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Tony Hunt. *Miraculous Rhymes: The Writing of Gautier de Coinci*. Woodbridge, U.K., and Rochester, N.Y.: D.S. Brewer, 2007. x + 212 pp. Table, notes, bibliography, and index. \$85.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 978-1-84384-126-5.

Review by Kathy M. Krause, University of Missouri—Kansas City.

Tony Hunt's new book examines one of the most popular (judging by extant manuscripts), yet until quite recently, least studied of medieval French texts, the *Miracles de Notre Dame* of Gautier de Coinci. Prior of the abbey of Vic-sur-Aisne and then of Saint-Médard de Soissons in the early thirteenth century, Gautier was a prolific singer of the Virgin's praises in both narrative and song. In his magnum opus, the *Miracles de Notre Dame* (hereafter *MND*), Gautier frames fifty-eight miracle tales (in octosyllabic Old French rhyming couplets, the standard verse narrative form in Old French) with a series of songs to the Virgin and to his patron saint, Saint Léocadia, and includes verse sermons and prayers as well. The *MND* survives in whole or in part in 114 manuscripts, of which seventeen transmit the entire text of over 35,500 lines, making it second only to the celebrated *Romance of the Rose* in the number of extant manuscripts. Nonetheless, I suspect relatively few readers of *H-France Review* have heard of Gautier or his work; indeed, even among medievalists his name does not have wide-scale recognition. This is regrettable, not only because his oeuvre was so popular in the Middle Ages but also because he was a superb story-teller and composer; his use of rhetorical figures and exuberant wordplay is unequalled, and his verbal inventiveness breathtaking. However, it would appear that critical neglect of Gautier and the *MND* is coming to an end, as the past few years have seen the publication of both Hunt's study and a volume of essays (edited by myself and Alison Stones) as well as several articles in both French and English.[1] As the only monograph in English devoted to the *MND*, and indeed one of only a handful of monographs in any language, Tony Hunt's study is thus a welcome sign of the times.

*Miraculous Rhymes* is divided into two sections, "The Writer and his Writing" and "The Web of Words." Hunt states in his preface that the divisions reflect a desire to reach to two audiences, "a broadly based one of medievalists and a more specialised group of Old French scholars" (p. vii); with the first half of the book providing "a general presentation of Gautier and an overall survey of the *Miracles de Notre Dame*" (p. vii) while the second addresses the technical, rhetorical aspects of Gautier's poetics. In consequence, the citations are translated from Old French to English in the first section, but not in the second; a reasonable decision particularly given the dense wordplay that is Hunt's focus in the second half.

Part one is comprised of an introduction and two chapters. The introduction begins with a survey of Gautier's life and of the audience for the *MND*, this latter drawn primarily from comments made within the text of the *MND* itself. Hunt continues with a brief overview of the construction of work, highlighting a few aspects of the contents, such as Gautier's inclusion of a series of miracle tales from Soissons in Book I, but not providing much explanation as to why these aspects are of particular interest. The introduction ends with a short summary of some earlier critical work on Gautier and *MND*.

Chapter one focuses first on a major feature of the *MND*: its complex architectural structure. Hunt bases much of this discussion on M. Okubo's thesis (laid out in two articles in *Romania*) that the *MND* was

composed in stages, beginning with a single book of miracle tales without songs and growing through five revisions to the final, complete work with its two books of songs, miracles, and didactic material.<sup>[2]</sup> Hunt continues the chapter by detailing the structure of the miracle tales themselves, providing abundant examples of Gautier's opening and closing formulae. The chapter ends with a list of all the miracle tales (in the order they are found in Koenig's edition), giving the number and title (again, according to Koenig's edition) and then focusing almost exclusively on the rhetorical flourishes used in their moralizing epilogues, or *queues* as Gautier himself calls them.

Chapter two examines in detail the prologues and epilogues to the two books of the *MND*. Like chapter one, it offers numerous citations from Gautier's text to document his artistry and provide a sort of summary of his poetic intent. The major portion of the chapter discusses Gautier's use of the chess metaphor, carefully laying out how he deploys the figure in the first prologue to Book I. Hunt also focuses once again on the Gautier's use of wordplay—clearly a major concern for Hunt, and an appropriate one given the abundance use of *annominatio* and similar techniques in the *MND*, as many scholars have noted.

