Imagining the Soul in Premodern Literature. Abe Davies. Early Modern Literature in History. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021. xiv + 244 pp. $149.99.

The continuing influence of the various brands of cultural materialism, together with what has been called the religious turn in early modern studies, has generated a multiplicity of interesting revisions of early modern conceptions of the human over the last two decades. Taking its cue from influential new historicist rereadings of the soul-body relationship by Gail Kern Paster, Michael C. Schoenfeldt, Richard Sugg, and others, while also proposing to go beyond the materialist limitations characterizing their approaches, Abe Davies's thought-provoking new study examines the early modern soul in its condition of "disembodied subjectivity" (2) that continues to raise unsettling questions about its "difficult relationship with matter and space" as well as about "the oblique relationship between the soul and the self" (4). Rather than tracing the manifold philosophical and theological debates surrounding these issues, Davies's focus remains firmly on representations of the soul in a wide range of literary forms and genres, "seeking to discern the challenges posed and opportunities offered by the imperative to imagine and render the ghostly I in literary writing" (16). As the term *premodern* in his title suggests, his concept of period boundaries is a flexible one, which allows him the freedom to include among his sources an Old English poem as well as occasionally pointing forwards to the poststructuralist echoes of early modern debates.

This critical lens makes for interesting new perspectives when Davies directly juxtaposes seemingly disparate texts like the anonymous tenth-century lyric *Soul and Body* and Andrew Marvell's late seventeenth-century "A Dialogue Between the Soul and Body," or John Donne's skeptical retort to Copernican "new philosophy" in the *Anniversaries* and René Descartes's *Discourse on Method*. In his unconventional readings of these works, Davies draws attention to literary devices such as imagery and fictional frames, in particular those connected with notions of space, to tease out hidden continuities and shared uncertainties about the ontological status of the soul across historical periods and discursive divides. For example, he demonstrates how both the anonymous Old English author and Marvell, in describing the soul's condition within the body, mix different metaphors of space from clothing to imprisonment and besiegement, thus creating a "sense of irresolution in the dualistic division of the individual" (44). In a similar way, he singles out Donne's and Descartes's use of fictional travel imagery to showcase their shared anxiety about the possible implications of philosophical innovation but also their confidence in the human soul's/thinking mind's capacity to function as a new center of stability.

The refreshing new perspectives created through such unfamiliar textual constellations come at a certain critical price. In approaching his texts through selective literary features, Davies largely dehistoricizes and decontextualizes them, and while he carefully

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avoids the aesthetic bias of New Critical readings, there is a certain tendency in his argument to elicit fairly general claims from relatively limited textual material. These strictures become most obvious when he attempts to define the entire "literary category" of early modern "soul-address" (123) from a close reading of Shakespeare's Sonnet 146. His reading of Shakespeare's imagery in combination with religious disciplinary writings neither does full justice to the complex and contradictory biblical, classical, and Petrarchan associations of the metaphors involved, nor does it sufficiently illustrate the chapter's far-reaching theoretical claims about the early modern lyric creating a triangular "deictic space" (234) drawing the reader "into the performance of the scene of self-discipline that it scripts" (157). This falls far short of, for example, Angelika Zirker's carefully argued book-length analysis of the inherent theatricality of Shakespeare's and Donne's lyric versions of the soul.

Conversely, Davies is at his strongest when he reconsiders a specific text, Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, through the lens of a specific historical context. His fascinating rereading of Hamlet's ghost within the discourse of early modern experimentalism and its reception of classical atomist notions of vacuity ingeniously connects *Hamlet*'s scientific subcurrents to its affinity with traditional *vanitas* literature and early modern discussions on kingship and divine providence. This last chapter is a showcase of just how much new and original insight may be gained from Davies's method of closely interrogating early modern materialist revisions of the soul and, through the medium of literature, bringing them into dialogue with the very concepts they purportedly challenge. It provides, however, also a necessary reminder that, even though similar questions concerning the soul may continue to be asked over the periods, the answers provided in each instance, far from reflecting an "experiential category apart from local cultural configurations" (23, quoting Robert N. Watson), cannot but always be historically and culturally inflected.

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Lives of the Great Languages: Arabic and Latin in the Medieval Mediterranean. Karla Mallette.
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This book is a welcome tribute to the cosmopolitan language, the linguistic vehicle of the premodern man of letters, epitomized here by Latin and Arabic. As such, it serves as a counterpoint to a number of modern assumptions about language that are intimately linked to the rise of nation-states. In essence, modernity posits an overlap between territory and mother tongue, the latter being used as the normative language of literature, and it both overlooks the possibility of a break between written and oral registers and conceives of the mother tongue as a natural, directly accessible device for all speakers.