

about the origin of evil (p. 126). If he had searched hard in the years before his baptism, Lancel concedes, they were 'twelve years during which he had made every effort to find the truth, from Mani to the New Academy, from the Academics to the Platonists'. In fact, one cannot escape the impression at that stage in 386 of a fickle, mixed-up dilettante, moving uncertainly but enthusiastically from one erroneous position to another (Ambrose not altogether a flawless influence here). Even as the Vandals prepare to invade, and the old bishop in Hippo is writing his last work to Paulinus of Nola, there are still in it, Lancel concedes, 'a few whiffs of a Neoplatonism which one might have believed well and truly expired at that date'. One wonders how much of this eclecticism has influenced doctrinal positions arrived at in the heat of controversy and later enshrined in dogmatic formulation in the West.

No great figure, however, could have a more sympathetic and thorough biographer than Lancel. Henry Chadwick, himself a towering Augustine scholar, compliments him in a Foreword to the book for his familiarity with the African church and its archeology, while also congratulating him on the opportunity to access the newly discovered collections of letters and sermons, on which Chadwick himself spoke at the 1995 Oxford patristics conference, and which certainly here prove their great value. As far as possible, Lancel wants Augustine's own works to shed light on the stages of his life; before the series begins, he works retrospectively from the *Confessions*, though agreeing it is not primarily autobiographical. From this *a posteriori* approach he feels he can conclude that 'we know almost everything about Augustine's soul' (p. 193); he also takes great pains to explain positions held by Manicheans, Donatists and Pelagians. But is it Augustine's 'soul' we come to know by these means, or his mind? We hear little of his liturgical and Eucharistic life or his spirituality, the inner Augustine (the *Confessions* excepted). Was it a characteristic compassion on his part that, in the *De peccatorum meritis et remissione*, on the question of unbaptized children, he allowed for the 'gentlest damnation of them all' in their case?

Some English readers of this work may find its documentation preponderantly French, Lancel himself hailing from Grenoble; perhaps it is the translator who has appended to the ten pages of bibliography a further eight (!) titles styled 'Complementary bibliography in English'. Be that as it may, there is no question of the author's familiarity with secondary literature on Augustine in addition to those seventy-one extant works of his own. The publisher of the English translation has had a problem in containing in one paperback volume the text, two sets of notes, bibliography, list of biographical dates and works, and four indexes. The result is rather crammed pages of small print, with frequent numerical and alphabetic endnote references that are imperfectly legible. In addition, for a work that is so strong on the geography and topography of North Africa and the structure of its churches, there is hardly a map or diagram for reference. Lancel's hard work deserves better. *Malgré tout*, however, I guarantee you will rarely if ever find a better researched and more readable biography of such an influential and controversial figure in the early Church.

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*The Poetry of Thought in Late Antiquity: Essays in Imagination and Religion.* By Patricia Cox Miller. Pp. viii, 287, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2001, £42.50.

'It goes without saying that a man's shadow, which looks like him, or his mirror-image, the rain, thunderstorms, the phases of the moon, the changing of the seasons, the way in which animals are similar to and different from one another and in relation to man, the phenomena of death, birth, and sexual life, in short, everything we observe around us year in and year out, interconnected in so many different ways, will play a part in his thinking (his philosophy) and in his practices, or is precisely what we

really know and find interesting.' (Ludwig Wittgenstein, 'Remarks on Frazer's *Golden Bough*', *Philosophical Occasions* [Hackett, 1993], p. 127.)

Metaphor is, among other things, a seizing hold of knowledge. More than anyone else, Patricia Cox Miller has reminded us that late antique writers used metaphors, in creative and sophisticated ways, to systematize thought. Wittgenstein would have approved, for in his notes on Frazer's anthropological classic he points to the necessity, the instinct even, of using natural symbols to communicate experience and knowledge about the human condition. Perhaps Cox Miller's most potent 'hypericon' – a term borrowed from W. J. T. Mitchell – is the centaur (admittedly not a quotidian beast), as employed by Jerome in his *Life of St Paul the Hermit*. 'Hypericons – like Plato's cave – are pictorial images in which theories of knowledge are condensed' (p. 89). Half-man and half-horse, the centaur is not a romantic image; rather, it communicates the inseparability of wildness and civilization in the nascence of ascetic Christianity. It does communicate primitivism, in the sense of a 'regressive return to bestiality', but also, through its spiritual knowledge, 'a radical rejection of values', that is, a preference for the solitary desert over the corrupt city (p. 82, citing Hayden White). The centaur is emblematic of Jerome's (and others') attempts to wrestle with the ambivalence of asceticism, its laudable imperative toward spiritual purity and its incessantly self-demeaning physicality. 'When poetized in this way, the body became supremely articulate, capable of signifying both spiritual lack as well as spiritual plenitude' (p. 103). As anthropology and cognitive studies continue to coalesce in contemporary research, it is important for a scholar with a literary ear to remind us that late antique writers thought and wrote in a way both peculiar to themselves but also recognizably human.

