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Review of *The Invention of Sodomy in Christian Theology* by M. D. Jordan

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Mark Jordan launches his "Acknowledgments" (ix-x) with these words: For some, disputes over the meaning of Catholic theology are historical exercises like any other. They have just the interest of disputes over the doctrines of other Mediterranean religions now generally disbelieved, say Mithraism or Manichaeism. For others of us, disputes over Catholic theology remain urgent. (ix) Not the least of Jordan's bold maneuvers in this important book is the "of us" of the third sentence. This is not self-advertisement or -indulgence but intrinsically linked with the strong argument of the book. As he contends, and equally if not more forcefully shows by doing, the act of taking a position -- all too often done in ignorance or in bad faith, unconsciously or hypocritically -- is the essential first step in the staging of any argument as it is in the performing of any analysis. That Jordan is "out" about his identification as both Catholic and gay -- the "us" could include either or both -- and open about the position from which he writes *The Invention of Sodomy* strengthens the value of his findings and arguments for both groups of readers.

It is equally important not to overlook the words "Catholic theology" in that same sentence. I speak from experience. On my first reading I fear I undervalued the significance of such a crystal clear utterance on Jordan's part as "The book is an argument about the incoherence of the theological category 'Sodomy'" (ix). Indeed it is. By a charming irony, Jordan's position as theologian, and the "traditional" voice that emerges from that position, is precisely what renders it strange, even "untimely" -- *unzeitgemaess* -- to use an epithet of which the author of "A Prelude after Nietzsche: The Responsibilities of a History of Sodomy" (1-9) would approve. Even "queer." And though he does not embrace that epithet in "A Postlude after St. Ambrose: The Responsibilities of a Theology of Sodomy" (159-76), it is for a queer theology that must take him ultimately to be arguing, a theology which would "understand how pleasure can survive the preaching of the Gospel" (176), to cite here the closing phrase of the book. It is also, he argues, on the basis of his genealogy of moral theology, the only responsible theology one could do.

Jordan proceeds not in the crab-like fashion the 'hysteron proteron' ordering of the patron saints of "Prelude" and "Postlude" might suggest -- by the way, those titles are no doubt intended to make us think of organs in church -- but rather via seven studies that advance chronologically from the tenth through the thirteenth century. Each chapter is based on close reading of Latin texts, with Jordan usually contrasting one central text with one or more other texts, and, as I shall discuss in more detail below, engaging in deconstructive exegesis. (Lest a reader think otherwise, "deconstructive" is generally a term of opprobrium in my lexicon.)

The first chapter, "The Passions of St. Pelagius" (10-28), reads Raguei's *Passio S. Pelagii*, the account of the martyrdom of an Iberian at the hands of his Islamic captors, against a variety of Biblical and Classical subtexts, and then Hrotswitha's *Pelagius* and portions of a Mozarabic liturgy against the *passio*. All texts are roughly contemporaneous (circling about the date 967). Jordan notes at the outset that just as "there is no disentangling of the 'facts' of Pelagius's suffering from the polemical uses of it," so there is no way "to disentangle the retellings of the passions of Pelagius from the ambivalent relations of Iberian Christianity to the same-sex love it thought was preached and practiced by Islam" (10). Such paradoxical ratios proliferate. Pelagius, stripping off his finery as he refuses the king's blandishments, "taunts" him with his nakedness, inciting the desire he refuses (16). Likewise, by narrating them, the *passio* seems to risk exciting just those passions in the reader it seeks to suppress.

