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Alcuin Blamires and Gail C. Holian. *The Romance of the Rose Illuminated: Manuscripts at the National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth*. Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies 223. Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2002. 137p.

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The *Roman de la rose*—the first part by Guillaume de Lorris (ca. 1237), the second part by Jean de Meun (ca. 1264-1274)—was certainly one of the most popular vernacular and secular texts from the entire Middle Ages, as we can tell on the basis of the huge number of manuscript copies. Blamires and Holian here introduce and make available in colored plates and black-and-white figures the manuscripts with this text in the National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth. The miniatures do not necessarily fall under the category of the first-rung illustrations, but they are still of extraordinary quality and shed important light on the *Roman* and the critical question of the interaction between text and image. Blamires and Holian identify this relationship as “slippery” (xxxiii) at best and, citing Lesley Lawton, confirm that the illuminated manuscripts “aided the process of reading rather than of understanding” (xxxv). They argue that we ought to accept the “Theory of Accidental Meaning in Illumination” (xxxvii) because the images are often fortuitous in their contribution to the meaning of the text. This might be the case here and there, but the theory would need considerably more elaboration to gain a solid footing. Perhaps we could agree regarding the separate narrative which often these illustrations tell, meaning a considerable distance between text and image (see James A. Rushing, *Images of Adventure*, 1995).

After introductory ruminations in which they focus on the theoretical aspects, the authors turn to the history of iconographic studies of the *Rose*. Subsequently they discuss, which constitutes the largest bulk of this book, the individual plates in the manuscripts, examining the relevant details, styles, motifs, and themes. Occasional cross-references to other illuminated *Rose* manuscripts support their analysis. Rather late, the third chapter offers a description of the manuscripts of the *Roman* held at the National Library of Wales (NLW Ms 5011E, 5012E, 5013E, 5014E, 5015D, 5016D, and 5017D). Two of these manuscripts—NLW Ms 5012E and 5015D—had been intended for illumination, but this task was never accomplished.

The illustrations are of fairly good quality, but details are often very difficult to make out. Nevertheless, the availability of these reproductions is already very welcome for *Roman de la rose* scholarship, along with the excellent descriptions. \*