

In medieval allegory, Body and Soul were often pitted against one another in debate. In *Body Against Soul: Gender and Sowlehele in Middle English Allegory*, Masha Raskolnikov argues that such debates function as a mode of thinking about psychology, gender, and power in the Middle Ages. Neither theological nor medical in nature, works of sowlehele (â€œsoul-healâ€•) described the self to itself in everyday languageâ€•”moderns might call this kind of writing â€œself-help.â€• Bringing together contemporary feminist and queer theory along with medieval psychological thought, *Body Against Soul* examines *Piers Plowman*, the â€œKatherine Group,â€• and the history of psychological allegory and debate.Â In so doing, it rewrites the history of the Body to include its recently neglected fellow, the Soul. The topic of this book is one that runs through all of Western history and remains of primary interest to modern theoristsâ€•”how â€œmyâ€• body relates to â€œme.â€•Â In the allegorical tradition traced by this study, a male person could imagine himself as a being populated by female personifications, because Latin and Romance languages tended to gender abstract nouns as female. However, since Middle English had ceased to inflect abstract nouns as male or female, writers were free to gender abstractions like â€œWillâ€• or â€œReasonâ€• any way they liked. This permitted some psychological allegories to avoid the representational tension caused by placing a female soul inside a male body, instead creating surprisingly queer same-sex inner worlds. The didactic intent driving sowlehele is, it turns out, complicated by the erotics of the struggle to establish a hierarchy of the selfâ€™s inner powers.

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