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Tracy Adams, *Violent Passions: Managing Love in the Old French Verse Romance.* Studies in Arthurian and Courtly Cultures. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005. xii + 311 pp. Bibliography. $65.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 1-4039-6294-4.

Review by Peggy McCracken, University of Michigan.

Violent Passions is a book that sees love as a problem. Or rather, it shows the extent to which twelfth-century French romances describe love as a problem, rather than a convention. Love is a problem in a variety of medieval discourses: theological and legal treatises, chronicles, sermons, saints' lives. Why then, Adams asks, have we persisted in reading love in romance narratives as an idealized emotion? Lovers suffer--they are victims of arbitrary passions, they are subject to lovesickness, they succumb to unruly desires. And lovers who cannot manage their emotions are a problem for society, in Tracy Adams' reading. While one might wish that she had used a more specific or more historically grounded definition of "society" (it is at times a rather vague term), Adams convincingly argues for the effects of love on the institutions that structure courtly romance: kingship and effective government. Romances argue for the social utility of love when passion is managed in ways that promote institutions like marriage and monarchy.

Love is ultimately a problem in relation to critical paradigms, according to Adams (in fact, it is such a problem that she avoids the word "love," preferring the Latin and Old French "amor"), and she repeatedly demonstrates the inadequacy of notions of courtly love to explain the negotiations of emotion and passion in the romances she studies. To critique the concept of courtly love is by now something of a commonplace, but Adams' contribution to this critique is original and often compelling. By rejecting the isolation of love in the courtly love paradigm and by situating romance representations of love in relation to broader debates about love in medieval culture, she shows the extent to which romance representations of individual passion demonstrate a concern with the integration of passion and sexual desire into emotional regimes through which they can be managed. She further argues that these emotional regimes support the institutions that organize society and that are represented in fictional form in romance narratives.

A short introduction to the book's methodology is followed by a first chapter, "The Problem of Love," that offers a critique of the concept of courtly love and an introduction to what Adams sees as the performative intent of romance love episodes. Insisting on the clerical identity of the composers of romance, Adams argues that the paradigms of love available to these clerics presented love as an ambivalent yoking of caritas and cupiditas. These authors combined models of love from a variety of discourses into new models that redefined the emotion and its function in relation not only to the couple but also to society. Adams sees the "productive forms of amor" (p. 15) as the result of the management of love: romance love episodes recount the transformation of amor into an emotion that serves a broader good, and subsequent chapters explore the various ways in which love supports or defines social order.

In chapter two, "The Mad Lovers of the Ovidian Lais," Adams introduces a key concept that will structure most of her readings. Noting Ovid as the major source from which romance writers drew their ideas about the symptoms of amor, she argues that those writers drew on two Ovids: the neoplatonic philosopher who theorized love, and the *magister amoris* of the love works. Adams contends that the Ovid read by romance composers was a combination of these two Ovids, a sort of "Super-Ovid" (Adams' perhaps infelicitous term) whose advice on how to manage love could be seen in a positive light.

Focusing on three Old French Ovidian *lais* borrowed from the *Metamorphoses*, Adams maintains that the *Lai de Narcisus*, *Piramus et Tisbé*, and *Philomena et Procné* demonstrate a violent ambivalence toward uncontrollable love. This chapter sets up the analysis of romance narratives in subsequent chapters: the *lais*, like romances, present love as a problem; however, the *lais* dramatize their characters' failure to manage their emotions. In Adams' reading, the *lais* represent amor as a negative emotion to be repressed rather than as a positive emotion to be managed, and they show that this kind of thinking about love is not adequate in a secular context. Adams then uses the representation of amor in the Ovidian *lais* to introduce the kind of conceptualization of love that she sees romance composers writing against and modifying.

Adams does not move directly to a discussion of romance in chapter three, "Marriage and Amor"; instead, she explores clerical attitudes toward love. She argues that romance narratives are a space within which clerical authors react to mandated celibacy. These authors describe the pain of love and desire, but they also valorize passion as a bond between spouses, and they assign new and positive values to sexual desire and incorporate it into marriage and kingship. While Adams may overstate her argument that the representation of the love-stricken romance hero is a response to "the trauma of the imposition of clerical celibacy" (p. 76; see also p. 6), her broader point--that the idea of painful sexual desire as a part of love comes from the cleric's experience of love--allows her to move from the representation of love as an unmanageable emotion in the Ovidian *lais* to the new forms of love imagined in romance narratives.