The second, more technical section of Hunt's study concentrates even more closely on Gautier's wordplay and rhetorical techniques, examining first the lyrics of the *MND* (chapter three), then the use of *paraonomasia* (wordplay) in chapter four and finally Gautier's rhyming techniques in chapter five. Each chapter provides a wealth of detail, and examples, in order to document Gautier's techniques.

Opening with a catalog of Gautier's use of references to music and musical terminology, the bulk of chapter three offers a song-by-song description of the *MND*'s lyrics. Hunt states that his purpose is "to show that *textually* the songs show the same formal patterning and rhetorical density and the same thematic configurations as the narrative miracles, despite the fact that they are set to music. To the eye, that is, they display the same careful sequencing and virtuoso rhetoric that we have already come to recognize elsewhere in the *Miracles*. This is something that previous writers have failed to note and comment on" (pp. 83-4). Although I agree completely with Hunt's desire to call attention to the textual artistry of Gautier's songs (which have largely been studied by musicologists as *contrafacta*, and thus the focus has been on melodies and sources), I find it extremely unfortunate that he does not seem to have known of Kathryn Duy's 1997 NYU dissertation in which she examines the complex structure of Gautier's lyric sequences in several manuscripts.<sup>[3]</sup> Duy's dissertation not only belies Hunt's assertion that previous writers have failed to note Gautier's sequencing of his lyrics, but also takes care to examine the lyrics as they are presented in the manuscripts. This is unlike Hunt, who bases his arguments about pattern entirely on the order of songs as given in Koenig's edition, an edition that, as scholars of Gautier know, presents the text in an order found in no extant manuscript of the *MND*.

It is also unfortunate that such an incredible wealth of detail should be accompanied by so little analysis of the findings. After the song by song description, we find only a single paragraph restating the book's main thesis, that Gautier's poetic project is to convert "the themes and styles of *courtoisie* to devotion to our Lady" (p.119) and concluding with the statement that the thematic network "can be most easily recognized from the following table" (p. 119). That "following table" is a two-page spread with the songs on the horizontal axis and sixty-nine "themes and lexical motifs"—from "amor" to "virge" passing by "deprier" and "pons"—along the vertical axis, with an "x" at the intersection marking when each theme is found in a particular song. This reader found the table anything but "easy" or helpful, as the number of little x's as well as the purely alphabetical listing of themes made determining any patterns extremely difficult. In addition, a number of the motifs seem to redouble each other (e.g. *chançon* and *chanter*, *fons* and *fontainne*) or to be of little interest since only they only occur once in the corpus (e.g. *rente*, *sourprendre*, *coronne*). The addition of some commentary and analysis by Hunt might well have clarified his choices of particular themes or lexical motifs; without it the table will be perhaps useful to scholars looking to find a particular theme in the songs (assuming the theme they are researching is one Hunt chose to detail), but that is about all.

The other two chapters in the second half of the book leave the same impression as the first: a wealth of detail (and an incredible amount of work accomplished compiling all that detail) punctuated here and there with the kind of insight that often only comes from such painstaking close reading. Nevertheless, the absence of significant analysis—indeed the absence of Hunt’s own voice (as opposed to Gautier’s)—frustrated this reader.

Chapter four examines Gautier’s rhetorical wordplay, enumerating the various techniques used (*anaphora*, *tractio*, *isocolon*, etc.) and discussing their place in particular in the “queue” of each miracle tale. Divided into three sections, two thematic (“Gautier the satirist” and “Gautier the moralist”) and one examining wordplay within the narrative proper of each tale (unhelpfully labeled “Gautier the rhetorician”), the chapter provides overwhelming evidence of the links between Gautier’s wordplay and his didactic purpose in composing the *MND*. Similarly, chapter five’s focus on Gautier’s use of rhyme offers extensive lists of the various types of complicated rhymes found in the *MND*—*rimes equivoques*, *suspendues*, *grammaticales* and *intérieures*—but those lists form the overwhelming bulk of the chapter. Indeed, Hunt himself states that he has “extracted all the most characteristic examples [of Gautier’s rhyming techniques], classified them according to a fairly pragmatic taxonomy, and listed them as a sort of catalogue” in order to provide what he hopes is “a fitting conclusion” to his study, one “furnishing a powerful affirmation of Gautier’s truly extraordinary virtuosity” (p. 160). It certainly does provide a fitting conclusion if by that one means a conclusion that fits stylistically with the rest of the book. Hunt’s attention to detail is admirable, although it borders on overwhelming. Indeed, it provides overwhelming evidence of Gautier’s love of rhetorical wordplay and use of that wordplay to communicate his meaning. However, the material could have provided so much more.

