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between the change in usage of the hell mouth and the size of the reading audience and the availability of texts to read. The significance of the hell mouth to the public audience would be seen as more than a visual link. It would serve as a reminder, a symbol that would instantly bring to mind a variety of religious teachings and the penalties for transgression.

However, it was not until the twelfth century that the hell mouth began to appear in the public domain, undergoing changes that would eventually lead to a “universally recognizable image” (84). In addition, Schmidt documents a shift from the original symbolism of the hell mouth as simply the entrance into hell to the hell mouth becoming one of the torments of hell itself. Schmidt also provides numerous examples of the many changes and artistic alterations that the hell mouth underwent between the twelfth and mid-fifteenth centuries which eventually led to the use of the hell mouth in stage dramas beginning in the fourteenth century. Schmidt provides sketches of elaborate scaffold designs of the hell mouth as well as stage records to substantiate the magnitude of the hell mouth’s importance.

Finally, Schmidt concludes with a brief overview of the origin and evolution of the medieval hell mouth, including its continued appearance over the centuries in modern dramas and texts. Thereby, he brings his readers full circle and leaves them with a sense of having made a complete journey from the present into the past and back again.

L. A. Doherty


Henry Staten’s broadly ranging, yet rigorously disciplined, book examines the phenomenon of mourning in the Western religious-philosophical tradition, or more specifically said, “the phenomena of the dialect of mourning” (8). The book contains three chapters that
will be of particular interest to scholars of the Middle Ages and Renaissance—one on Dante and Troubadour poetry, a brief chapter on *Hamlet* and *La Princesse de Cleves*, and one on *Paradise Lost*. Additionally, medieval and Renaissance scholars will find rewarding Staten’s readings of Augustine as he introduces his argument and his analysis of the Gospel of John. Yet the larger concerns of the book, and the way those concerns play themselves out in his readings of medieval and Renaissance texts, will be valuable not only for scholarship devoted particularly to those texts but also for scholarly endeavors that situate the Middle Ages and the Renaissance in “a field within which it would be possible to describe the migration of structures that are ‘grafted’ (in Derrida’s sense, with everything it implies concerning transformation by context) from the texts of one period to those of another” (17).

The basic assumption governing Staten’s study is that “mourning is the horizon of all desire” in the Western religious-philosophical tradition, for “as soon as desire is something felt by a mortal being for a mortal being, eros (as desire-in-general) will always be to some degree agitated by the anticipation of loss” of the object of desire and, more fundamentally, the loss of the desiring self (xi–xii). This dialectic initiates Western literature, configured so profoundly by Platonism and Platonizing Christianity, into profound anxieties that summon “strategies of deferral, avoidance, or transcendence that arise in response to the threat of loss” (xi). Augustine, even more than Plato, describes the soul as motivated at its profoundest level by eros, or desire, and therefore even more urgently denigrates the physical, present world in order to make more accessible the recuperation of self and other in transcendence.

Staten is interested in the way key texts in Western textual history employ those strategies, especially because they necessarily involve those texts in thinking the possibility of nontranscendence in order to “declare the unthinkability of nontranscendence” (xiii). Milton, for example, is deeply committed to framing desire within a doctrine of transcendence, yet “the doctrinal architecture at a certain point leaves open a wide space within which other forces can play themselves out”
(114), specifically, Adam's simultaneous erotic desire for Eve and death in Book 9. Staten is also interested in how criticism has read these texts in ways that reinforce the cultural imperative to transcend the body. When Staten reads the troubadours, especially Bernart de Ventadorn, he will also read carefully and critically “the prevailing critical tendency” to dissociate eros from “more ‘real’ forces”—for instance, Laura Kendrick's “attempt to make out the pure physicality of the sex urge, the ‘desire of language,’ and the pursuit of status as interlocking elements of a single thesis” (77-78).

Through all levels of his reading, Staten persistently probes for places in the texts that the West has produced where, at least momentarily, one might think the possibility “of love for what is mortal precisely as mortal and because it is mortal” (xii). In Eros in Mourning Staten adds to the theoretical acumen he also demonstrated in Derrida and Wittgenstein and in Nietzsche's Voice, a passion for his study that is moving to read. Moreover, he balances in his book an extremely precise critical vocabulary with an openness concerning his own biases. This study will foster and facilitate an important critical dialogue for many years to come.

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This collection of fifteen essays represents the published results of a conference on the title topic held in 1992 at the University of California, Davis, to commemorate the five-hundredth anniversary of the event. In 1492 the Spanish monarchs Ferdinand and Isabella expelled the Jews from their country, initiating a diaspora that scattered professed and many converted Jews to all points