The role these several narratives and treatments plays in Jordan's larger trajectory is to exemplify a discourse that circulated before the "invention" of the concept of "sodomy" itself, the term for which, *sodomia*, as he has already informed us, leaves "no trace . . . before the eleventh century" (1). The impossible ironies and paradoxes of the texts suggest that "the Christian community seems as much bothered by his [Pelagius's] beauty as was the caliph" (28). Jordan continues, concluding the chapter: At the center of these instabilities, in the text of Hrotswitha's life, there appears a word that means to settle matters. It will circumscribe the sin It will specify what exactly was guilty in the caliph's act and why it was . . . so grievous a sin. The word in Hrotswitha is 'Sodomitic.' . . . With that word, the passions of St. Pelagius enter into the genealogy of the category of 'Sodomy' -- a term unknown to Hrotswitha, because it had not yet been invented. The Christian attitudes oscillating around the figure of Pelagius will be condensed in that invention. (28) To anticipate, sodomy will continually escape its circumscription; instability will dog its specification, and the condensate will itself oscillate. In chapter 2, Jordan describes the moment of that invention, "The Discovery of Sodomy" (29-44). Jordan here argues that it was Peter Damian who coined the abstract *sodomia* in analogy to *blasphemia* (29; see also 43). Peter's coining of the term is the result of long processes of thinning and condensing. These processes made it almost inevitable that there would be an abstract term for this specific kind of sin, so specifically stigmatized The essential thing to notice in the processes by which 'Sodomy' was produced is that they first abolish details, qualifications, restrictions in order to enable an excessive simplification in thought. Then they condense a number of these simplifications into a category that loses concrete but that has in fact nothing more concrete about it than the grammatical form of

a general noun.(29) I cite generous swatches of two adjacent paragraphs here to suggest some of the strengths and potential weaknesses of Jordan's method, which one might call a sort of philological genealogy. For all his rejection of "historical narrative" (see more below), such narration seems to insert itself at several points. How are we to understand "Peter's coining of the term" as the "result" of the rather disembodied "processes" Jordan invokes? These (Hegelian?) processes have no little impact; indeed, with "inevitable" the spirit of teleology arises before us. Later these "processes" are personified: they "abolish," "enable," and "condense." Jordan knows what he is doing: "The history of the word 'Sodomy' is a history of the abuse of grammar, which is a reduction of thought" (30). A history of persons is replaced by a history of usage. To abuse Jordan's own grammar, but only somewhat, I would turn that last sentence back on itself: should we take that "reduction of thought" to refer to "the abuse of grammar," as I believe Jordan intended, or to the "history of the abuse of grammar"?

In navigating his way through a potentially vast sea of texts relevant to the interpretive history of Sodom, Jordan wisely proposes to make soundings in "the four 'doctors' of the Western church" (33): Jerome, Ambrose, Augustine, and Gregory. At many points here he actually follows the track of another "doctor," Dr. Boswell (on which more below). In slight contradiction of his own claim to find no trace of "sodomia" before the eleventh century (p. 1, as above), on p. 36 he tells us that "in two tenth-century copies of the text [a letter of Gregory], there is a telling scribal error. 'Of the Sodomite' becomes 'of Sodomy.'" This surely is a "trace" but, since the letter killeth, I don't think one should make much of it. Jordan's own note indicates that the dating of one of these two manuscripts is "tenth or eleventh century," and -- though he doesn't say it -- that one or two scribes as well as Peter Damian took the step of creating the abstract noun "sodomia" at roughly the same point in history offers more, not less support for those "processes" I found so ontologically peculiar in my preceding paragraph.

The subsection "Baptizing Luxury" (37-40) and the traces of a genealogy of morals the history of *luxuria* Jordan brings to our attention will prove particularly important in his later analyses. In many of the categorical frameworks that will provide the structure for anti-Sodomitical discourse, "sodomy" will appear as a subset of *luxuria*, even as "it is a relatively less potent device for moral reorganization -- for moral condemnation -- than the term 'Sodomy.' 'Sodomy' represents a level of abstraction beyond the slippage encoded within *luxuria*. Indeed, 'Sodomy' will have the advantage of carrying within it all the polemical resources of *luxuria* and more besides" (40). On pp. 42-44 Jordan grapples specifically with the "implications of abstracting an essence from a proper name" (42). And as becomes clear from Jordan's survey of three centuries of usage, *sodomia* is continually renegotiated, redefined, recategorized, and is by no means co-extensive with the "sodomy" of contemporary penal codes, the definite article notwithstanding a notoriously "utterly confused category." For example, Damian's *sodomia* or *vitium sodomiticum* includes masturbation (46).

