

modern production of *Faustus* is now only ‘deployed for the purposes of seasoning an undergraduate lecture or adding a little zest to a scholarly essay’ (34). But is the correct response really to note how different, how much more ‘serious’, this experience was for early modern people? I wonder, was the frisson experienced in Exeter so different from the one we experience now when we contemplate the videos or photographs of ghosts reproduced on the internet, some obviously staged or ‘fictional’ but some eerily unsettling since ‘scientifically’ corroborated? Is there not a deep affinity between the way early modern and postmodern individuals stare into the metaphysical abyss? And are not our *identifications* with early modern culture the intellectual gestures that make our professional activity the most compelling, especially as we share the results of our research in the classroom?

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Notes

- 1 Margreta de Grazia, *‘Hamlet’ without Hamlet* (Cambridge, 2007), 5.

Federico Schneider. *Pastoral Drama and Healing in Early Modern Italy*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2010. Pp 236.

Federico Schneider’s *Pastoral Drama and Healing in Early Modern Italy* is a welcome and valuable contribution to the ever-growing interest in this particular niche of early modern Italian studies. The book represents an attempt to dispel a traditional, though erroneous, view. As Schneider puts it, ‘after more than 40 years of fruitful scholarship, the long held prejudice that Renaissance pastoral drama was nothing but a shallow form of *divertissement* has been conquered definitively’ (1). Among the first studies to attract scholars’ interest in the genre were Marzia Pieri’s *La scena boschereccia nel Rinascimento italiano* (Padua, 1983) and, more recently, Laura Riccò’s *Ben mille pastorali’ L’itinerario dell’Ingegneri da Tasso a Guarini e oltre* (Rome, 2004). For the English speaker, Lisa Sampson’s *Pastoral Drama in Early Modern Italy: The Making of a New Genre* (London, 2006) is a goldmine in terms of

formulating a broad overview and understanding of this most intricate, slippery, and, as its history attests, fascinating 'third' genre, a hybrid of comedy and tragedy. Of course, as Schneider notes, there are also scores of studies on the genre's most famous masterpieces, Torquato Tasso's *Aminta* and Battista Guarini's *Pastor Fido*.

Its promising overarching title and its several merits aside, Schneider's book constitutes, in fact, another study of the seminal authors Tasso and Guarini. Schneider's thesis, as applied to the two classics *Aminta* and *Pastor Fido*, concerns a question that has fascinated critics of poetry for centuries: that is, its 'therapeutic' power, as demonstrated in both theory and practice. Traditionally characterized as a *remedia amoris*, an antidote for love-sickness, pastoral drama also carries a socio-political dimension, as Schneider points out. On the one hand, his study focuses on the genre's aesthetic dimension: its formal aspects and their ability to 'affect' the audience. On the other, as the author explains, his investigation is concerned with the therapeutic aspect of *medicinal* (also referred to as Ovidian or 'rational') remedies as opposed to the magical/alchemic ones prevalent in many specimens of the genre. In other words, Schneider's study carefully explores the 'relationship between the proclaimed medical healing agenda of pastoral drama and the highly artful process of poetic imitation or *mimesis* that goes into the crafting of this kind of poetry, and determines its therapeutic effect' (6). As such, the book emphasizes continuity rather than difference between *Aminta* and *Pastor Fido*: they share 'an aesthetics centered on the cathartic arousal of moral pity and fear, thus firmly rooted in tragedy' (Preface). The successful outcome of this fascinating investigation has important overarching results that extend beyond pastoral drama to our understanding of the 'meaningfulness of sixteenth-century theater as a whole' (6). Some very interesting recent studies consider the poetry/medicine analogy in the light of the Derridean idea of the Platonic *pharmakon* from which Schneider's thesis draws its inspiration (6, n 14). His study represents another important step in this direction of literary theory and analysis.

One of the most praiseworthy aspects of this book is its sensitive and meticulous study of a key phenomenon of Renaissance poetics: the shift from *delectare* (to delight) and *docere* (to teach) to *movere* (to move or 'affect') the audience. To this end, the book is rather creatively divided up into four chapters, each of which marks a progressive move toward the conclusion of the study, with a final chapter on 'healing', that art intrinsic to the mechanisms and 'chemistry' of pastoral drama, as a genre apart. From a formal

perspective, then, the genre's reliance on an Aristotelian poetics of 'catharsis' or 'healing' appears highly dependent on what Schneider refers to as the 'poetic enchantment of Petrarchism' (11).

