

Federico Schneider. *Pastoral Drama and Healing in Early Modern Italy*.

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Scholars devoting their careers to exploring early modern pastorals written for the stage do not need to be convinced that “the long held prejudice that Renaissance pastoral drama was nothing but a shallow form of *divertissement* has been conquered definitely,” as Federico Schneider asserts at the very beginning of his monograph (1). Yet the book’s very existence proves that not all biases have been swept away, and that much more work needs to be devoted to this genre.

Schneider examines two examples from the Italian canon, Torquato Tasso’s *Aminta* (written 1573, performed 1574, printed 1580/81) and Battista Guarini’s *Il pastor fido* (written 1580–84, printed 1590, performed 1593), paying special attention to the genre’s “proclaimed medical healing agenda” and its ties to its “highly artful process of poetic imitation or *mimesis*” (6). What is also novel, and

decidedly successful, is the structure of this study: Schneider examines Guarini's numerous theoretical pronouncements on the pastoral, reads *Il pastor fido* through them, and finally brings his conclusions to bear on Tasso's *Aminta*, reversing their chronology and the traditional manner in which these two texts have been traditionally studied. In this manner Schneider is able to come to interesting and convincing conclusions as to the role of pastoral drama in Italy and further afield in the early modern period.

Thus in chapter 1 he explores Guarini's treatises placing them side-by-side with contemporary interpretations of Aristotle's theory of genres and the emphasis on the *utile* of tragedy. In chapter 2 he introduces a pedagogical and a poetical aspect, the first as means of the healing therapy that constitutes the goal of the pastoral, the second as necessary antecedent of anybody writing in verse in the Renaissance and as model for both *fabula* and *elucutio*. Here we face another canonical figure, Petrarch and his *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*. In chapter 3 Schneider turns to *Aminta*, highlighting structural differences in the tragic-comic elements developed in Tasso's play in juxtaposition to *Il pastor fido*. I was especially impressed by the author's ability to show continuities and variations between Petrarch, Tasso, and Guarini on the verbal, stylistic, and metaphorical levels. Furthermore, he provides much needed insight on the different directions in which the two sixteenth-century writers stretched the Petrarchan linguistic exemplar. Finally, in chapter 4 Schneider contextualizes the different manners in which *Aminta* and *Il pastor fido* bring about their audience's catharsis by underscoring their respective cultural atmosphere, especially the Catholic church after the Council of Trent. In his very strong Epilogue, the author brings to bear Jacques Derrida's well-known essay "Plato's Pharmacy" on his argument, showing the convergence of neo-Aristotelian and Platonic elements in the pastoral and arguing for the necessity to continue to reevaluate a genre that in "its prime . . . has become an alternative form of moral philosophy which conveys a renewed faith in the synergy of scientific, literary, and philosophical discourses taking place throughout the sixteenth century" (208–09) and that will have a large impact throughout Western Europe in the seventeenth.

In a work of this scope and caliber it is disappointing to encounter erratic uses of the relative pronouns *that* and *which*, inconsistent punctuation, clauses without a main verb, several passive verb forms, and typos of foreign words and phrases: such as *tanatos* instead of *thanatos* (99, 102, 151, 201), *aphoria* instead of *aporia* (38n63), *double entente* instead of *double entendre* (90, 152) or *coup de scène* instead of the Italian *colpo di scena* or the French *coup de théâtre* (42, 51, 100). This reader wishes that a more rigorous copyeditor had vetted this book.

Despite these (admittedly minor) details, Schneider demonstrates his in-depth knowledge of primary and secondary texts pertaining to pastoral drama and lyrical poetry within and outside Italy in early modernity. His novel and original approach demands continued attention to a genre that has been understudied — the many texts that Lisa Sampson has discovered or rediscovered in her *Staging the Pastoral in Early Modern Italy: The Making of a New Genre* (London: MHRS and Maney, 2006) attest to this — and to a period that is only slowly coming out from under the

negative bias to which Positivist and Idealist critics both subjected it. *Pastoral Drama and Healing* is an excellent step in this direction.

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