

Review of: "Communication, Community, Compromise, and Compassion: Fundamental Lessons from Late Medieval German Literature. Heinrich Kaufringer's Messages for Today"

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Albrecht Classen, "Communication, Community, Compromise, and Compassion: Fundamental Lessons from Late Medieval German Literature. Heinrich Kaufringer's Messages for Today." *Qeios* 21.05.2024.

In this article, you propose a list of seven key concepts beginning with the consonant "c" (communication, community, compromise, commitment, collaboration, compassion, courage) through which one can explore medieval literature more deeply and "extract from it timeless messages of great relevance for us today." As an exemplary group of texts for accomplishing this, you choose verse narratives written by the late medieval German poet Heinrich Kaufringer, citing some of his "powerful insights into fundamental conflicts" that have caused people suffering, and suggest methods to cope with them.

More specifically, you maintain that good literature, as a fundamental expression of culture, bears relevance to our lives no matter from which historical period a specific literary work comes. To demonstrate this, you introduce a "pragmatic model for analysis" of literary texts and then apply it to Kaufringer's verse narratives. You assert that literature is a bearer of "universal meanings," of which there are few of great importance: e.g., "love, God, death, meaning of life, identity, hatred and aggression, hope, happiness, and purpose." Although the cultural-historical contexts of these meanings change, the central issues tend to remain the same, across time and across cultures. This is a very good point, and extremely valuable in supporting the importance and relevance of the Humanities.

Now, ready to develop the model, you list the seven "c's," and claim that in their absence conflicts erupt. Each of these general concepts is linked to the others. In order to evaluate one's personal situation in light of all these concepts, you suggest that it must be done within a social or an academic evaluation, and the academic Humanities are "specifically charged with carrying out these investigations pertaining to human life through a wide scope of lenses or approaches." You recommend *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and *The Plowman from Bohemia* as two late Medieval German works that continue to appeal to the modern reader in this way. This is excellent.

Now turning to Kaufringer, you discuss the narratives "The Merchants in Disagreement," "The Search for the Happily

Married Couple,” “The Mayor and the Prince,” and several other *mæren*, which are tremendously entertaining and which serve as excellent illustrations of how the many “c-words” of your model operate in early modern literature. In the concluding section of your essay, you make a very important point that Kaufringer balances out the negative consequences of the church’s deadly sins with virtues, and that the virtuous behaviors are often characterized by the “c-words” of your model. Your point that marriage works only when both partners can communicate well with each other is, of course, most important, and the elements of that good communication you correctly identify as “solid collaboration, a firm degree of compassion and commitment, and all of that carried by courage and care.”

The final point you raise is perhaps the most significant: “when we accept works like the *mæren* by Heinrich Kaufringer as meaningful study material for the present generation of students because they allow the critical exploration of human happiness, then the issue of meaningfulness and importance is completely obvious.”

Your essay is beautifully written, and your points are very well supported by the examples you have chosen. The only criticisms I can make regarding your essay have to do with a few syntactic issues, verb tenses and conjugations, and the like. I think a good proofreading would completely solve that problem. The basic idea, that medieval/Early Modern literature is relevant and justifies the importance of the Humanities, is sound and irrefutable. Thank you for this opportunity to review a most interesting and compelling academic paper that offers justification for the Humanities and hope for the future of academics.

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