The third chapter (45-66) is devoted to Peter Damian and his *Liber Gomorrhianus* addressed to Pope Leo IX (1048-1054), which Jordan analyzes as the polemical treatise it so clearly is. In this and all subsequent chapters Jordan the theologian rightly highlights the *structure* of the work he is analyzing; inconcinnities or imbalances between part and part, or part and whole, are chinks through which Jordan the deconstructive exegete enters the text. It is on the basis of such deconstructive readings that he develops his own critiques. So "the...emphasis [of Damian's pamphlet] would seem to fall on characterizing types of the vice and their consequences in other sins, on refuting specific passages in the penitentials, and on showing how to make effective exhortations or condemnations. This reading of the treatise is not implausible, but also not fully helpful in seeing how the treatise works. It is more helpful to reconstruct the booklet as a therapeutic address to the concealed Sodomite, who must be persuaded without being identified, since he must be persuaded to identify himself. The booklet aims to produce self-judgment" (48). "Sodomite, whoever you are" (50) in a text addressed to the pope is thus not really -- to use vocabulary of literary and rhetorical analysis that Jordan tends to eschew -- an apostrophe, the invocation of an absent person, but a direct appeal to someone present if yet in hiding. Or to put it yet another way, Damian seeks to penetrate the "closet" -- a term Jordan is not afraid to use in some contexts (e.g., "The closet, far from being a construction of the present century, is a very old ecclesiastical dwelling place," 165).

Jordan unmasks several of the strategies Damian adopts to avoid the pitfalls inherent in his project (e.g., "how Peter knows what he must describe"; 56), but it is the fundamental inconsistency between the therapeutic and the punitive that receives Jordan's most searching analysis. His conclusion to the chapter exemplifies well what I mean by "deconstructive exegesis." In a move familiar from "deconstructionists" in literature, Jordan fastens on an explicit or implicit contradiction and lets it undo the text. Let me offer generous citation from the conclusion of this chapter, since in Jordan's genealogy, Damian's coinage and conceptualization of "sodomy" is *fundamental* for the history of the category altogether: The author's voice in the *Book of Gomorrah* is at once the voice of the brother and the father, the diagnostician and the surgeon, the advocate and the sentencing judge. What consolations he offers are offered on the way to an inevitable punishment. It is easy, with this end of a reading, to view the *Book of Gomorrah* as a ruse, as a way of entrapping the Sodomite into confession with sweet images of healing. Peter Damian is in fact unclear about the possibilities for healing He is equivocal about the future of the self-confessed Sodomitic hermit, as he is about the chances for overcoming the vice even by long asceticism. Peter Damian is not equivocal about punishment. This difference is not so much a sign of bad faith as a sign of despair, which is another defect of faith. The *Book of Gomorrah* is unsettled by its own inability to make good on its offer of persuasion. . . . Damian is uncertain whether or how to provide the conversion to which he invites Peter Damian has also built into his coinage of the category 'Sodomy' one of the fundamental paradoxes that will trouble its theological history. He seems to conceive Sodomy as a sin that cannot be repented. This conception violates the fundamental Christian teaching about sins of the flesh, namely, that they are always repentable. To conceive of a fleshly sin that cannot be repented is to set in motion an interminable dialectic. The dialectic can be stopped only by admitting that what has been categorized as an unrepentable fleshly sin is either not a sin or not fleshly. To think otherwise, to insist on the paradoxical categorization, would be to deny that Christian life can serve as an ongoing conversion, as a turning of the soul back to God. There would then be no need for schools of repentance, for monasteries. The category of unrepentable Sodomy threatens in this way the institutions of moral reformation to which Peter Damian has committed his public life.(65-66) "Deconstructive" I have termed Jordan's exegesis, and yet it is of course also traditional scholastic theology, with roots not only in Abelard's *Sic et Non* but in the very dialectic of the *pro* and *contra* questions of masters as orthodox as Aquinas. In the final paragraph of chapter 3 which I have just quoted, Jordan argues that the deconstructive consequences threaten more than a text: institutions totter on their foundations. But this, too, is to speak the language of traditional moral theology, which is built on/builds a seamless structure that links heaven, earth and hell. One rip, and the entire edifice collapses.

