

Sharon Rose Yang. *Goddesses, Mages, and Wise Women: The Female Pastoral Guide in Sixteenth and Seventeenth-Century English Drama*.

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This intriguing study reflects ongoing scholarly interest in the pastoral mode as a vehicle for social commentary during the Renaissance. Sharon Yang's analysis of a character type she calls the female pastoral guide contributes to the developing critical discussion of women as practitioners of pastoral, either as writers or as characters. The author has chosen drama as the primary area in which to explore the development of the pastoral guide, citing the genre's accessibility to varied audiences. For Yang, the guide is a version of the "eternal woman" of Bakhtinian carnival, temporarily inverting a cultural hierarchy privileging masculinity as the primary locus of power, virtue, and learning. Yang's study focuses less, however, on the pastoral genre itself than on a feminine archetype she derives from a wide-ranging review of ancient Near Eastern Great Goddess figures, late Greek romances, medieval Mariology, and early modern European discourse on witches. After providing an overview of the historical development of the archetype through the Continental pastoral romances of Boccaccio, Sannazaro, and Montemayor, she offers a comparative analysis of several examples of the female pastoral guide in English drama ranging from the closet drama of aristocratic coterie (such as Wroth's *Love's Victory*) to plays produced for a popular audience (including Fletcher's *Faithful Shepherdess*). She also discusses three of Shakespeare's plays (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *As You Like It*, and *All's Well That Ends Well*) for their employment of the guide type. Yang separates the guide into three main categories: the goddess-queen, the white witch, and the female scholar, all of which may overlap. The study concludes with a speculative account of the decline of the pastoral heroine toward the end of the seventeenth century, her disappearance linked to pastoral's falling out of fashion as a discourse of popular art. In sum, Yang locates the female pastoral guide in English Renaissance drama as a liberating figure that appropriates and subverts forms of male authority, including the intellectual and the spiritual, under Puttenham's "vaile" of pastoral triviality.

The book's tight focus on drama is simultaneously effective and limiting. It leads Yang to overstate somewhat the originality of the guide figure, ignoring the predominance of the pastoral romance heroine in multiple Renaissance genres including prose narrative and epic poetry. The author correctly identifies the cult of Elizabeth I as an important source of goddess tropes in Lyly's *Endymion*, but slights, for example, the overwhelming pastoral influence of Spenser's *Faerie Queene* on Fletcher's play. While her reminders of the Continental influence of pastoral romance on English examples are useful, the relevance of Great Goddess archetypes seems stretched. While applying Bakhtin's concept of carnival to pastoral drama, she also is compelled to note that her heroines frequently uphold qualities of temperance and restraint that reaffirm Renaissance societal norms of feminine conduct rather than challenge them. Renaissance English pastoral mostly reflects

Neoplatonic idealism rather than the fleshly preoccupations of carnival, a paradox not fully acknowledged nor explored here. Arguing that the female pastoral guide addressed a collective cultural “psychic wound” (222), Yang assumes a somewhat reified and totalized Renaissance worldview that recent scholarship has called into question. The book’s emphasis on the archetypal comes at the expense of historical context; for example, the differences between Elizabethan and Caroline uses of pastoral are considerable. It must also be noted that the edition displays several proofreading errors and formatting inconsistencies in the bibliographical apparatus.

Yang’s study is most effective in its attentive close readings of individual plays. Her discussion on the parallels between Paracelsan medical theory and the actions of Shakespeare’s heroines as wise women is especially illuminating. This book suggests fresh approaches to important critical questions: is pastoral inherently a conservative or a revolutionary mode? Why did pastoral become associated with the feminine in English Renaissance literature? How have the values of pastoral transmogrified and endured in various versions? Yang’s study of the female pastoral guide provides some stimulating if provisional answers.

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