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Laine E. Doggett, *Love Cures: Healing and Love Magic in Old French Romance*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009. 267 pp. \$39 pb. ISBN 978-0-271-03531-4.

Review by Tracy Adams, University of Auckland

In *Love Cures: Healing and Love Magic in Old French Romance*, Laine Doggett proposes a new genealogy for the courtly lady of medieval romance, both cause and cure of the hero's lovesickness. She is not the cousin of the inaccessible and capricious *domna* of troubadour lyric but descends principally via Iseut, a healer in two separate senses, metaphoric and literal: Iseut cures Tristan of his lovesickness through her love, but she also heals his physical wounds with medicinal herbs. An empiric, that is, a practitioner of a type of medicine based upon experience rather than theory, she possesses valuable knowledge. The courtly lady, then, can be traced to a figure who is not idealized, remote and uncaring but vitally engaged in social life. By focusing upon the realistic detail with which some female healers are portrayed in the romance, Doggett lifts the love episodes out of the marvelous literary world to which they often have been consigned and shows them to fit more comfortably into a world where women worked busily through tested means to assert control over their own destinies and those of their loved ones. In this world, love is a force that can be controlled, like illness and injury, by those adept in the practice of healing. The notion of love as both illness and remedy -- as a poison that cures -- is as old as it is ubiquitous. As Doggett notes, for Ovid, the best remedy for Love's wound is Love. But the notion must be historicized, as well. In the context of the twelfth century, when the boundaries among love, healing, and magic were penetrable, and lovesickness was a physical malady curable through medicine, the role played by Love in Ovid is sometimes played by a female healer.

Doggett's goal is to consider the areas where love, healing, and love magic intersect, to trace the reciprocal influences of the three upon each other and discover how these contributed to new conceptions of love. Her examination, which she places within the larger context of the development of the institution of marriage, further aims to contribute to understandings of love as it was conceived of during the high Middle Ages. In an introductory first chapter, "Background Considerations," she explains how the fields of medicine and magic converged at many points and why these fields should not be confused with the "marvelous." The practices of medicine and magic cannot be separated easily during the period covered by the study. Healers included "physicians, empirics, surgeons, diviners" (p. 17). Richard Kieckhefer's query, "If a person rubs bat's blood into his eyes, is that magic, or is it a kind of primitive medical science?" makes the point: magic was not a type of illusion but a branch of natural science, an investigation into the hidden things of nature (p. 20). However, medicine and magic must be distinguished from the marvelous, which includes phenomena that cannot be explained: supernatural events. Doggett then suggests that the romances that she analyses all offer rational responses to a difficult situation occasioned by an arranged marriage. Empirical practice, she explains, "appears in these works not merely coincidentally, but as leverage in situations brought about by forced marriage." It thus gives women "a means of influence in situations where they have no authority..." (p. 31). The chapter concludes with a quick survey of the critical concept of "courtly love." The widespread notion that women in romance are "idealized figures" placed in the story for the purpose of frustrating men does not catch the complexity of the genre's depictions of gender (p. 35). Also, in contrast with some of the Ovidian tenets popular during the period, love as described in the romance is "an earnestly desired

and potentially permanent bond that motivates life's biggest decisions" (p. 38). Magical practice is a means of helping love along in the romance.

Chapter two, "On Artifice and Realism: Thessala in Chrétien de Troyes's *Cligés*," offers a new perspective on the nurse of the romance heroine Fenice. Most often regarded as evidence of this romance's emphasis on the marvelous and artifice in its discussion of love—that is, on love as a phenomenon largely irreconcilable with social life except through supernatural means—Thessala is shown in this chapter to be more closely aligned with empirics than sorceresses. She manipulates the romance between Fenice and Cligés through a series of practices that would have been familiar and perfectly credible to a late twelfth-century audience. The episodes that Thessala engineers, Fenice's feigned death and the nightly hallucinations of Fenice's husband, Alis, during which he believes himself to be participating in sexual relations with his wife, thus are not bits of artifice woven into a fairly realistic story. Rather, they represent "a highly realistic depiction of an empirical healer and magical practitioner of the later twelfth century whose function is to create illusions" (p. 42). Referring to herself as "mire" or doctor, Thessala carries out procedures that correlate with typical twelfth-century medical practice. What is the effect of situating this character "within the 'realm' of common empirical magic" practiced throughout medieval society (p. 82)? Thessala's activity, referred to as that of a "mestre" or master, must be seen as analogous to that of the master craftsman, Jean, who constructs the magnificent tower where Fenice and Cligés carry on their love affair. Highly skilled individuals thus manage to work around institutions established through feudalism and the Church. As Doggett insists, however, different audiences would have brought different reactions to the story which "depicts both Fenice's displacement from agency within the courtly marriage system and resistance to the system's dictates" (p. 84).