It is in the analysis primarily of theological texts, the spirit and workings of which he understands intimately, that Jordan excels. Chapter 4 (67-91) is devoted to Alan of Lille, above all his *De planctu naturae*. It is the one text that, in my view, may defeat Jordan, but there is little dishonor in being bested by so challenging and complex a text, especially since Jordan's chapter will add to ongoing debate. For one thing, Jordan is one of the few critics (among the many who have something to say about the *Plaint*) who can and does set the *Plaint* in relation to Alan's work as preacher and theologian. Jordan is right in insisting that one way or another scholars must attend to the prose prologue neither in Häring's text nor Sheridan's widely-used translation, "a short text that may or may not be part of the *Plaint*" (88) and published by Françoise Hudry in 1988. In his own analysis, Jordan seeks to penetrate within the multiple veils of this *integumentum* and reveal what has been hitherto concealed. "Investigation," he states, "will show that surface shape and texture do not hold in Alan's *Plaint*." Many have claimed that, but why? Jordan's novel proposal: "They are not intended to hold. Alan's purpose in the *Plaint* is to criticize the uselessness for certain Christian moral teachings of the rhetoric of pagan myth" (69). This is a radical reading. For Jordan, *De planctu naturae* is set up to exhibit, even enact the very failure of attempting to read the 'auctores' *moraliter*. Alan's text is booby-trapped, and meant to be recognized as such. That texts parade fallacious arguments and wrong-headed arguers is nothing new, from Socrates' opponents through "Boethius" at the opening of *De consolazione philosophiae*. (For Jordan on Boethius, see pp. 72-73). But usually they are contradicted before the end; leaving the correction to be inferred is an unusual tactic. One may ask why Alan would go to such lengths to create so ambivalent, so equivocal a text. Moreover, it seems to me too subtle by half that readers are expected, according to Jordan, to distinguish Nature's message from her medium, approving the one -- avoid "sodomy" -- while disapproving the other -- don't try to base morals on pagan poets.

Of course, this *might* give readers of the *Plaint* license to *approve* sodomy, but that is not the direction in which Jordan takes his reading. The closest we get is that Alan the theologian seems to get high marks from Jordan for realizing that "the paradoxes uncovered in Nature's teaching are never made good in a plain-speaking doctrine for Christians. On Alan's understanding of the rhetoric available to various modes of theology, it seems that they cannot be" (91), a position strikingly close to the one urged by Jordan himself towards the end of the book. And ultimately, it seems to me that for Jordan's larger argument, it is not so much the *reductio ad absurdum* of his *Plaint* that is as important as the infinite regress of "Nature"; as subsequent chapters will make ever clearer, it is not only in but over the abyss of "nature" that the tradition Jordan traces attempts to erect *sodomy*. So, for example: Nature ca~not provide a compelling argument against a vice that directly affects what most concerns her, the reproduction of bodies. She is too various and variable to yield or to enact convincing regulations. . . . The *Plaint of Nature* is not only a complaint against sexual sins, it is a complaint against Nature's failure to speak satisfactorily about those sins. (87) Though I admire throughout the book Jordan's restrained and efficiently spare notes, it seems to me that the very complexity of the literary heritage and context of *De planctu naturae* might have called for more explicit attention to other studies. Purely in terms of literary (as opposed to theological) tradition one might have liked a reference to Peter Dronke's slim but nonetheless important book *Verse with Prose from Petronius to Dante: The Art and Scope of the Mixed Form* (Cambridge, MA, 1994); more substantial and even more important, Bernhard Pabst., *Prosimetrum: Tradition und Wandel einer Literaturform zwischen Spätantike und Spätmittelalter*, Ordo 4 (Cologne, 1994). While Jordan brings to his reading of Alan's *Plaint* awareness of Alan's religious writings, it is quite odd that he doesn't even mention Alan's other and even greater foray into mythography, the *Anticlaudianus*. Certainly, he would have found a great ally in James Simpson, whose article "The Invention of Alan of Lille's 'Anticlaudianus': A Preposterous Interpretation" (*Traditio* 47 [1992] 113-60]) proceeds along suggestively similar lines. Building on insights of Winthrop Wetherbee, Simpson attempts to come to grips with the particular formal challenges of the *Anticlaudianus*: "The meaning of the poem . . . should not be understood referentially, in what the action depicts, but rather through the form of the work itself"; elsewhere, "Alan wishes us to read his poem as if it were itself a theological artifact" (134). The case of the *Anticlaudianus* may also shed light on the question of the newly published "prologue" to the *Plaint*, for the *Anticlaudianus* also had a prologue added to it, here "by Alan . . . in response to attacks on his poem" (Simpson, p. 114, with reference to M.-R. Jung, *Etudes sur le poème allégorique en France au moyen âge* [Bern, 1971], p. 73). Simpson cites (p. 121) Alan's insistence on the limits of the *artes*, where *explicitly* Alan draws a line Jordan argues is *implicit* in the *Plaint*: *salutande liberales artes a limine, id est, postquam nos perduxerint ad limen theologie, ad ianuam celestis regine, relinquende sunt in pace: non ut ubi figamus pedem, sed ut faciamus pontem* (quoted from *Alain de Lille: textes inédits* ed. M.-T. d'Alverny [Paris, 1965], p. 275). But clearly, and significantly, the arts are not to be rejected totally; they ar} a stepping-stone, a precondition: "Just as those who have not yet mastered the Arts should not attempt theological understanding, so too are those who are still within the inferior disciplines warned away from the deepest meanings of" the *Anticlaudianus* (Simpson, 133-34).

