Gestik in Jelineks Theater sehr präzise und erklärt, wie Jelinek die Verfremdung und Unterbrechung als narrative Strategie benutzt, um das "Erhabene und Vulgäre" (224) durch Überlappungen von Tragödie und Komödie einander gegenüberzustellen und so den schockierenden Effekt hervorzubringen, den Jelineks Texte bei ihren Leser*innen und bei ihrem Publikum erzeugt. Dieses Buch ist für Theaterwissenschaftler*innen, Literaturwissenschaftler*innen und Studierende sehr zu empfehlen.

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Martyn Rady, *The Middle Kingdoms: A New History of Central Europe*. New York: Basic Books, 2023. 617 pp.

Judging by the book's length and title, readers of Martyn Rady's *Middle Kingdoms* might expect a new synthetic history of Central Europe along the lines of Pieter Judson's influential 2016 publication, *The Habsburg Empire*, which was also subtitled *A New History*. What *The Middle Kingdoms* offers instead is a descriptive narrative of Central European history in thirty-four chapters running chronologically from the Roman era to the present day, or "from Plato to NATO," as we used to joke in my alma mater when teaching History 100 to the freshers.

The sense that this work was intended more as a popular history and an entertaining read than as a sustained intellectual inquiry is underlined by the relatively sparse bibliography of just twelve pages in length (totaling only a few books per chapter) and the organization of references as endnotes. And while the "Further Reading" section does cite various hard-hitting names in the field (including Judson), these are often not cited directly in the notes and at times do not appear to have been consulted for this work at all. Indeed, Rady's work does not enter into sustained scholarly conversation with the dynamic scholarship on Central European history and thus it is not clear what specifically is "new" about this historical overview, aside from its recent publication.

Read as a popular history, *The Middle Kingdoms* is interesting and at times insightful and humorous. Yet the work lacks any overarching argument or coherent point, nor does it engage seriously or critically with its central object of interest, namely Central Europe. In the introduction, for instance, Rady merely

states (debatably) that Central Europe begins at the Rhine and has no clear eastern limit (2). The chapters skip from topic to topic and era to era, honing in on places as disparate as Frisia and Crimea and covering everything and anything from military to social to cultural history, though with a clear (and rather traditionalist) preference for political, legal, and constitutional developments. The work thus offers a patchwork overview of a vast region across an even vaster timeframe and often reads like little more than a historical travel guide, as in the following bizarre statement: "Sadly, for most British travellers, Frisia remains a nameless 'flyover country'" (123).

If there is a coherent scholarly takeaway to be gleaned from this descriptive narrative, then perhaps it is that Central European history has always, since recorded history began, been a place of manifest entanglement, where "boundaries were fluid, rulership was contested, and what constituted a people was still uncertain" (48)—though I believe it is a mistake to place this statement in the past tense. This finding, while hardly groundbreaking, helps refute the tendentious nativist claims to national homogeneity in the present day, which, as Rady rightly points out, only emerged in modernity and were only realized, at least in part, through mass violence in the mid-twentieth century (though Rady sometimes also contradicts himself in this respect, for example speaking anachronistically and irritatingly of "the Czech nation" in the Late Middle Ages, 101). Coming from the field of Jewish history, I find it particularly refreshing to see Jews in early modern Central Europe portrayed not as the region's sole and eternal strangers, but alongside Armenians, Gypsies (a term Rady uses deliberately in place of the overly generalized and thus often misleading or anachronistic term *Roma*), and even Scots as itinerant out-groups performing particular social or economic functions (262).

Complementing this focus on diversity and fluidity, Rady emphasizes that Central Europe has also always been a contested region, expending many pages on invasions by Mongols, Tatars, Huns, Turks, Swedes, Corsicans, and notably Russians—Rady completed this work not long after Russia launched its latest war of aggression against Ukraine, which serves as something of a vanishing point to the entire narrative. Indeed, Rady points out that Russia has a history as long as that of Germany or Austria of throwing its weight around and trying to dominate the region, with the crucial difference that Germany and Austria stopped doing so after 1945, at first by coercion and later by choice.