The third and fourth chapters posit that while scholars agree on Iseut's influence on the romance is clear, the nature of her influence has been misunderstood. "Tristan and Iseut: Beyond a Symbolic Reading of Empirical Practice" argues for a literal interpretation of the famous love potion of Thomas of Britain's version of the story along with a recognition of Iseut's talent as a healer. Tristan and Iseut experience first friendship and then love for one another, but, prohibited from a romantic relationship by social regulations, they do not acknowledge their feelings. These rise to a level of consciousness only when they drink the potion, which Doggett reads not as a metaphor but as genuine uninhibitor. What we have here then is neither a religion of love, as Jean Frappier describes it in his classic article, nor a pessimistic statement about the unsustainability of passion, but a tale of how an emotion can be enhanced and modulated through empirical practice.[1] Nor is there anything mysterious about Iseut, a skilled healer. True, she cures Tristan of his lovesickness, but her knowledge of medicine is her defining attribute. It strikes me that this point reminds us of Leslie Rabine's reading of the tale, although Doggett does not mention it, which emphasizes the terrible loss suffered by Iseut when she leaves her homeland for an alien country where her particular genius is not valued.[2] Although Iseut and Thessala "take their inspiration from the world around them, not from literary witches of antiquity" and serve as models for romance composers to create a new type of heroine possessing "competence, excellence, and wisdom in a world where women are often considered to lack these traits" (p. 133), the court society depicted in Thomas's *Tristan* is not interested in Iseut's qualities. In the second of the *Tristan* and Iseut chapters, "Empirical Practice Amidst Competing Claims," Doggett proposes that the feature most clearly distinguishing Thomas's story from Béroul's is that the latter represents its characters doubting the efficacy of empirical practice as fully rational, which is taken for granted in the former. The narrative thus presents love as a phenomenon susceptible of manipulation, but also questions the interpretation. The *Folie Tristan de Berne* goes even further, presenting the thoughts of the characters under the influence of intense emotion and in the process of making possibly faulty assumptions about the emotional state of the other. This is an interesting take on the traditional critical debate over the degree to which the lovers exercise free will over their love, for here the characters themselves take part in the debate.

Doggett chooses the *Roman de Silence* to demonstrate how Iseut's model developed in different directions in later romances. Scholars of this late thirteenth-century romance have been interested principally in the transvestite heroine, Silence, raised as a boy by her father to circumvent laws against female inheritance. But in chapter five, "Love and Medicine in the *Roman de Silence*," Doggett focuses attention on a different aspect of the romance, the medical skill of Silence's mother. Like *Cligés* and some of the Tristan narratives, the *Roman de Silence* opens with the story of the hero/heroine's parents, Cador and Euphemie, who is depicted as an empiric. However, her roles as healer and beloved are inseparably intertwined; Cador is physically injured and struck by love, and Euphemie's cures are both physical and emotional. Her empirical knowledge, writes Doggett, "is appropriated to flesh out the representation of love, allowing a strong link to be made between healing a poisoned body and a lovesick one" (p. 220). The happy love story of Silence's parents then serves as a standard against which other marriages in narrative are measured. That between Silence and Ebain, while not freely chosen by the heroine, is based on loyalty, which Doggett suggests becomes the defining characteristic of a positive marriage.

In "Reworked Elements in *Amadas et Ydoine*," Doggett reads this little-studied romance as a "travesty" of the elements treated seriously in the other works she has analyzed. Lovesickness and its cures are ridiculed. But, as she demonstrates, what comes up for mockery is not the female empiric working her rational magic, but creatures of folklore working miracles. Doggett's point is that the romance thus "accords a measure of respect to empirics" (p. 261). Moreover, by this point, the beloved's ability to heal has transformed into a miraculous ability to cure her lover.

Several recent studies demonstrate how drastically the modern critical lens of "courtly love" has tended to reduce the interest of romance heroines, obscuring the degree to which romance heroines are often clever and active.[3] Doggett's study with its shift of perspective away from the romance heroine as idealized courtly lady to a figure involved in taking care of people is a welcome addition to this body of scholarship. The point that loving is originally accompanied by the literal ability to heal and that the two slide into each other such that healing becomes a metaphor when medical knowledge begins to be monopolized by the university is an important one. Doggett's insistence on the rational as opposed to marvelous aspects of the beloved's activity counters earlier perceptions of romance heroines as capricious beings, remote and frustrating cousins of fairies. Her emphasis on the origins of love potions, sickness, and cures in the everyday business of empirical practice offers wonderful food for thought, suggesting that romance love discourse is at least as much indigenous as acquired from literary models. A tighter argument, clearly detailing the proposed genealogy and exactly what this has to add to our study of the romance would have been welcome, however. The different chapters' introductory material is often repetitive without clarifying the arguments and sub-arguments, and, although a progression of development is implied, it is not quite clearly outlined. Still, by drawing attention to a practice which is shown very persuasively to lie behind many of the love episodes of the medieval French romance, this fascinating study opens many new paths for research.

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[1] Jean Frappier, "Structure et sens du Tristan: version commune, version courtoise:" *Cahiers de Civilisation Médiévale* 6 (1963): 255-80; 441-53.

[2] Leslie W. Rabine, "Love and the New Patriarchy: Tristan and Isolde," *Tristan and Isolde: A Casebook*, ed. and intro. Joan Trasker Grimbert (New York and London: Garland Publishing Co., 1995): 37:74.

[3] Some examples include E. Jane Burns, *Courtly Love Undressed: Reading Through Clothes in Medieval French Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002); Kathy Krause *Reassessing the Heroine in Medieval French Literature*(Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001) and Peggy McCracken, *The Romance of Adultery: Queenship and Sexual Transgression in Old French Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998).

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