

Gary A. Schmidt. *Renaissance Hybrids: Culture and Genre in Early Modern England*.

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Although early modern English writers frequently condemned generic mixing, its literary possibilities exerted undeniable attractions. Colorful terms including *gaullimaufrey*, *hodge-podge*, *mingle-mangle*, and *mongrel* reflect the bemused fascination that greeted new, boundary-crossing forms. In *Renaissance Hybrids*, Gary A. Schmidt explores generic hybridity in the context of English ambivalence toward the meeting and mingling of national cultures. This lively and persuasive book argues that English writers found in generic hybrids an apt vehicle for exploring divided feelings about the period's pervasive cultural mixing.

Schmidt approaches the "fertile intersections between literary genre and cultural history" (1) by exploring early modern English attitudes toward an increasingly heterogeneous society, alongside the possibilities offered by mixed genres, such as satire and tragicomedy, for challenging social structures. After an introduction on early modern anxieties about cultural and generic mixing, the first chapter surveys theoretical approaches to boundaries and their transgression, moving from anthropologists including Levi-Strauss, Douglas, and Turner to more recent postcolonial theorists. Schmidt draws on these models in reading reflections on Englishness by Roger Ascham, whose wariness toward the contaminating foreign

realm of Continental Europe, especially Italy, contrasts ironically with his enthusiasm for absorbing and imitating classical Roman literary models, as well as for Roman absorption and imitation of previous Greek literary models.

After establishing theoretical and historical foundations for his argument, Schmidt turns to more explicitly literary reflections on cultural purity, beginning with Spenser's responses to emerging mythologies of English national identity. Chapter 2, "Giant Aspirations: Cultural Archaeology in Spenser's 1590 *Faerie Queene*," examines both monsters and heroes as embodying fantasies of English national unity. If monsters represent hybrid amalgamations of incongruous worlds, so too do Prince Arthur, Merlin, and Britomart, each of whom yokes together Briton and Saxon pasts in order to represent an imaginatively unified England. Here and in chapter 3, "The View from Ireland: Spenser in 1596," Schmidt emphasizes "Spenser's own conflicting identities — as an Irish settler of English descent" (93), and argues that there is "much to be gained by reading both *FQ* and the *Vewe* as Spenser's attempt to work through this 'hybridity'" (92).

Chapters 4 and 5 turn from hybrid creatures and nations to hybrid literary kinds, exploring "how specific genres and discursive forms come to be . . . vehicles for debating and theorizing questions of heterogeneity" (119). Chapter 4, "Satire and Politics in the English Renaissance," explores the pervasive Elizabethan identification of satire with satyrs in order to trace Renaissance associations of the form with hybrid monstrosities, before discussing the Marprelate tracts, the Bishop's Ban, and Shakespeare's use of satirical forms in *1 and 2 Henry IV*, *Henry V*, and *Troilus and Cressida*. Chapter 5, "Jacobean Absolutism and the Rise of Tragicomedy," continues the previous chapter's focus on the political implications of generic mixing; Schmidt explores Renaissance debates about tragicomedy in order to argue that its rise in the early Stuart period responds to tensions between James I's absolutist philosophy and competing demands from subjects, which he traces through readings of Marston's *The Malcontent*, Beaumont and Fletcher's *A King and No King*, and Shakespeare and Fletcher's *Two Noble Kinsmen*. The book ends with a brief afterword, "Hybrids Past and Present: the Final Boundary," that reflects on modern debates about hybrid identity, concluding that "the purist dream of undiluted identity is perhaps the real chimera" (228).

This is an engaging book, nicely yoking together formal attention to genre with an anthropological approach to English writers' negotiations with the country's own inescapably mixed character. Schmidt's arguments are lively, original, and firmly rooted in textual evidence; they will be of interest to a wide range of scholars, including those interested in emerging nationalisms, genre theory, Spenser, satire, and tragicomedy. The book's extensive quotations, from both early modern writers and contemporary critics, aptly embody the cultural exchange it describes. At times lengthy passages from critics could be fruitfully condensed, and critical perspectives could be updated with attention to more recent voices, but the book's contributions to conversations about genre and culture are valuable, and well worth exploring.

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