Chapter 5, "The Care of Sodomites" (92-113) surveys some of the penitential literature, especially Paul of Hungary's *Summa of Penance* (c. 1220), with its "enormous digression on the sin against nature" (94), and a selection of other texts, the slightly earlier (c. 1208-1213) *Penitential Book* of Robert of Flamborough, William Peraldus' *Summas of the Vices and the Virtues*, and works by Robert of Sorbonne and Peter of Poitiers. In his treatment of Paul he shows exactly how material from Augustine was tentatively excerpted and misapplied. Against the sources, the direction of Paul's exegetical tendencies are quite clear. If one can generalize about these texts, it is that "confessors are not to mention any of the forms of Sodomy for fear of encouraging them in those who might not know about them. . . . The fear of Sodomy ends up by undoing the pretense of spiritual care for Sodomites" (113). This is the incoherence, here of a network of texts, that undoes an institution. The fundamental paradox stems from "the anxiety that Sodomy is in fact not repulsive -- that it is immensely attractive" (107).

I found Jordan's sixth chapter, "Albert the Great: The Sodomitic Physiology" (114-35) among the most interesting and most compelling. Jordan shows that while Albert was widely read in contemporary medical treatises, including material deriving from Arabic, and took pains to use it when discussing other questions, . . . he is never willing to acknowledge that same-sex activity is a medical problem. Albert refuses this acknowledgment while he makes general concessions about the influence on human character of involuntary bodily dispositions. There is a place for medicine in his theology, but not when it is a question of Sodomy. (115) Jordan makes this odd silence telling. (The evidence he marshals in this chapter should convince most readers that his larger claim cannot to be dismissed as an *argumentum e silentio*. "Silencing" is not the same thing as "silence.") Albert's "extraordinarily selective" "moral use of Aristotelian natural history must point up the persistent inconsistency in Albert" (133).

At one point Jordan offers a calculatedly literal rendering of the chapter "De aluminati" from Gerard of Cremona's translation of Avicenna's discussion of *al-ubna* in his *Canon medicinae*. In addition to the chapter title itself, there are sentences here which do not admit of certainty. Of them, Jordan says "I do not know I also do not know . . ." (120). I truly admire Jordan for this

translation of a text that surpasses his and our understanding. This is a very daring move in a scholar, for the scholar is expected to be the "master" of material. "Mastery" is, of course, deceptive, and Jordan here evinces that hermeneutical humility before texts that is the precondition for their speaking to us. (On that grammatically troublesome chapter title: were one determined to construe the heading, one might imagine a nominative *aluminas, -atis*, but presumably there is evidence elsewhere to reject so simple a solution.)

I have already passed the point when a reader might expect I had any concern about the length of this review, but indeed I do. I can hardly do justice to the subtlety of his analysis of Albert's treatment of sodomy, the inconsistencies in which arise from "oscillations in Albert's understanding of *luxuria*. The oscillations are caused by the effort to keep the category of *luxuria* together around the law of procreation" (127). The very medical teaching Albert elsewhere offers his readers would permit an undoing of his claims about sodomy: "Precisely because semen by itself is not generative, an objector could argue, ejaculations outside a fertile womb cannot be a sin against generative power" (128).

By now Jordan has so trained his reader in arguing with his medieval authors that new opportunities seem to arise on every page, even when Jordan himself passes by in silence. So (as Jordan summarizes him) Albert endorses the principle that "what is distinctive is obligatory"; Albert uses it to argue that "since only human females have vulva presented frontally, human copulations must take place from the front" (131). Albert himself may not make the claim, but not a few moralists and theologians Jordan cites assert that no non-human animals engage in same-sex behavior, only humans. Which gives rise to the following syllogism: same-sex behavior is distinctive to humans; what is distinctive is obligatory; same-sex behavior is obligatory.