The conclusion to the book does not so much conclude as continue the previous chapters. First, it compares Gautier’s wordplay to that of another, nearly contemporaneous, miracle compilation, the Old French *Vie des Pères* (not to be confused with the *Vitae Patrum*.) Then, in an unexpected development, Hunt introduces the issue of where or how Gautier developed his love for etymological (and other) wordplay. Hunt provides an overview of the shift in the understanding and use of etymology by theologians and scholars during the twelfth century: its absorption into *derivatio* and subsequent use of the technique in biblical exegesis, schoolroom exercises, etc. This is a potentially important addition to our understanding of the poetics of the *MND*, providing a key context within which to situate Gautier and his work; as such, it is regrettable that it comes only at the end of the book. Had instead it been placed earlier, perhaps at the beginning of the second section, it might have contributed much to Hunt’s discussion of Gautier’s poetic technique and represented a truly ground-breaking addition to scholarship on the *MND*. As it is, the excursus on Latin grammarians ends the conclusion and the book.

As this review has I hoped made clear, Hunt’s study offers abundant material for further investigation of the *Miracles de Notre Dame*. His detailed teasing out of the threads of Gautier’s poetic techniques uncovers numerous rhetorical facets of this medieval masterpiece, one still little known by scholars. Scholars of the *Miracles* and of Gautier de Coinci will find much useful material here; I only regret that Hunt did not himself chose to pursue the insights that punctuate the wealth of detail in his book.

## NOTES

[1] Articles include: Peggy McCracken, “Miracles, Mimesis, and the Efficacy of Images,” *Yale French Studies* 110 (2006): 47-57; Gérard Gros, “Gautier architecte: étude sur la disposition des récits dans les deux Livres des Miracles,” *Babel* 16 (2007): 123-54; and a chapter in Michelle Bolduc, *The Medieval Poetics of Contraries* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006). Our volume of essays (Kathy M. Krause and Alison Stones, *Gautier de Coinci: Miracles, Music and Manuscripts* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006) has a publication date of 2006, but did not actually appear until early 2007. Thus, it would seem

understandable that it does not appear in Hunt's bibliography; however Hunt's reference in his introduction to the 114 manuscripts of Gautier's *MND* (p. 4) can only have come from our volume, since it is only there that the recent work of Kathryn Duys and Alison Stones has been published, updating Arlette Ducrot-Granderye's and V. Frederic Koenig's manuscript lists. The absence of any recognition of their work is unfortunate. Arlette P. Ducrot-Granderye, *Etudes sur les Miracles de Notre Dame de Gautier de Coinci: Description et classement sommaire des manuscrits. Notice Biographique. Edition des miracles "D'un chevalier a cui sa volonte fu contee por fait après sa mort", et 'Comment Notre Dame desfendi la cité de Constantinnoble' d'après tous les manuscrits connus*, Annales Academiae Scientiarum Fennicae, Series B, 25 (Helsingfors: Suomalainen tiedeakatemia, 1932; Reprint, Geneva: Slatkine, 1980). Gautier de Coinci. *Les Miracles de Notre Dame*, edited by V. Frédéric Koenig. 4 vols, (Geneva: Droz, 1966-70).

[2] M. Okubo, "La Formation de la collection des *Miracles* de Gautier de Coinci," *Romania* 123 (2005): 141-212 and 406-58.

[3] Kathryn A. Duys, "Books Shaped by Song: Early Literary Literacy in the *Miracles de Notre Dame* of Gautier de Coinci," (Ph.D. dissertation, New York University, 1997).

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