series, \$95, ISBN 0-8153-2085-X).

V.B. Richmond’s *The Legend of Guy of Warwick* is a compendium of the many places where Guy of Warwick’s legends have appeared from the Middle Ages to the twentieth century, providing, in a way, a catalogue of Guy materials. Most of the book is given over to descriptions and summaries of these materials, with the chapters breaking up the summaries chronologically. This book provides a useful collection of information for anyone wishing to closely examine the appearances of this hero across a wide range of manuscripts. It

is, however, hardly the “comprehensive literary and social history” that the publisher’s blurb claims it to be.

Guy of Warwick’s legends are rooted in the Middle Ages, and the first four chapters are consequently devoted to that period. Despite over 150 pages being devoted to Guy in the Middle Ages, though, we learn rather little of the meaning or popular significance of his legends during that period, a fact deeply frustrating to a folklorist. What we do learn is that Guy’s legend is repeatedly drawn on when a model is needed for a combination of knightly and pious behavior, a point that could easily be made in considerably fewer pages than this book allocates to it. There is much to the material here that a folklorist would want to know more about. For instance, Richmond points out several times that the legends had an active oral circulation that is reflected in the written texts. In recent years considerable activity in medieval and folklore studies has focused on the interplay between orality and literacy in medieval texts, but Richmond does not take up this issue at all. An exploration of the many references to oral tradition in the Guy legends, in what contexts they occur, and whether they can tell us anything about the currency of these legends outside of the manuscripts we have left, are all questions that might have been addressed within a discussion of Guy’s appearances in various manuscripts, but are not raised here.

The bulk of this lengthy book consists of plot summaries and notations of variation from one version to another. Richmond excels more at describing the locations and contents of various Guy texts than in interpreting the significance of their presence or their structure. For instance, after noting that among the fifteenth-century Paston family documents there are references to retellings of the Guy legends, Richmond remarks, “The *Paston Letters* are a detailed and vivid social history that explains much about the legend’s appeal” (p. 108). What exactly they explain and how is left up to the reader to intuit, since Richmond immediately moves away from the context of the legends within the Paston documents and household, and into a brief observation on the appeal of a self-made hero to those seeking advancement. In fact, as the quoted passage suggests, Richmond’s impulse is to relate other literary works to the Guy legends, rather than to relate those legends to other documents. A particularly egregious example occurs when she relates Milton to the legends of Guy. John Lane, the author of an unpublished history of Guy, was an associate of Milton’s father. This stirs Richmond to observe, “Because Lane was associated with John Milton’s father, it seems likely that the boy would have heard about his retelling of Guy’s legend” (p. 213). Such indulgent

speculations do not contribute to our understanding of Guy's legends, and, unfortunately, are not rare in this book. Although her treatment of literary and social contexts improves in her coverage of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries, too often Richmond remains content with noting differences in Guy legends from one account to the next without engaging in critical analysis of the reasons for these changes.

Overall, Richmond is too often content to observe and list when what is needed is for the material to be questioned and analyzed. In her preface, Richmond tells us that this book is the product of fifteen years of research. The level of detailed familiarity with these texts, and the breadth of materials brought together here, both proclaim a lengthy and assiduous collecting process. Where this book fails to satisfy is in what it does (or more precisely, fails to do) with the materials that it collects. Too often in this volume, one is left with the impression that the author has not really digested the materials, but has presented them to us in a form that sometimes seems little more than elaborated notes.

Tim Lundgren
Ohio State University
Columbus, OH, USA

Cloth that does not die: The Meaning of Cloth in Bunu Social Life. By Elisha P. Renne. (Seattle and Washington: University of Washington Press, 1995. Pp XXI + 269, 34 illus., 9 in colour, map, tables, notes, appendix, glossary, bibliography, index, US \$40.00, ISBN: 0-295-97392-7, cloth.)

During the course of her doctoral fieldwork into marriage and divorce among the Bunu Yoruba in Nigeria (1987-1988), Elisha Renne assembled an array of details about cloth: "I realized that cloth use and references pervaded Bunu social life in ways I had hardly imagined" (p. xviii). Her return to Bunu in 1990 and 1991 allowed her to supplement her findings enough to write the ten essays, or chapters, which comprise *Cloth that does not die*.

Renne herself has signaled the significance of her work:

The diversity of West African and Nigerian textile traditions has been treated in several general surveys on cloth types and looms. While the