

*The Virtue of Sympathy: Magic, Philosophy, and Literature in Seventeenth-Century England.* Seth Lobis.

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*Sympathy* is a familiar term in our modern vocabulary of emotion, where it is especially associated with basic humanity. The relatively mild modern notion of sympathy as fellow feeling can be traced back to the stronger moral, psychological, and social conceptions of sympathy, which formed a key element of eighteenth-century moral sentimentalism, notably in the philosophy of David Hume and Adam Smith. Post-Enlightenment understanding of sympathy belies the fact that it is one of a cluster of terms that originate in the conceptual vocabulary of natural magic and other defunct systems of thought — terms like *charm*, *enchant*, *fascinate*, and *magic* itself — that have lost the force they had for Shakespeare's Prospero. It is a primary objective of Seth Lobis's study to recover pre-Enlightenment connotations of sympathy and to trace the continuities and transformations it underwent from the seventeenth through the eighteenth century. In so doing, he recapitulates older scholarship by the likes of R. S. Crane (1934, republished 1967), Norman Fiering (1976), and the more recent work of Jennifer Herdt (2004), who have identified sources for moral sentimentalism among the Latitudinarians of the seventeenth century. Lobis offers a richer account by highlighting the importance of sympathy in natural philosophy and natural magic. In so doing, he mounts an explicit challenge to Foucault's contention that sympathy was emptied of meaning in the paradigm shift from a magical to a rational mindset. By contrast, Lobis emphasizes the continuities and complexities of thinking about sympathy in the period, explored in the writings of Kenelm Digby, Margaret Cavendish, John Milton, the Cambridge Platonists, Shaftesbury, David Fordyce, James Thomson, David Hume, Adam Smith, and the Humean apologist Samuel Jackson Pratt.

Rich in close attention to text, the book is in many ways a browser's paradise, replete with minute observations, luxuriant quotations, and revelatory anecdotes. Prolivity has its disadvantages, however. It is easy to lose sight of the overall argument as it takes its labyrinthine course, despite frequent signposting. But do we really need two chapters on Milton to make a point that could have been made in one? Are such lengthy quotations fully justified? There is scope for some editorial pruning. More seriously, there are places

where theory trumps scholarship. Although Lobis challenges Foucault, his assumptions are still Foucauldian. He has not found a way of discussing pre-Enlightenment philosophical treatments of sympathy without assuming that they have to do with magic, or that any talk of immaterial substances denotes a magical view of the world. This is most problematic in his account of the Cambridge Platonists. It is seriously misleading to say of Cudworth's and More's views on sympathy that they "conceived of it in magical terms" (205; Jennifer Herdt also thinks they defend magic). The cosmos of the Cambridge Platonists activated by immaterial forces is no more magical than the cosmos of Isaac Newton. Cudworth may have been every bit as bookish as Shakespeare's Duke of Milan, but he was no Prospero. It is true that Cudworth uses the terms *magic* and *magically* in his account of natural powers. But he uses these terms not as part of a system of magic but in their seventeenth-century sense of a natural power or force. Furthermore, the manuscript quoted at length in support of the magical view of Cudworth does not in fact do so, because it is not by Cudworth. Lobis incautiously states that it is because it "sounds" Cudworthian. In fact, the manuscript in question contains quotations from books that postdate Cudworth's death. Cudworth has a highly developed philosophical account of sympathy, the source of which is Plotinus, to whom Cudworth turned not (as claimed on page 208) to "clarify" a point about terminology, but as a key source for his metaphysics, wholly distinct from, e.g., Paracelsianism, to which Lobis aligns Cudworth and More. To pursue a thesis about the continuity of the magical, surely Girolamo Cardano is your man, and very much a figure who holds interest for students of the Renaissance. But this is a book for literary scholars, who will find plenty to interest them in those canonical figures of the literary Renaissance, John Milton and Margaret Cavendish.

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