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Review

Thinking Queerly: Medievalism, Wizardry, and Neurodiversity in Young Adult Texts. Jes Battis. Medieval Institute Publications and De Gruyter, 2021.

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Jes Battis' *Thinking Queerly: Medievalism, Wizardry, and Neurodiversity in Young Adult Texts* offers a heady witch's brew of reflections on contemporary medievalism, young adult literature, queer theory, and neurodiversity. It is not your conventional monograph. Indeed, towards the end of the epilogue, Battis (they/them) quotes a description of neurodivergent language by Julia Miele Rodas that could easily apply to some of the productively disruptive effects of their approach: "language hacking, the joyful breaking down and retooling of conventional language in ways that defamiliarize and implicitly critique seemingly seamless and intuitive communicative practice" (Rodas 8, qtd. in Battis 196). Throughout, Battis casts light on the deeply problematic – that is, racist, ableist, homophobic – inheritances and (current) practices that permeate academia and with which we still have fully to reckon. This is a book that is at turns learned, playful, illuminating, provocative, engaging, flawed, quirky,

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and irreverent. It will undoubtedly delight and annoy, intrigue, educate, entertain, and – above all – challenge.

Battis makes it clear right from the start that the book comes out of the pedagogical realities of teaching both medieval and YA literature – and it is worth noting that this also replicates the realities of the contemporary reception of these works (by students and other readers) alongside one another. It quickly becomes obvious how well the eclectic range of discourses embraced by the book speak to one another, and how many challenging questions they raise and assumptions they probe. Alongside an introduction and fairly substantial epilogue, *Thinking Queerly* comprises five chapters, as well as an appendix, which briefly summarises the key texts discussed in the book, aimed at further increasing its accessibility. Battis' Introduction opens up the topics of medieval adolescence, medieval and medievalist neurodiversity, and medievalist YA literature. The first chapter, "My So-Called Merlin", explores the best-known medieval wizard as a liminal adolescent; the second centres on Morgan le Fay, linking her with contemporary YA enchantresses. Chapter Three, "Wizards in School", examines the links between medievalism, wizardry, and education, and Chapter Four, "Bad Magic", focuses on "failures of communication" amongst minor and 'failed' wizards who thereby disrupt "neurotypical ideals of speech and learning" (25). Finally, the fifth chapter explores the adolescent Gawain, chivalry, and contrasting medievalist treatments of the kissing game, and the epilogue teases out Tolkien's wizard Gandalf's neuro-queerness and sums up the monograph's key ideas: the inherent queerness of medievalism, the diverse interpretation and function of the wizard figure, and the potential for empowerment in both.

The monograph is the first in a new series from Medieval Institute Publications and De Gruyter on "Premodern Transgressive Literatures", which promises to be exciting and potentially transformative, though the price point makes it likely that the volumes will be purchased primarily by libraries. *Thinking Queerly* is an engaging and accessible trawl through an impressive array of late medieval and contemporary medievalist texts. The book itself is beautifully produced (and I noticed just a handful of typos). Inevitably, there is not space to consider the whole range of medieval and medievalist material (Old English and Old Norse are touched upon only briefly, and there are quite a few Arthurian YA novels on which it would have been interesting to hear Battis' thoughts). Likewise, it is not possible to engage in depth with all the relevant existing scholarship in the area (for instance, Battis laments the comparative lack of scholarship investigating the queerness of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, but does not address Carolyn Dinshaw's influential analysis of Gawain and Bertilak's kisses, though her work is cited regularly elsewhere). Nonetheless, the book simply bursts with ideas and insight, not just about the textual material but also about its academic contexts, both deeply exclusionary and deeply exploitative. One of the most moving passages for me, in this vein, was Battis' invocation of the widespread academic "fear of never being productive enough", and call "to find our passions beyond the structures of academia, and

pursue the joys that we need in order to survive—since the academy can't save us [...] though we can save it by creating a space where all bodies and minds are able to thrive" (125). More and more academics are finding neoliberal Higher Education institutions draining, even toxic, spaces. Some are leaving in order precisely to survive. Books like Battis', whilst recognising the challenges, hold out the hope that things can change for the better: that truly inclusive spaces can be created and sustained by people thinking (and acting) differently. May it be so.

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