

Sághy, Marianne. Barraud, Clement William, S.J. *Saint Elizabeth of Hungary. Historical Drama in Five Acts (1892)*. Rockville, MD.: Wildside Press, 2010. Pp. 196. AHEA: E-journal of the American Hungarian Educators Association, Volume 5 (2012): <http://ahea.net/e-journal/volume-5-2012>

---

Barraud, Clement William, S.J. *Saint Elizabeth of Hungary. Historical Drama in Five Acts (1892)*. Rockville, MD.: Wildside Press, 2010. Pp. 196.

Marianne Sághy, Department of Medieval Studies, Central European University, Budapest

Wildside Press's recent reprint of two historical dramas by Clement William Barraud, S.J. (1843-?) on Saint Thomas of Canterbury and Saint Elizabeth of Hungary makes one wonder why people today would read old school dramas. Are they interested in medieval retro? Gothic revival? Catholic kitsch? If so, they should read Barraud. The play about Saint Elizabeth is worth reading, perhaps also worth performing, and it certainly raises a number of intriguing questions. Regrettably, this publication missed the opportunity to address, in a foreword or an epilogue, relevant questions about Jesuit school drama and Victorian representations of Europe's most influential, most popular, and most touching woman saint. There seems to be a recent upsurge of interest in St Margaret and/or in nineteenth-century British historical melodrama as shown by this reprint as well as by another reprint of the same text by the British Library Historical Print Editions (2011), but with a lack of any scholarly apparatus to these editions we are still in sore need of at least an overview of existing scholarship.

Jesuit drama reaches almost as deep as the origins of the Society of Jesus itself. Inspired by Charles de Montalembert's wildly successful *Vie de Sainte Élisabeth de Hongrie* (1836), a keystone of nineteenth-century Catholic renewal, Father Barraud wrote his play for "a school in the colonies." This tells all about the tenor and purpose of the work. Composed in the Jesuit tradition, the play was supposed to raise "heroic courage" and "rare charity" in the young. Saint Elizabeth is of interest, however, not only as an historical play, but as a period piece and one of the last representatives of Jesuit school drama. How did a Jesuit approach the Middle Ages? How does Saint Elizabeth look in a Victorian garb?

Set in Eisenach and in Thuringia, the play covers a time span of eighteen years, from 1226 to 1248, picking episodes both from Elizabeth's life and from her post mortem miracles. It raises the compelling question whether Elizabeth faced more tragedy in her life or after her death. The play starts in the terrible year of 1226: dreadful floods, famine and bubonic plague decimate the population of Thuringia. Elizabeth feeds the needy and nurses the sick, provoking the disapproval of Schubert, the Landgrave's treasurer and the disgust of the power greedy Heinrich and Conrad, the Landgrave's brothers. Heinrich schemes with the aptly-named arch-villain, Falstein to get rid of Louis, Landgrave of Thuringia, by means by sending him off to the Crusades. Stirring Louis and his knights to fulfill their vow and free the Holy Land is equivalent of a death sentence and Heinrich's seizure of power. Louis dons the cross; Elizabeth is bereaved, foreboding the death of her beloved husband. Heinrich pretends to prepare for the holy war, but stays home. News reaches Thuringia that Louis was felled by pestilence in Italy. While Elizabeth is mourning her husband, the evil Falstein (on Heinrich's orders) drives Elizabeth out of Warburg Castle. Falstein wants to keep Ysentrude, Elizabeth's lady-in-waiting from accompanying her since he wants to marry her. Ysentrude refuses him. In the streets of Eisenach, burghers are surprised to see Elizabeth with her three children going from door to door, knocking in vain, for all refuse to give her shelter. The Bishop of Bamberg provides the family with shelter and Ysentrude stops Elizabeth's son, Hermann from revenging her mother. At Louis' funeral in Bamberg Cathedral, his knights seek to avenge the ungodly traitor Heinrich. Monks are busy composing accounts on "Holy Louis" and "Judas," his brother. To save face, Heinrich breaks off his friendship with Falstein, who is sentenced to death, but is saved by Elizabeth who sends him to the Holy Land. Elizabeth enters the cloister, making her sacred vows in a long white robe, surrounded by choirs of angels.

Fifteen years later, the knights are on a visit in Saint Elizabeth's Church in Marburg. Lady Elizabeth is assimilated with the Virgin Mary in their mind. Elizabeth's glove has become a precious relic, saving knights from death in the fight. At the same hour, a demented Heinrich, accused of young Hermann's death, breaths his last. A wandering religious votary comes from the Holy Land to the tomb of Saint Elizabeth to seek pardon. The palmer is no other than Falstein. He confesses to all his war on the innocent widow and falls to his knees at Elizabeth's tomb to atone for his sins, until Elizabeth appears in glory and forgives him.

