

In spite of this, there is no doubt that the work is a very welcome and valuable addition to the study of medieval women and gender.

There are a number of editorial errors, including: there is no number for the chart referred to—I presume it is Chart 1? (p. 62); there is no page reference given for the note referred to (p. 38, n. 64); there is no number for the chart referred to—I presume it is Chart 5? (p. 145); there is a reference to Figure 000—I presume this is Figure 2 (p. 150).

Kirsten A. Fenton  
University of Edinburgh



Noah Guynn. *Allegory and Sexual Ethics in the High Middle Ages*. (The New Middle Ages.) Palgrave Macmillan, 2007. Pp. xii + 218.

Noah Guynn's *Allegory and Sexual Ethics* explores what we may call the dark side of allegory: its use as an ideological instrument and a "ruse of power" that "normalizes [the] hegemony" of elites, a rhetorical performance of force and persecution (26). Guynn takes Gordon Teskey's thought-provoking *Allegory and*

*Violence* (1996) as a springboard for new readings of three high-medieval works that function as vehicles for coercive sexual ethics: *Le Roman d'Eneas*, the *De Planctu Naturae*, and *Le Roman de la Rose*. In *Allegory and Violence*, Teskey observed that the composition of an allegory is a "violent" rhetorical action, one that enacts the Platonic and Aristotelian vision of how form comes to participate in matter. This is a gendered and generative process, in which "matter is made pregnant with form by assuming a 'subject' (*sub-iectum* 'cast down') position with respect to the male." As Teskey asserts, allegory is also inherently violent and produces ethically and aesthetically charged hierarchies. By "forcing" union upon two disparate entities, allegory "elicits continual interpretation as its primary aesthetic effect, giving us the feeling that we are moving at once inward and upward toward the transcendental 'other,'" (Teskey 4). Allegory's ability to code this "other" as an irrefutable truth gives it its ideological utility.

As Guynn acknowledges, it may come as no surprise that allegory is an ideological tool, one that claims "to transcend particulars and discern essences" (3). Guynn is most innovative in his assertion, demonstrated

in his following analyses of individual allegorical narratives intended for varied audiences, that allegory's seeming transgressions and ambiguities actually serve to "enforce compliance with the moral, intellectual, and cosmic structure that is [. . .] the projection of a dominant ideology," exhorting "moral vigilance" and the extirpation of "threats to established forms of sovereignty" (3-4).

In Chapter 1, Guynn reviews the sign theories that were influential in the high Middle Ages, highlighting the intimate connections between sign theory, ideas of corporeality, and political ideologies. Through readings of patristic and medieval theologians, Guynn concludes that allegory, while seeming to affirm indeterminacy in its very "unmasking [of] its own internal contradictions or pushing them to the point of near-incoherence," asserts a monological vision in which perversion—always ideologically defined—is only temporarily defeated (33). By creating and destroying the other, allegory turns "all bodies into ideological battlefields" (50), staging battles that must be continually fought against an internal enemy within the human body and within the body politic.

Thus, in text after text, allegory promotes the exclusion and even extermination of non-elites or outsiders: heretics, Jews, women, and homosexuals (pp. 46-50).

Chapter 2 analyzes *Le Roman d'Eneas*, a work that, at first glance, may seem out of place in a book on allegory. However, as Guynn argues, in addition to the romance's allegory of violent piercing Love, the entire work allegorizes the sexual ethics of empire building, which depends upon the mutilation and destruction of sexually deviant bodies (p. 56). Many characters whose behavior endangers *translatio imperii* and the founding of Rome along patriarchal lines populate *Eneas*. Guynn discusses Dido and Camille within this frame, but his central interest is the romance's treatment of homoeroticism and continual references to sodomy, in the stories of Pallas, the lovers Nisus and Euryalus, and particularly in the ribald, scathing sexual insults cast upon the hero Eneas—by his future mother-in-law and wife. Here Guynn likens sodomy to allegory: in the ideological terms of the romance, "sodomy is both an abstract representation of moral failure [. . .] and a signifier pointing toward an ineffable meaning so outrageous it can



only be spoken of 'otherwise,' through circumlocution" (85). *Eneas*, however, commemorates the deviant sexual behavior of the founder of Rome and his companions, for, Guynn insists, deviance must be continually remembered in order to perpetuate control over deviant bodies that stand in the way of patriarchal authority.