Adams begins her analysis of romance narratives with a terrific study of the *Roman d'Eneas* in chapter four, "The *Roman d'Eneas* and the Erotics of Empire Building." Here, Adams moves into the analysis she has been building toward and demonstrates the results of the interpretive structure carefully put into place in earlier chapters. To state her argument in somewhat simple terms: the *Eneas* composer uses Dido and Lavine to demonstrate two responses to love. Dido cannot manage her desire, she does not know how to use the art of love, she succumbs to lovesickness, and her political status suffers. Lavine does know how to manage love: she manages her own desire and uses the art of love to solicit Eneas' desire. Here Adams sees two cultural models at work; the "Super-Ovid" model combines the philosophy of love with the management of love to positive ends and modifies the medieval notion of the two Venuses. The *Eneas* author disrupts the traditional opposition of the carnal Venus and the chaste Venus when Lavine demonstrates her ability to manage lust--to control her own desire for Eneas while soliciting his desire. Most important, though, Adams sees Eneas' passion as a qualification for kingship--not just in terms of reproduction, but in a symbolic sense. Eneas' marriage to Dido, based on affection but not passion, is shown to be inadequate for the founder of a dynasty. When Lavine chooses Eneas and teaches him the art of love, Eneas reconciles his destiny and his own ability to act. The *Eneas*, Adams claims, creates a strong link between marriage and lordship by arguing that the one motivates the other, and demonstrates the possibility of creating the passion that motivates both when it is missing.

A fifth chapter continues the focus on lordship and love, and moves to a more focused consideration of charisma. In "'Making Love' in Béroul and Thomas's Tristans," Adams also focuses on strategies for managing love, such as Thomas' account of Tristan's attempts to console himself for the inability to possess Iseut (initially in his marriage to the second Iseut, and then in his creation of the statue of Iseut). Adams situates these episodes in the context of twelfth-century thinking about images and idolatry, and maintains that these two kinds of Iseut doubling question the relationship between the spirit and its material manifestations, and between resemblance and difference. In Adams' reading, Béroul's story of the lovers positions the love affair more firmly in relation to society by valorizing mutual love over feudal marriage. In Béroul's *Tristan*, the lovers' valorization of their own love in the stories is not to be seen as a validation of adultery, in Adams' view, but rather as a challenge to the prohibition of sexual desire even within marriage as well as the aristocratic view of passion as irrelevant to marriage

practices. In other words, the Tristan stories, like the *Eneas* romance, promote the importance of the relationship between love and leadership. And although Tristan's relationship with Queen Iseut remains an illegitimate union, his charisma allows King Marc to negotiate and maintain peace with his barons. Love and charisma thus maintain social equilibrium.

In her final chapter, Adams turns to Chrétien de Troyes. In a logical extension of her analysis of the Tristan narratives, she considers the way that *Cligés* also uses passionate love to critique feudal marriage. Like Thomas' narrative, *Cligés* emphasizes the importance of inner emotion and outer action, and Adams notes that both Tristan and Fenice attempt to reconcile inner feelings with outer appearances and actions. Unlike Tristan, however, Fenice is able to bring change to the society she lives in, helping to bring Cligés to the throne that is rightfully his. The romance emphasizes the importance of Fenice's exercise of her will: she assents to her inclination to Cligés, and her interior is in accord with her exterior. Adams also sees will as a key term in the representation of love in *Le chevalier de la charrette*. Using discourses of friendship that posit friendship as the perfect alignment of wills, she reads Lancelot and Guenevere's relationship as based on mutual friendship. Passion still characterizes the relationship, of course, but Lancelot's ability to control his passion through will valorizes his emotion. Here too, passionate love is related to kingship: Arthur's ineffectiveness and the violent landscape that Lancelot traverses to save the kidnapped Guenevere emphasize the disorder in Arthur's kingdom, and Lancelot's successful deliverance of the queen underscores the importance of love as a qualification for rule and an impetus to fight for peace. Adams argues that the difference between Arthur and Lancelot is shown to lie in different ways of exercising the will: the lover exercises his own will and the passive ruler conforms to the will of others. Again, the loving couple serves as exemplary of political order.

In post twelfth-century romances, Adams explains in her conclusion, love becomes the subject of analysis. In thirteenth-century French romance, authors begin to focus more on the incompatibility of *caritas* and *cupiditas* rather than on their integration; the unself-conscious experience of love in earlier romances is displaced by the analysis of love, and chastity is valorized over sexual desire (as in grail romances).

Violent Passions is written a carefully argued revisionist view of love in twelfth-century romances. It will be crucial reading for any scholar interested in courtly love or the ethical workings of love in Old French romance. Its focus is resolutely on heterosexual love and marriage and it locates both the valorization and disruption of those institutions from within. This reviewer wondered whether a consideration of some of the many studies of same-sex love, especially in the *Eneas*, might support or modify its argument.[1] The book is at times repetitive (the critique of the idea of courtly love as valorizing women occurs quite a few times), and some of the argument might have been condensed and perhaps streamlined a little. But *Violent Passions* offers many rewards to the patient reader: it moves through rich readings and complex considerations of the models of love available to medieval romance writers and the modifications they made to those models. While some readers may dispute some of the book's conclusions, Violent Passions convincingly argues that love is a problem--not a given--in twelfth-century romances, and that it is worth thinking about why that is so.

NOTES

[1] See, most recently, "Sodomy, Courtly Love, and the Birth of Romance: Le roman d'Eneas," in Noah D. Guynn, *Allegory and Sexual Ethics in the High Middle Ages* (New York: Palgrave, forthcoming).

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