As convoluted as all this plot may sound, *St. Elizabeth of Hungary* is not a bad plot or a bad read. Flying against the grain of legends, Barraud wrote a good school play, or pseudo-historical melodrama, somewhere between tragedy, comedy of morals and a miracle play (on which see Deon Fischer. *Roman Catholic Saints and Early Victorian Literature: Conservatism, Liberalism, and the Emergence of Secular Culture*. Surrey: Ashgate. 2012). Villain, betrayed traitor, pilgrim and pardoned sinner, Falstein is the real protagonist of the play, while Elizabeth merely remains a hook on which to hang religious and moral truths. It is, however, quite remarkable that the author could free her from the all-invading images of her legend: no miracle of the rose, no Christ in the nuptial bed, no self-mortification are present here. Elizabeth, the widow takes on the image of the Holy Virgin, and her husband, Louis looks much like the betrayed Christ. *Saint Elizabeth* is all about crusade, power, court intrigue, poor relief, and miraculous forgiveness. Christians, first and foremost Louis, Elizabeth's husband, are willing to sacrifice their lives to free "the Land on which God once trod" from the hands of Muslim infidels. Remarkably, however, good and evil are not confronted in the play as a holy war fought somewhere in a distance, but as taking place in the very heart of Christianity: good Christians are betrayed and maltreated by bad Christians.

The play raises a number of historical questions. To what extent does Barraud's representation comply with what we know of the period and of Elizabeth's life? Why were these episodes selected or invented rather than others from Elizabeth's legend? Presumably a school or scout performance of the play would have allowed teachers to address these questions and to teach the history of Hungary, Germany, and Europe and for students to discuss: how Elizabeth's mother, Gertrudis was murdered by Ban Bánk back in Hungary and how this event became a keystone of Hungarian national consciousness? How did Elizabeth fend off her politically-motivated uncle and organize the burial of her late husband? What was the amount of Elizabeth's dowry and for what purpose did she reclaim her inheritance? Was she forced to take vows? Was she a Franciscan tertiary or not? What do we know of her Marburg hospital? How did Elizabeth influence the princesses from Prague to Portugal to live an ascetic life of self-negation and renunciation?

Commonplaces and accepted truths could also be reinterpreted as a revisionist take on King Andrew II, Elizabeth's father is also on the order of the day in Hungarian historiography. For example, Andrew, the only crusader king of Hungary, brought about a remarkable alliance of European rulers from Catalunya to Bulgaria to free the Holy Land, alloying high Byzantine and French chivalric culture in a brilliant court in Esztergom and Székesfehérvár. When Elizabeth invited troubadours and Minnesangers to her court, she stepped into her father's footsteps. Several other issues would be worth pursuing through a discussion of this play, such as the question of love and dynastic marriage, religious forms in the thirteenth century, the appearance of the mendicant Franciscans and their impact in royal courts, etc. all problems which offer food for thought and have been recently discussed by various scholars. See, for example, Lori J. Pieper's 2002 *St. Elizabeth and the Franciscan Tradition* (Fordham UP Dissertation), several publications by Gábor Klaniczay, such as his *Holy Rulers and Blessed Princesses: Dynastic Cults in Medieval Central Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000) and his "Proving Sanctity in the Canonization Process: St. Elizabeth and St. Margaret of Hungary" (Collection de l'École française de Rome 340 [2004]: 117-148), and Kenneth Baxter Wolf, ed. and trans. *The Life and Afterlife of St. Elizabeth of Hungary: Testimony from Her Canonization Hearings* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2011). St. Margaret has also become a significant figure in explaining the place of women writers and patrons in medieval culture (on which see Alexandra Barrett, "the Virgin and the Visionary in the Revelations of St. Elizabeth" (*Mystic Quarterly*: 17.3 (199): 125-136), "Continental Women Mystics and English Readers," Ed. Carolyn Dinshaw & David Wallace. *Women's Writing in the Middle Ages* [Harlow: Longman. 1992).

Saint Elizabeth is intriguing a whole range of scholars, not just medievalists. She was, for example, also a huge inspiration for Victorian artists; therefore a survey of nineteenth-century visual, narrative and dramatic representations would be a rewarding scholarly project. Barraud's play gives a good opportunity to discuss Elizabeth's impact on the arts. The paintings of Edmund Blair Leighton and Philip Hermogenes Calderon, dating from the same decade as Barraud's play, could be well compared along with the fashion of the Middle Ages and the medieval revival in the Victorian aristocracy. (See, in this context, the controversy around Calderon's painting in Philip McEvansoneya. "A Libely in Paint: Religious and Artistic

Sághy, Marianne. Barraud, Clement William, S.J. *Saint Elizabeth of Hungary. Historical Drama in Five Acts (1892)*. Rockville, MD.: Wildside Press, 2010. Pp. 196. AHEA: E-journal of the American Hungarian Educators Association, Volume 5 (2012): <http://ahea.net/e-journal/volume-5-2012>

---

Controversy Around Ph. H. Calderon's 'The Renunciation of St. Elizabeth of Hungary.' *Journal of Victorian Culture* 1.2 (1996): 254-279).

Anachronistic and dated, Barraud's *Saint Elizabeth* is nevertheless an uplifting and thought-provoking piece that can be read with curiosity and profit. I hope that concerns voiced in this review will make publishers and readers seek to devise new projects and new comments on religious drama, historical perception, and Victorian art alike. It would be useful to produce a new edition of the play taking into account new scholarship to see a Victorian *Saint Elizabeth* in a new light.