Chapter 3 turns to Alan of Lille's *De Planctu Naturae*, clearly an apt choice of text for Guynn's central argument. Nature and Genius, Guynn argues, are morally and sexually indeterminate figures, despite their force as ideological instruments employed by Alan in order to "shore up ecclesiastical power and to legitimate aggressive disciplinary and penitential practices" (97). Through skillful close readings of the poem, Guynn demonstrates how Alan and his personifications assert that poetry and perversion are inseparable (p. 105). Nature is unnatural in her usurpation of the masculine role of giving form to matter, and Genius' anathema rehearses the "endless cycle of repudiation and contamination" caused by and within the human condition (133). The poet thus "constructs a model of ethics and sexual ethics in which conformity is achieved through universal,

irredeemable guilt." For Alan, just as poetry that condemns sodomy cannot repress its own expressions of homoerotic desires, humans too must condemn their irrepressible "internal, indomitable enemy" (135).

Lastly, Guynn turns to another allegory that "works to encapsulate the unpredictable force of desire through abstract, essentialist tropes," the *Romance of the Rose*. Guynn urges that "scholars reopen the question of Jean de Meun's sexual politics" in order to understand the "strategies by which the poem seeks to disavow ownership of and responsibility for its content" (153). Rereading the obvious sexual violence in the *Rose's* final allegorical sequence, Guynn seeks to counter the critical tendency to look for a hidden meaning, where there is not really anything to be found, but mere euphemisms that, if anything, heighten the pornographic effect of the "plucking of the Rose." The *Rose*, he concludes, like the other vernacular allegories studied in *Allegory and Sexual Ethics*, self-deconstructs, but in a manner that works "to confirm the status of men as literary/sexual subjects and women as literary/sexual objects" (138). The chapter concludes with a brief discussion of Christine de Pizan and the *Querelle*, in which

Guynn reviews scholarly opinions on Christine's written responses to the poem and also reminds us that the forced penetration of the rose undoubtedly had a counterpart in women's historical reality.

*Allegory and Sexual Ethics* will be of interest to medievalists concerned with the history of sexuality and gender studies. Throughout, Guynn matches his close attention to textual details with an exhaustive review of recent and key critical approaches to his selected texts. Moreover, each chapter stands well on its own, and can serve as an aid in teaching the three works selected. While the temporal and geographic scope of *Allegory and Sexual Ethics* is limited to twelfth- and thirteenth-century France, Guynn's readings, in advocating a move away from considerations of the aesthetic value of allegory and towards an analysis of the coercive power of rhetoric and its incisive role in social relations, have wider applications. In keeping with his focus on allegory's political importance, Guynn concludes on an activist note by suggesting that an understanding of medieval allegory's "pernicious ideological fictions" can and should impact upon our own reality as scholars and lead us to "challenge the oppressive, violent legacy of

premodern ethics and sexual ethics" (174).

Emily C. Francomano  
Georgetown University



**Augustine Thompson.**  
*Cities of God: The Religion of the Italian Communes, 1125-1325.* Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005. Pp. xii + 502.

**A**ugustine Thompson's *Cities of God* is a magnificent book, a tour de force of archival scholarship that argues persuasively for the central role of religion in the civic culture of the northern Italian communes. Thompson thus corrects the standard understanding of communal governments as principally "secular" phenomena. He aims to elucidate "the religious life of ordinary laypeople," largely overlooked in recent scholarship that has focused instead on "heresy, the mendicants, and women's mysticism" (1). This meticulously documented work employs much of the best secondary scholarship and, especially, an impressive array