We are now ready for the scholastic subtleties of the seventh and final chapter (136-58), "Thomas Aquinas. The Sin against Nature." Jordan describes the particular circumstances in which and to what ends Aquinas was penning the *Summa* -- for the Dominican *studium* in Rome he needed to establish -- until he broke off composition in December, 1273, four months before his death, so that his last work omits full treatment of many topics. "It is particularly unfortunate that Thomas was not able to write the section on the sacrament of marriage, since this had long been one of the most poorly ordered sections of medieval theology" (140), and Jordan is not alone in regretting this. Jordan sees Aquinas' actual treatment of the vice against nature as a small part of an already marginalized accounting of the seven capital sins. In his analysis of Aquinas, Jordan finds that "in these three descriptions of the [sodomitic] vice as carnal, bestial, and unnamable, Thomas misreads [a number of authorities, i.e., Augustine and Aristotle] just in the way that produces the duality of the Sodomitic vice as self-indulgence and eponymous crime against nature." Jordan presses on: "But we cannot stop with calling them misreadings. Misreadings are questions, not answers. Why do the oscillations enacted by the category 'Sodomitic vice' require such readings?" (152). Part of the source of these oscillations must lie in "what must appear to us a paradox in the notion of unnatural pleasure -- a paradox glimpsed in the category of *luxuria* but observed most strikingly in the persistent fact that some people derive pleasure from unteleological copulation" (155). But ultimately we should not expect (Jordan argues) to be able to articulate a complete answer or set of answers to these questions, no more than Aquinas himself believed humans could fully capture the divine in moral theology (see especially pp. 152-53). Jordan is never more the negative theologian, never more "apophantiv" himself than in the six or so pages in which he attempts to suggest an answer to these questions. (For Jordan on Thomas' *apophansis*, see p. 157; as often, Jordan mirrors the theologians he debates.)

In the last two pages of this chapter Jordan clearly begins to shift towards the explicit impulse of the "Postlude," namely, to think about ways in which established theological "principles . . . might have been used to great effect in constructing Christian discourses about same-sex desire" (157). Jordan rightly observes that "it has not been possible, under the historical circumstances of Thomism, to rethink Thomas's rather superficial teaching on Sodomy in light of his deeper teachings" (158). When he continues with these words -- "It has not been possible to stop the oscillations in the category of Sodomy by reference to the powerful principles that structure the whole of the *Summa*." -- many readers may wonder who would want to do this, and why. Jordan here and in the book's closing pages certainly seems to want to "save" Thomas, and the theological enterprise, by building on well-established foundations and with recognizable methods a new "theology of Sodomy." At the same time, Jordan certainly does not seek to conceal the ways "the term 'Sodomy' has proved so useful as an ideological or polemical term, that is, as a mask for violent exercises of power" (163). But unlike historians who seem only interested in chronicling a history of infamy in this matter, Jordan evinces an implicit optimism. In the final section, "The Responsible Construction of Christian Moral Tradition" (170-76), Jordan proposes three "exercises by which believers can *begin* to . . . use rather than abuse the Christian moral tradition" via "a meticulous reexamination of our relation to its text -- a reexamination of what it means to have a tradition" (172). Echoing the opening words of the "Prelude," he notes that "unbelievers" may find a use in this as well; at least here the often problematic first person plural receives clear specification. The last three pages contain much that is bold, even "prophetic," and each reader of *The Invention of Sodomy* will have to decide how she or he responds to Jordan's call.

