

Renaissance and Reformation Renaissance et Réforme



Petrarchism at Work: Contextual Economies in the Age of Shakespeare

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Volume 42, Number 3, Summer 2019

Situating Conciliarism in Early Modern Spanish Thought
Situier conciliarisme dans la pensée espagnole de la première modernité

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1066388ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1066388ar>

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Publisher(s)

Iter Press

ISSN

0034-429X (print)

2293-7374 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Nassichuk, J. (2019). Review of [Petrarchism at Work: Contextual Economies in the Age of Shakespeare]. *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, 42(3), 236–238. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1066388ar>

Kennedy, William J.

Petrarchism at Work: Contextual Economies in the Age of Shakespeare.

Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016. Pp. 333. ISBN: 978-1-5017-0001-9 (hardcover) US\$82.50.

The author of important, pioneering monographs on such topics as Renaissance rhetoric viewed through a comparatist lens and the pastoral works of the Neapolitan humanist Jacopo Sannazaro, William J. Kennedy is perhaps best known to scholars today for his seminal contributions to the study of Petrarchism in early Europe. Taken together, such books as *Authorizing Petrarch* (Cornell University Press, 1994) and *The Site of Petrarchism: Early Modern National Sentiment in Italy, France and England* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003) already constitute, in the wake of Leonard Forster's 1969 classic *The Icy Fire*, one of the foremost critical readings in English of the vernacular Petrarch's deep and wide-ranging influence upon the emerging diverse linguistic and literary traditions of the European continent during an age when the importance of these cultural developments was heightened by the concomitant appearance of the printing press.

In this latest work on the rich and varied tradition stemming from Petrarch's vernacular verse, Kennedy investigates the vast intuition that poets from the Renaissance period operate in such a way as to illustrate an emerging sense of professional identity manifest in several aspects of the poet's undertaking. Germane to this portrait of the humanist poets are five central criteria, namely, a sense of vocation and belonging, entrepreneurship, a sharpened sense of self-identity and self-critique, a commitment to craftsmanship and technique evidenced by the corrections process and, finally, a consciousness of the boundaries of one's own work, including a regard for the tastes, needs and desires of "clients" (8), or readers. Although they are frequently evoked in the analyses that reside at the heart of this study, the author freely admits that not all of the five criteria are illustrated in the case of every author studied in these pages.

The book is organized into three parts, each of which treats of a separate national and linguistic tradition, presented in chronological order. Part 1 is devoted to the Italian tradition, beginning with two chapters on Petrarch himself followed by separate analyses of the works of the Venetian poetess Gaspara Stampa and the literary works of Michelangelo. Part 2 moves to the French

royal court, examining the career of Pierre de Ronsard from his emergence as a Petrarchan author in his early *Amours* to the publication of his late masterpiece, *Sonnets pour Hélène*. Finally, part 3 examines the Petrarchan elements in order to point up evidence of professional literary deliberation, practice, and identity in Shakespeare's *Sonnets*.

Kennedy attempts to show that during a period—i.e., the late Middle Ages and Renaissance—when questions of civic order and “economics” were becoming central topics of interest for moralists, philosophers, and those entrusted with the challenges of governance, these same preoccupations appear with growing frequency in the work of humanist poets. In order to flesh out this truly fascinating intuition, which in many ways enlarges critical discourse on the now-famous theme of Renaissance self-fashioning, the author brings an impressive array of erudition to several disciplines and national traditions, as well as several excellent textual analyses which, in themselves, constitute a characteristic display of virtuosity in the art of close reading. As such, the book's content reflects at once the advantages and inherent challenges of the comparatist's approach. On the one hand, the central thesis offers a stimulating perspective on a common preoccupation in early modern literature, the pertinence of which certainly extends beyond the boundaries of any one national linguistic tradition. Specialists of these particular traditions may nonetheless, on the other hand, feel that the textual proof marshalled in support of the thesis of “contextual economics” constitutes necessary but insufficient evidence of claims made in the introduction.

At times, the author seems to apply the language of “economics” in a way that stretches even its metaphoric sense. In analyzing the final lines of Petrarch's sonnet 78, for example, Kennedy declares that the poet, unhappy in love and unable to grasp the essence of his idealized lady, has composed a piece bereft of “utility value” and which, in the face of its own rhetorical failure, becomes “just another standardized commodity” (39). Specialists of the French tradition may also regret that little mention is made here of the many competing models of group identity among sixteenth-century poets not working predominantly at the royal court, such as the Marian devotional Puy tradition in Normandy or indeed the filiations that formed within monastic orders such as the Celestines, whose collective intentions seem to have been radically different from those of Ronsard, the courtly prince of poets. Minor quibbles such as these, however, only underscore the importance of Kennedy's achievement in this monograph

which invites debate, reflection, and further contributions on a widening variety of textual *corpora*. This fine book has much to recommend it, especially to English-language students of Renaissance literature and history who seek to weigh the importance of one of Renaissance Europe's principal literary idioms as its distinctive forms appear in a representative variety of national contexts.

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Leong, Elaine.

Recipes and Everyday Knowledge: Medicine, Science, and the Household in Early Modern England.

Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018. Pp. 288 + 19 ill. ISBN 978-0-2265-8366-2 (paperback) US\$32.50.

Elaine Leong's book examines the different ways that households collected, tested, and assessed recipes for personal health and domestic management in seventeenth-century England. Her work details how men and women collected and exchanged information and techniques, which contributed to the development of what Leong terms "'household science'—that is quotidian home-based investigations of the natural world" (4). The home was a space in which families eagerly amassed and analyzed information on natural processes, taken from relatives, friends, and printed texts. Working from 260 manuscript recipe books and 200 printed titles issued between 1600 and 1700, Leong's text demonstrates that domestic spaces were important sites of early modern knowledge making. Like contemporary learned knowledge communities, households possessed an interest in the natural world and engaged in similar practices of structured knowledge making, rooted in experience and observation.

In chapter 1, Leong explores the roles of family, sociability, and gift exchange in recipe collection. Connecting these three branches of investigation, she argues that early modern households were embedded in social networks established and sustained through the gathering and sharing of medical and culinary knowledge. A system of reciprocity existed; in granting others access to family preserves and remedies, households expected to receive information