inclusion of an alphabetical list of plants mentioned in the Gilbertus text according to genus and species, has the potential to be an extremely valuable tool for scholars in the field.

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Hamburger, Jeffrey F. *The Rothschild Canticles: Art and Mysticism in Flanders and the Rhineland circa 1300.* New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1990. xi + 336, 225 b/w illustrations, 12 colorplates.

This thoroughly researched, clearly organized, and lucidly-written study makes accessible a little-known devotional manuscript, New Haven, Yale University Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library MS 404, which contains a wide range of excerpted texts and lavish cycles of enigmatic illustrations. Hamburger introduces the manuscript with a discussion of mysticism and art, contending that mystics consciously employed images such as those in the *Rothschild Canticles* to stimulate and guide their devotional practices. Probing the text and picture relationships, he points out a wealth of variations in modes and processes of imaging: illustrations *ad verbum* that represent a literal level of meaning ignoring the allegorical purpose of a text, abbreviated texts expanded by memory, cryptic texts explicated by miniatures, enigmatic pictures expounded by texts, abstractions personified, concepts diagrammed, visionary experience simulated, as well as imaging disavowed (apophatic images)—both verbal and visual. The focus of Hamburger's study delineates the programmatic function of the miniatures, which suggests successive steps in the mystical ascent from purgation through illumination to ultimate union with God.

Several aspects of the study will be of interest to feminist medievalists. For one, Hamburger hypothesizes that the book was probably made for or commissioned by a nun or canoness. For another, the manuscript contains sexual allegory. A number of miniatures make use of bridal mysticism in which the soul (*anima*, feminine noun) strives to achieve sexual union with Christ. It is therefore tempting to view these eroticized mystical attempts to bond intimately and directly with God as a case in which texts have been appropriated and images created for the interstices within which religious women had their being, existing between insitutionalized, male-controlled liturgical practices, thus finding opportunities to expand those sanctums of legitimacy through exercises matched to their own needs and desires. Enigmatic visionary images, like those of the Trinity, when associated with women's mystical experiences, would allow art-historical analyses in terms of "domains of deviance," displacements," or "antilanguage forms."[1] Hamburger's groundwork would appear to encourage such explorations, although he himself does not embark on them. Recently, however, Pamela Sheingorn has questioned the notion that the book was made for a woman. Pointing to the prevalence of gender shifts in the art and literature of the Middle Ages, she suggests that the possibility of an intended male user should not be ruled out.[2] If then the book did not belong to women's exclusive discursive space, speculation as to how a male or female reader would have read it differently might prove a fruitful future exercise.

The tiny codex, measuring a mere 118 x 84 mm, could be used while held easily in the hand. The imposing, monumental study, more than four times as large, must be

placed on a stationary surface and perused with the aid of several bookmarks that secure the reader's place in text, endnotes, bibliography, black-and-white reproductions of all the miniatures, and black-and-white reproductions of comparative pictorial material—not to mention the six appendices offering codicological diagrams, detailed descriptions, and transcriptions of portions of the text. The reader who traverses the material according to the path mapped out by the main text, following its many excursions and detours through notes and images, is rewarded with the rich complexity of multiple shifting contexts. For most readers, however, the superscripted and parenthetical numbers serve only to authorize. In this and similarly produced books, a reintegration of the notes and at least some of the illustrations would render transparent both the discursive character of the study and the dialogic principles at work between texts and figures.

Hamburger's sound foundation of painstaking scholarship on the specifics of this work will serve as a basis for further observations. His study greatly enriches the continuing debates on mysticism and art, gendered readings of bridal allegories in sacred texts and images, and gender-specific uses of medieval art.

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Hansen, Elaine Tuttle. *Chaucer and the Fictions of Gender*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, Oxford: Univ. of California Press, 1992. 301 pp.

Elaine Tuttle Hansen's new book, *Chaucer and the Fictions of Gender*, is, for my money, one of the two or three best and most original books published on Chaucer in the past couple of decades because it brilliantly demonstrates the crucial role that feminist analytics has to play in the study of early, canonical texts. In ten chapters that cover Chaucer's entire poetic career, Hansen finds that career unified not by some preordained trajectory of growth and maturation, but by the repetition of an almost obsessive concern with gender instability. This concern, which forms and informs Chaucer's poetics and thematics from *The Book of the Duchess* through *The Canterbury Tales*, derives, Hansen argues, from a number of sources within Chaucer's social and political milieu, as well as from the literary and discursive traditions to which he is heir. Ultimately, Hansen shows, it comes from a fundamental masculine anxiety, as Chaucer repeatedly registers it, that men and women may not be different enough or different at all; that the *Genesis* myth may be dangerously correct in making men and women "'O flessh'" (p. 248).

Paradigmatic configurations of relationships within medieval literature, culture, and politics also worked, liked the *Genesis* myth, to blur fixed gender distinctions: configurations such as the ones typically found in courtly love, wherein the male is represented as feminized in his hyper-emotional subservience to the lady. To inscribe gender differences where it may seem, and dangerously so, that none exist and thus to stabilize the instability of gender, Chaucer creates the "fictions of gender" that Hansen names in her title. These are fictions, often uneasy ones, of gender differences meant to repress, occlude, and finally to erase the specter of gender sameness, even, at times, while the fictions themselves forefront and explore it. Moreover, as Hansen's complex and textured argument makes clear, these fictions of gender, as they appear in Chaucer's work, create and empower masculine identity specifically by allowing men (sometimes in unexpected cases, like the Knight's and the Miller's), to bond across social classes, as well as across genres, poetic styles, and seeming moral differences. In the end, men can