

ter 2 “gathers for the first time the scattered and heterogeneous evidence of Middle English riddles . . . and sorts it in relation to classical and Christian, Anglo-Saxon legacies of riddling” (28). Chapter 3 focuses on language in the banquet of Conscience scene in *Piers*, revealing “the theological and anti-institutional potential of play” in this drama of academic confrontation (28). Chapter 4 explores enigma as it was studied in medieval schools, while chapter 5 confronts the most enigmatic scene in *Piers*, the tearing of the pardon in B. Chapter 6 brings in Julian of Norwich, studying her important “parable of the Lord and the servant” (29). The final chapter “braids together the concepts of play, persuasion, and participation through the convention of riddles as an ending move” (29), comparing the elusive ending of *Piers Plowman* to that of other texts, such as Dante’s *Commedia* and the *Romance of the Rose*.

The book’s index is a well-engineered tool with detailed listings for such helpful headings as “*Piers Plowman*, characters and personifications,” “knowledge,” “participation,” “riddles and riddling,” “reading,” and many others. A fifty-page bibliography will be of great use, and the wise placement of 120 pages of notes at the back of the book allows for undistracted reading, highlighting the caring voice of a gifted teacher working in a natural, pastoral mode, at once profoundly genuine and generous.

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Renaissance Texts, Medieval Subjectivities: Rethinking Petrarchan Desire from Wyatt to Shakespeare. Danila Sokolov.

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As early as the 1970s, the medievalist A. C. Spearing was challenging his graduate students to recognize the way that artificially constructed period boundaries could obstruct more than elucidate our understanding of modernity’s emergence. His published work in the field helped inaugurate a conversation that has borne rich fruit ever since. It is good to find Danila Sokolov taking up the legacy in his *Renaissance Texts, Medieval Subjectivities*, illustrating the brand of insightful readings that the approach continues to open. At the same time, the book suffers from a tendency to overstate both the prominence of selected concepts and tropes available in our premodern poets, and the enduring divide between medieval and early modern in current critical discourse. As a result the project’s stronger localized theses collectively lose nuance, tempering the larger argument’s persuasiveness.

This becomes evident early on, as the notion of “meed” from an isolated passage in *Piers Plowman* comes to inform Wyatt’s lyrics and Spenser’s *Amoretti*. A provocative claim, but one asking for a more thorough discussion of a line of transmission: Skelton’s even more pressing and temporally proximate notion of “bowge,” for instance,

surely comes into play. In a similar vein, Sokolov identifies a distinctive brand of “Chaucerian melancholy” in the poet’s *Book of the Duchess* that he traces through Surrey’s and Sidney’s benchmark sonnets. Quite apart from its undue privileging of this particular text from the medieval canon, the argument does not sufficiently confront the tremendous complexity that troubles period diagnoses of melancholy, rendering his application overdetermined. His assertion that if we “open *Astrophil and Stella* to a dialogue with earlier texts, the role that the Chaucerian poetics of melancholy plays in its discursive configuration becomes more pronounced” may be uncontroversial, but it does not sufficiently justify his conclusion that such a poetics “thus reaffirms the relevance of the medieval imagination to the project of early modern English Petrarchism” (133).

The book’s strongest chapter provides a wonderfully thoughtful reassessment of Mary Stuart’s so-called Casket Sonnets and their unexpected relationship to James I’s dream vision *The Kingis Quair*. Despite their troubled providence, questionable authenticity, and heavily mediated publication, the sonnets afford Sokolov opportunity for a fresh reading that reaches backward effectively to offset the medieval predecessor and ahead to engage such other instances of “royal poetry” as Elizabeth’s. The following unit’s turn from political courts to courts of law in “Petrarchan Afterlives of Erotic Legality” sustains this momentum to link John Lydgate’s work with Samuel Daniel’s and Michael Drayton’s reimagining of love’s “jurisdiction.” Even if we (again) find the jury hung on such ideas as “desire to posit love as a legal matter, despite Drayton’s fascination with contemporary practices of criminal law, is in its essence a medieval phenomenon, if a markedly belated one in Elizabethan England” (209), his position sends us back to these familiar poems with new eyes.

The final chapter, unfortunately, anchors the study unreliably in its treatment of “Medieval Pathologies of Affect” in Shakespeare’s *Sonnets*. While it makes a plausible case that the “begging” posture in Hoccleve’s appeals for courtly patronage prefigures the speaker’s stance in the young man poems, Sokolov’s preoccupation with the psychological and literary manifestation of an “aesthetics of disgust” in the dark lady sequence misfires: the disgruntled lover’s misogynistic denigration of the woman’s appearance and character as diseased constitutes only one corner of his diverse, multivalent moods, a point obscured in the critic’s totalizing rhetoric. Compounding the argument’s dubiety, his attempt to deploy Henryson’s *Testament of Cresseid* as a means of gaining greater purchase on the sonneteer’s disposition fails to address the largely antithetical moral designs informing the earlier poet’s work, compromising efforts to bridge these radically disparate performances.

Sokolov’s endeavor, despite such flaws, marks a strong first book by a promising scholar. Among its last releases, Duquesne has given his work a deservedly fine setting in this typically beautiful production. We may find in its quality one more reason to lament the passing of yet another important outlet for our next generation’s vital research.

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