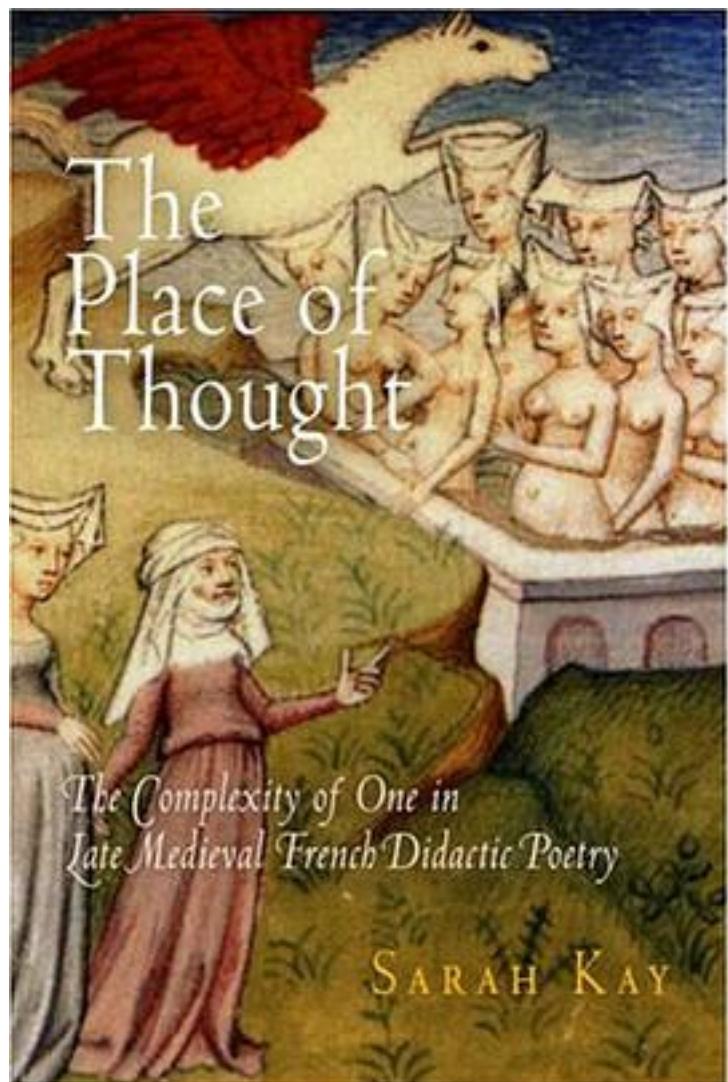


The Place of Thought



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From Jean de Meun in the late thirteenth century to Christine de Pizan in the early fifteenth, medieval French poets often aimed to impart theological, philosophical, or moral ideas. To unify their thought, and to make its outline visible to readers, the poets created vivid images of place, such as gardens, paths, idyllic landscapes, cities, trees, and fountains. For Sarah Kay, these spatial images are a prop of "monologism," helping to communicate (or impose) unity of meaning and interpretation by summoning readers to occupy the same "place" in their thinking as the authors. Because of this monologism, Kay contends, didactic poetry has been ill served by a critical tradition that favors difference, plurality, and dialogism. In *The Place of Thought*, she seeks radically to reassess this literature and reappraise the pleasure to be derived from reading it. Kay argues that one meaning is not inherently simpler or less interesting than many meanings. Using specific works as examples, she demonstrates that this "one-ness" of thought in French didactic poems can be an excitingly complex and challenging notion, and that it strains the images in which it is placed to the point where they become difficult to visualize. Herein lies the poems' simultaneous intellectual and aesthetic appeal. Focusing on the *Roman de la Rose* by Jean de Meun, the *Breviari d'amor* by Matfre Ermengaud, the *Ovide moralise*, *Pelerinage de vie humaine* by Guillaume de Deguileville's, *Le Jugement dou roy de Navarre* by Guillaume de Machaut, *Le Joli buisson de Jonece* by Jean Froissart, and *Le Livre du Chemin de long estude* by Christine de Pizan, Kay traces the works' backgrounds in scholastic thinking, illuminating them when appropriate with modern reflections on the same ideas.

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