The first chapter, 'The Art of Purging', is quite intriguing and does a fine job of spelling out the terms of the debate. It starts with Guarini's theoretical pronouncements on the nascent genre of 'tragicomedy': that its 'end' is moral and should be understood as the purgation of melancholy. This chapter and Schneider's thesis as a whole owe a great deal to an important yet little known article by Pier Cesare Rivoltella (13, n 2) on the heated, ongoing debates of the cinquecento surrounding the notoriously slippery term 'catharsis'. The debate, as Schneider points out, begins forty years earlier with Francesco Robortello's commentary on Aristotle's *Poetics* (*Explicationes*, 1548). By the time Guarini arrives on the scene, there is still room for further maneuvering regarding the exact meaning and the implications of 'catharsis', and more precisely of how one goes about achieving this end in a genre *other* than tragedy (the original field of Aristotle's discussion of the term). For instance, is purgation (catharsis) to be understood as the obliteration or the moderation of affects (emotions)? The question is an extremely complicated one and it is difficult to say whether or not early modern authors ever reached any consensus on it. Schneider revisits the poles of the debate, thoroughly discussed in Rivoltella's lengthy essay, in which the removal or obliteration of negative affects (*via remotionis*) is opposed to the balance of affects (*via moderationis*). Ultimately, he concludes that Guarini's sense of catharsis in tragicomedy is akin to soliciting a 'tempered laughter' (29, 33) from the audience; that is to say, its aim 'consists in the temperament of affects, as opposed to their obliteration' (26). This understanding takes into account both the comic and the tragic aspects of tragicomedy and helps build a case for the genre's independent status vis-à-vis the already established dramatic genres, comedy and tragedy. Tragic catharsis, therefore, forms an indispensable part of 'the complex methodology of tragicomic purgation' and is achieved 'through a masterful use of the fashionable *peripetia*', a reversal of fortune wherein 'probable death is substituted for actual death' (30). The result is *not* terror but mere danger, 'a powerful affective trigger' (31) and a key element in Guarini's dramaturgy. A notable and interesting aspect of Schneider's discussion is his revisitation of Lorenzo Giacomini, a contemporary of Guarini, whose work *Sopra la purgazione della tragedia* was quite influential on the author of the *Compendio* and the *Verati*. Essentially, the first chapter examines Guarini's blueprint for implementing a classical precept, catharsis, on a

Christian terrain. In the *paragone* of the three genres, then, Guarini champions tragicomedy's legitimacy by pointing to its successful resolution of the shortcomings of the dominant genres, comedy and tragedy.

Chapters two and three focus on the legacy of Petrarch's *Canzoniere* and pastoral drama's debt to its stylistic, linguistic, and thematic repertoire. Schneider argues that Guarini's *Pastor Fido* 'upgrades Tasso's strictly neo-Platonic reading of Petrarch's romance of love in the *Aminta* to a reading of Petrarch's romance of love with a more complex resonance, that includes courtly and even religious elements' (79). Both chapters are quite useful in showing us how the two playwrights use style strategically to cater to their masterpieces' therapeutic aspirations. The Petrarchan lexicon and, indeed, the *Canzoniere*'s ethos are paramount in this process. Tasso's *Aminta*, Schneider suggests, constitutes a first and important 'upgrade' (119) on the Petrarchan model. Given the affinity between the two masterpieces, a certain amount of repetition is inevitable as one moves from the first to the third chapter.

The last chapter ('The Healing') demonstrates the end result of both plays' active engagement with 'Petrarch's redemptive itinerary' (117). On the one hand, both authors aim to 'reconcile' traditionally separate discourses of sensuality and spirituality, passion and reason; on the other, this last chapter demonstrates the different means whereby each author achieves a 'cathartic' experience. In short, the itinerary from the *Aminta* to *Pastor Fido* entails a change in pastoral's 'therapeutic effect': that is, 'from a tempered laughter based on a neo-Aristotelian catharsis to a tempered laughter based on a Christian reworking of a neo-Aristotelian catharsis' (178). Guarini's is an attempt at 'moralizing' Tasso's play by 'authorizing' Petrarch — a strategy shaped, no doubt, by post-Tridentine aesthetics.

In spite of the very pertinent and intelligent questions *Pastoral Drama* raises, Schneider's writing is encumbered by an excessive number of parenthetical clauses, colons, semicolons, and hyphens that render the prose convoluted, making the book and its ideas very hard to follow. Equally distracting are the imposing footnotes numbering as many as four in any one sentence. Typos are rather numerous, sometimes cropping up at crucial points in the narrative. For these reasons, the reader has the impression of tackling a first draft in need of extensive editorial revisions, so that the book's achievements in handling a quite fascinating and most intricate subject matter are marred by its often awkward stylistic and syntactic choices.