The Imagination in Early Modern English Literature. Deanna Smid.
Costerus New Series 221. Leiden: Brill | Rodopi, 2017. viii + 210 pp. $127.

Oftentimes, definitions of the pre-Romantic imagination are negative: we only learn that it is not characterized by inspiration, originality, individual genius, and so on. By contrast, in *The Imagination in Early Modern English Literature*, Deanna Smid investigates how early modern thinkers actually defined the imagination and how ideas about it were treated in plays, poems, and emblem books of the period.

The early modern imagination was both concrete and abstract. There was a widely held belief that it was physically present in the brain as a central cognitive function common to animals and humans. While it might seem counterintuitive that animals should have an imagination—surely a uniquely human property—at the time it was seen as a processing unit for sensory impressions, memory, and (for humans) reason, and as a central hub connecting these faculties. As such, the imagination had multiple functions, including imagining the outcome of an action, registering the appearance of an object, or recalling that appearance after the fact. Moreover, the imagination was inextricably connected to the body. The imagination interpreted and transformed external sensory stimuli—to the extent that it could cause or cure illnesses or shape the appearance of an unborn child. Consequently, with its powers, the imagination could be construed as a benign source of creativity or as a dangerous incentive to sinfulness.

Smid's admirably jargon-free and lucid monograph addresses the relationship between the body and the brain; the role of imagination, pregnancy, gender, and creativity; the dangers of an imagination running free; and the relationship between novelty, recombination, and religious devotion. Bookended by a tidy introduction/definition and a contemplative conclusion, each of the main chapters is introduced by a survey of what the most important theorists of the imagination (including Francis Bacon, Thomas Hobbes, Robert Burton, and the frequently contrary and subversive Margaret Cavendish) had to say about each particular theme, before embarking on an analysis of a literary approach to the same issue. In a largely convincing reading of Thomas Nashe's *The Unfortunate Traveller* (chapter 2), Smid sees "pestilence as a metaphor for his stylistic representations of the imagination and its contagious influence" on the bodies and minds of its characters and readers (63), reminding us of how ideas "go viral" nowadays. The analysis of Richard Brome's *The Antipodes*, meanwhile (chapter 4), says something about the influence of theatrical illusion on characters and audiences alike, amid layers of deftly handled dramatic irony. The reading of Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* (chapter 3) also convinces in its arguments about two different types of imagination: that which is female, sound, healthy, and life-giving (the pregnant Hermione), against that which is male, baseless, paranoid, and deadly (the jealous Leontes). This ultimately evenhanded discussion concludes with a demonstration of how imagination as art also possesses the power to heal, through the play's statue scene.

A study of this kind, which reads a large selection of disparate works through one concept, runs the risk of streamlining the subject matter, especially when its presentation is so stringent, logical, and (almost) mechanical. Smid is aware of the potential problem and the book's relaxed philosophizing conclusion does much to eliminate such worries, though some may find it too radical in its suggestions about the imaginative freedom with which we might approach future historicist literary research. A more serious problem is that this book leaves the reader wanting more—which is meant both as a compliment and as a criticism. One hundred and ninety-two pages is not sufficient to address the medieval forebears of early modern imagination theory, the deeper implications of the statement that "language is constituted by the imagination" (166), the role the imagination plays in esoteric world views (alchemy, cosmology), and the full impact of visual-verbal forms on the imagination, an issue too briefly outlined in chapter 5, on emblems. More could be said about imagination, imagery, and image. It is to be hoped these things can be addressed in a sequel. As for what this book actually does, it provides a valuable reminder that "if we are to classify a text as imaginative then the first question should be, by which historical standard?" (185). This book is an excellent introduction to one particular historical standard.

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Timely Voices: Romance Writing in English Literature. Goran Stanivukovic, ed. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2017. x + 362 pp. $110.

This is a welcome collection of essays, ably edited, firmly oriented toward the future of criticism on romance. Despite the superb works on romance by Patricia Parker, Barbara Fuchs, and Helen Cooper, for example, the very frequency of critical recourse today to these same few volumes indicates the need for an expanded canon of theories, approaches, explanations, and attitudes to romance. This is especially the case for undergraduate and graduate students seeking to get a handle on this notoriously mercurial genre. *Timely Voices* is a worthy addition to that canon. Its fourteen essays travel across time as well as models of romance, from Old Irish literature to Jane Austen, giving substance to Steve Mentz's formulation of romance as a "polygenre." Insisting on the transnational, transhistorical, and even interdisciplinary character of romance, the editor foregrounds romance writing and romance thinking as perhaps the most flexible form of creative process for the ages.

A strong and at times provocative introduction from Goran Stanivukovic describes the collection's interest in romance as "strategy" and "resource," always ripe for reinvention. Stanivukovic presents the volume's conceptual framework as being rooted in the idea of influence, but "where influence is seen not as imitation but as testing the limits,