The inclusion of Germany in this Central European history is interesting in itself, for as Rady points out, much of the field has in recent decades focused

on "East-Central Europe," meaning east of Germany, but no one ever seems to talk about "West-Central Europe." Germany's inclusion moreover highlights the unclear position of Austria in the region, "flitting uncertainly between the two" (5), i.e., between east and west (in my estimation, the recent tendency to include Austria in "Western Europe" is historically, culturally, and politically bunk). Yet at times Rady's focus on Germany feels disproportionate and is presumably designed to foreshadow and hence "explain," at least implicitly, the later chapters on the Nazi regime and its genocidal war, though with consequently debatable teleological implications.

Continuing in this vein, Rady's emphasis on Germany's Herero genocide in Namibia—a horrific but far from unique event in the history of European imperialism—coupled with his remark that "European colonialism and German overseas ambitions pushed race to the forefront as a marker of biological difference" (408) comes to seem an instance of the usual British projection of colonial guilt onto Germany. In the wake of the Black Lives Matter movement, one gets the impression that the British media dedicates far more coverage to Germany's colonial past than Britain's own. Taking British Darwinism, transatlantic slave trading, and the settler colonialism, apartheid, and genocide perpetrated across North America, South Africa, and Australasia into account, Rady's insinuation, though never explicitly articulated, that Germans invented or pioneered colonial racism and genocide is plainly misleading. Alongside Rady's surprising because also self-contradictory suggestion in the conclusion that Central Europe merely copied "Western European civilization" at every stage of its history (510), the book appears to betray a problematic if unconscious cultural bias grounded in a sense of "Western" superiority over the rest of Europe that unfortunately remains quite common in British society—as the public discourse surrounding Brexit amply demonstrates.

These criticisms aside, the book is cogently written and includes many interesting tidbits, albeit often of an anecdotal nature, for example the humorous fact that Karl Theodor, Prince-Elector of the Palatinate, holds the record for the greatest number of bizarre Enlightenment-era decrees, having issued 120,000 in total, including a law on "the five acceptable ways to measure the length of a fish" (302). Other, more sobering facts, for example that an estimated two million Poles, Lithuanians, and Russians were captured and sold into slavery by Crimean Muslims between 1500 and 1700 (218), could have been grounds for insightful if provocative discussions (in this case concerning postcolonial orthodoxies surrounding the global legacy of

slavery—the word itself is derived from the word *Slav*), yet Rady does not rise to such challenges.

The lack of a clear overarching argument—including the pessimistic ending in light of Russia's ongoing wars of aggression—means that readers are left to draw their own conclusions on what any of this history means or teaches us. Yet history enthusiasts looking for light and entertaining reading (albeit often focusing on dark subject matter) will not be disappointed, and even specialists may find themselves receiving an introduction to historical events and contexts that are genuinely new to them, though the sparsity of sources cited hardly offers opportunities for deeper exploration.

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Márta Csire, Ernő Deák, Károly Kókai, and Andrea Seidler, *Region der Vielfalt: Wechselbeziehungen im burgenländisch-westungarischen Raum in Geschichte und Gegenwart*. Vienna: Praesens, 2023. 358 pp.

The hundredth anniversary of Burgenland joining the Republic of Austria in 1921 caused a flurry of publications, exhibitions, and events on this topic before and after 2021. This book, *Region der Vielfalt: Wechselbeziehungen im burgenländisch-westungarischen Raum in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, likewise provides a look back at a century of Burgenland history, setting itself apart from other publications with its focus on the Burgenland Hungarian minority and its history and culture. Burgenland is a diverse borderland between Austria and Hungary and used to be thought of as German-speaking Western Hungary, which is why it was given to Austria as a result of the Treaty of Trianon. The state has a significant Croat minority, Roma and Sinti, and before the Holocaust it had the largest rural Jewish-Austrian population. Today, there are more than six thousand Hungarians living in Burgenland, out of a total population of a little over 300,000 people, so roughly 2 percent of the population, "zum Teil noch die Nachfahren der einstigen Grenzwächter, Flüchtlinge, die im Zuge des ungarischen Aufstandes von 1956 ins Burgenland kamen, Migrantinnen und Migranten, die sich nach der Grenzöffnung von 1989 und vermehrt nach dem Beitritt in die Europäische Union für die Übersiedlung in dieses Bundesland entschieden" (9). The Hungarian popu-