As long as this review already is, I must briefly note two related areas which I think might stand further scrutiny. I have not resolved for myself exactly what Jordan's stance is to "history" and "historiography" as opposed to theology and "genealogy." Already on p. 1 he ostentatiously disdains the genre of history: while Jordan wants "to recover the medieval acts of invention that constituted Sodomy and prepared for its long-standing effects," "I do not want to do this in the style of history," Jordan says. Rather self-righteously he expands the *topos* of the "new" historicist's dismissal of History: "Narrative history, that charming cousin of the novel, is as constrained by principles of verisimilitude and sequence as the sonnet by its rules of prosody" (1). This is drawn out through a paragraph. And yet verisimilitude and plausibility reappear as principles here and there within Jordan's argumentation. Jordan occasionally (con?)descends to compose bits of historical narrative such as the introductory paragraph to "Pelagius's Cult" (22). A bit more history, though, might have tempered his one gesture at a grand explanation, one he broaches at the very end of the book, namely, that the modern Western "idea of an identity built around the genital configuration of one's sexual partners is . . . the product of Christian theology. The rapid acceptance of the term 'homosexual' as a term of identity was prepared, long before, by a double mistake in medieval theology. Because Latin theologians thought in terms of Sodomites, we have found it so easy to think of ourselves as *being* homosexuals, as having a lesbian or gay *identity* (163). This is an interesting suggestion, and can't be totally wrong. But at least for England, Germany and the U.S., where elaboration and articulation of the discourse was first pronounced and most influential, one cannot leap from Latin scholasticism to the nineteenth-century without considering Protestant theology and culture. When Jordan makes the striking suggestion "that the invention of the homosexual may well have relied on the already familiar category of the Sodomite" (163-64), one can not naively imagine that, even if

nineteenth-century handbooks printed for Catholic divines and devotees trotted out medieval scholastic texts, the members of those circles who adumbrated homosexual identity were not also (or more) influenced by legal and other categories. And exactly what role did any Christian moral theological arguments, Catholic or Protestant, play in the thinking of a Magnus Hirschfeld or a Sigmund Freud?

Jordan's major target as the "narrative historian" on Jordan's ground seems rather clearly John Boswell, author of *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality. Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* (Chicago, 1980). Jordan takes issue with Boswell on a number of (usually local) points of interpretation, and *The Invention of Sodomy* is not intended as a polemic against *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* much less a revision of it. Particularly his account of the interpretive history of Sodom traverses ground that Boswell covered (ch. 30, n. 1, at the beginning of this section). What I find so interesting, and generally unappreciated (and not merely by Jordan) is that much in Boswell's argumentation about the non-applicability to contemporary debates about "homosexuality" of earlier Christian moralizing, especially of Paul but patristic and medieval authors as well, anticipates the negative reasoning of someone like Jordan. It was also Boswell who insisted what one could not just line up Christian "authorities" against same-sex behavior -- as the Church itself so often wants to -- but that one must examine each argument in the context of each author's thought; above all, one had to lay bare the bases for their argumentation. When the reasoning descended through steps involving fantastic lore about exotic beasts, this might indeed give pause to contemporary fans of such moral teaching. Most surprising of all may be that the seeds of even a deconstructive reading can readily be found in Boswell. About to embark upon a review of Aquinas' teachings on the issue at hand, Boswell writes, the aim of such analysis is . . . to investigate the extent to which such positions reflect logical or consistent application of traditional Christian principles, and where they do not, to suggest other ways of accounting for their development. It is difficult to see how Aquinas's attitudes towards homosexual behavior could even be made consonant with his general moral principles, much less understood as the outgrowth of them. (*Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*, 319) What is, of course, quite different is that while Boswell attempts to account for Aquinas's inner inconsistencies and contradictions (to stick with that one example) by a variety of explanations, he does not derive it, as Jordan does in all his chapters, from the inherent instability or incoherence of the category "Sodomy" itself. Jordan here represents a different interpretive tradition, but nonetheless, I find it interesting to look, and think, beyond a model that would situate Jordan's book as diametrically opposed to Boswell's study. And in this I think, at least to judge from the argumentation of *The Invention of Sodomy*, Jordan might agree with me.

The book is well produced. I noted the following relatively obvious misprints: "Domines" for "Dominus" (p. 13, n. 13); "lupunare" for "lupanare" (p. 79); "dcotrines" for "doctrines" (p. 129); "non- Catholic" for "non-Catholics" (p. 136); "vita" for "vitia" (p. 143, n. 13).

In conclusion, this is a highly original, important contribution. It is well written and well worth reading. Jordan is an accomplished scholar of theology and -- to the extent I can judge matters -- theologian. What is perhaps most unusual about the book is the degree to which Jordan reveals his engagement with the topic. I hope Jordan's book inspires other studies in this vein. One can only hope the results are of comparably high quality.