

material is reviewed. Much of the discussion here focuses on counts of vocabulary items in Chaucer that are frequently used in Wycliffite texts; the problem is that most also occur elsewhere. Evidence for Chaucer's knowledge of the Wycliffite Bible is extensively, if somewhat confusingly, discussed; whether the conclusion, given all its hesitations and compromises, is persuasive seems questionable. Equally McCormack is somewhat evasive about how the Parson's Tale's advocacy of oral confession, its stress on the position of the priest, and its teller's participation in a pilgrimage are compatible with an argument that sees the Parson as a Lollard. Obviously there could be here a disjunction between the Parson and Chaucer himself, but that needs a rather fuller analysis than it receives. [Anne Hudson]

Fatemah Chehregosha Azinfar, *Aibeism in the Medieval Islamic and European World: The Influence of Persian and Arabic Ideas of Doubt and Scepticism on Medieval European Literary Thought* (Bethesda, Md: Ibex Publishers, 2008). 271 pp. ISBN 10-1-58814-051-2. \$80.00. This book starts from the contention framed by Zenker in 1910 but much extended in Pierre Gallais's *Tristan et Iseut et son modèle persan*, that the basis of the *Roman de Tristan* is the Persian *Vis and Ramin*; its ambitious aim overall, says Fatemah Chehregosha Azinfar, is to explore 'the effects that the "rediscovery" of Aristotle's philosophical work had on the creation and development of European literary texts written from the tenth to the fifteenth centuries' (p. 14). In her first chapter, on *A Thousand and One Nights*, she argues that there its structure has 'a strong skeptical tone' (p. 39); succeeding chapters address some of the most important works of medieval literature, the *Chanson de Roland*, Dante's *Divine Comedy*, the *Pearl* poem, and Chaucer's *House of Fame*, all of which, says the author, are marked by this same ironic scepticism (for which she finds analogies, variously, in Habermas, Foucault, Suleiman, Todorov, Freud ...). Her ambitious enterprise is, however, marred by a rather suspect methodology: the chapter on *Roland*, for instance, takes in courtly love (and the female body), troubadour poetry, Andreas Capellanus, Islamic religion and rational philosophy, Avicenna, *Tristan, Aucassin*, and Boccaccio, before arguing, on the basis of textual comparisons which seem far too unspecific to carry the weight of proof attached to them (see for instance p. 140), that *Roland* too 'shows great thematic and linguistic correlation with [*Vis and Ramin*]' (p. 133), and that it too is imprinted with an ironic scepticism – and then hurtles on through Evelyn Waugh, Louis Aragon, Bertrand Russell, Gottfried's *Tristan*. Unfortunately, too, the reader's confidence is not enhanced by inaccurate quotation, sporadic accents, the contention that Chrétien left his *Chevalier au lion* unfinished (p. 108), the assumption that the *Roland* was designed for readers (p. 144).

Guy P. Raffa, *Danteworlds: A Reader's Guide to the Inferno* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 2007). 144 pp.; 1 map, 1 line drawing. ISBN 0-226-70267-7, \$35.00/£22.50 (hard covers); ISBN 0-226-70268-5, \$14.00/£9.00 (p/b). Dante's *Inferno*, though fascinating, can be difficult to penetrate due to its complex network of mythical allusions, theological concepts, and obscure historical characters. In recognition of these obstacles, Guy P. Raffa's commentary systematically breaks down the text into manageable and comprehensible expositions of its key aspects, providing the reader with what he calls a 'mental map' of Dante's journey. Compiling information from diverse sources, such as medieval commentaries on the text and Dante encyclopedias, the book methodically explores each circle of hell, providing a plot summary and a section identifying each character encountered by the narrator. This is followed by an explanation of any classical, religious, historical, or philosophical themes, and their relation to the work as a whole. The clarity and organization of the commentary make this book an indispensable study aid, particularly for students, whilst the English translations of significant quotations allow the text to be approached by readers from

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