In *The Poetry of Thought in Late Antiquity*, Cox Miller has collected thirteen of her essays on the topic of 'poetics' in late antiquity. All have been published previously, from 1980 to 1996, in various journals and collections. In addition, there is a new general introduction and three new prefaces corresponding to the three main parts of the book: 'Poetic Images and Nature', 'Poetic Images and the Body', 'Poetic Images and Theology'. Contrary to the style of Ashgate's own *Variorum Reprints* series, the essays are reset with a consistent type face and pagination. The endnotes for each essay are also consistently formatted, and the bibliography at the end covers the entire collection. Surprisingly, there is no index, but, overall, this is a well-organized and accessible volume.

The length of this review does not allow for a complete summary of each essay in the collection, but perhaps it is more important anyway, considering all of these have been published before, to describe how the book hangs together. In addition to nature/beast-as-metaphor, several other themes recur throughout the volume: for instance, the shock of textual juxtaposition (e.g., chapters 3, 9, and 12), an 'erotics' of reading (part 2 and chapter 11), polyvalence and the 'violence' of the text (chapter 13). Underlying all these themes is the argument that in each case late antique writers, particularly Plotinus and Origen, have anticipated modern critical theory. (There is also the subtle commendation that modern critics would do well to acknowledge this.) The bestial imagination of late antique writers, mentioned above, was emphatically not a sign of their *naïveté*. Rather, bestial images, such as that of the centaur, were a canvas on which these writers painted their theories of spiritual knowledge and textuality; the images were not secondary but 'were constitutive of the insights of such texts' (p. 3).

These lessons in late antique poetics are revealed, perhaps most strikingly, in Cox Miller's reading of Origen's *Commentary on the Song of Songs* (chapter 6). Her interest is in Origen's use of the word 'word' (*logos*), not primarily as a Christological signifier but as a 'perspective on language' (p. 123). This perspective is unexpectedly rich, for, in exegeting the sexually suggestive *Song of Songs*, Origen invites the reader to a method of Christian reading that relies explicitly on the most erotic aspects of the

text. The *logos*, the Bridegroom, becomes also (through *glissement*, a 'sliding' of meaning) the seductive principle of divine understanding. Therefore, when the Bridegroom seduces his Bride (the reader), she is 'ingrafted (*insero* in Rufinus' translation)', a sexual encounter which illustrates for Cox Miller 'an erotic sowing of the mind' (p. 127). Moreover, Origen calls the 'word' a 'dart' and describes the Bride as 'wounded' by the Bridegroom's absence, signifying the 'riddling, parabolic [and even violent] character' of words on a page (*ibid.*). These wounds are never healed, just as the marriage is never fully consummated in the text; thus the aphrodisiac and poisonous elements of words are always present, and the reader's desire for stable meaning is perpetually unfulfilled.

There is very little work in late antique studies comparable to this collection. Cox Miller has brought the task of literary theory to late antiquity in a more thorough, and consequently more convincing, manner than anyone else. If anything at all is lacking in her analyses, it is perhaps a glimpse of Origen's intensely theologized (perhaps even orthodox?) anthropology, like that espoused, for example, by Mark Edwards in his new *Origen Against Plato* (Ashgate, 2002; for which, tellingly, Cox Miller was an editor). But nothing really can be said to detract from a book of essays that collectively have taught scholars of late antiquity so much about how to read our texts in the unsettling ways they were intended to be read.

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*Medieval Hagiography: An Anthology*. Edited by Thomas Head. Pp. lvix, 834, London, Routledge, 2001, £25.00.

This eight-hundred-page volume gathers together thirty-six texts or collections of extracts introduced, translated and annotated by a large team of scholarly experts. It provides an extensive sample of the range and variety of genres and themes included under the term 'medieval hagiography'. It includes works originally written in nine languages, among them Czech, Icelandic, Hebrew and Welsh, from countries ranging from Ireland to Palestine. It begins with the first great saint's life, Athanasius' *Life of Anthony* (translated by David Brakke) and ends with the decree of canonization of Joan of Arc in 1908. The editor's interest in France and in the twelfth century weights the balance to some extent. The selection is shaped partly by the aim of supplementing existing translations: most of the material has not been previously translated, and for almost all of it no English version is easily available (often even the critical text is hard to find). Nearly all the translations are readable, the annotations and bibliographical guidance are very helpful and the introductions provide excellent guidance to the reader. An index would have been useful for so meaty a collection.

The selection includes several lives of notable ascetics, ranging from Anthony's, through Peter Damian's life of the severely monastic Romuald of Ravenna (Henrietta Leyser) and the Cistercian brother Pons of Léras, converted from the life of a wealthy and violent knight (Beverly Mayne Kienzle), to the married beguine Marie D'Oignies (Sarah McNamer translates the Middle English version of Jacques de Vitry's Latin life). Bishops provide another set of models, from Porphyrius, engaged in fierce (and even bloody) battles with pagans in fifth-century Gaza (Claudia Rapp) to the strict but sweet-natured Jón of Hólar, twice married while a priest, a fine singer, and an educationalist and reformer; his life, written a century after his death in 1121, emphasizes Iceland's strong international links (Margaret Cormack). Saints' relics, which have been rediscovered by scholars in recent decades, are the focus of seven sections of the book; these illuminate the extraordinary power of relics in the minds of the educated and the simple faithful alike. Guibert of Nogent's lively critique of their