

Emma Lipton, *Affections of the Mind: The Politics of Sacramental Marriage in Late Medieval English Literature*. University of Notre Dame Press, 2007. Pp. 246.

In *Affections of the Mind*, Emma Lipton offers a rich account of the ways that late-medieval English texts negotiate competing discourses about marriage to re-imagine hierarchical models of social and religious authority and to articulate a coherent identity and ideology for the middle social strata. The book's title refers to a notion of marriage grounded in mutual consent and affection and opposed to competing models of marriage defined by consummation and the marital debt. Defining marriage in terms of sexuality and the payment of the marital debt affirmed the superiority of the celibate clergy over the laity and reinforced feudal models of obligatory service to a lord. Sacramental marriage, in contrast, offered the emerging lay middle strata a way to re-imagine their relationships to the aristocracy and the clergy. Through fresh readings of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century texts from varied genres, Lipton argues that sacramental marriage both provided a model for

more "horizontal" relationships between the middle strata and the aristocracy and also undercut clerical authority. *Affections of the Mind* reads late-medieval representations of domestic relationships between husbands and wives as a microcosm for broader social and political relationships. With its nuanced attention to the ways that the discursive constructions of marriage and the social values of the middle social strata inflect one another, Lipton's work elegantly illustrates how any analysis of gender and sexuality can be made richer and more precise by considering social status as well.

The first two chapters focus on the challenges that representations of sacramental marriage could pose to the conventions of romance and *fin amor*. The first chapter, "Married Friendship: An Ideology for the Franklin," explores how the marriage between Dorigen and Arveragus in Chaucer's *Franklin's Tale* draws on the language of classical accounts of friendship, revising *fin amor* tropes to emphasize free choice and mutual affection. The intertwined vocabularies of marriage and friendship allow the Franklin, himself a member of the middle social strata, to re-imagine the relationships among the men at the end of the *Tale*

in terms of a “horizontal political model focused on personal merit and participatory governance” (23). Lipton’s reading of the *Tale* examines the tension between Arveragus’s chivalric identity and an ethic of mutuality in social relationships through insightful readings of his relationships first with Dorigen and then with the other men in the *Tale*. The focus on Arveragus, however, leaves aside the question of how Dorigen’s relationship with Aurelius, which adheres to the conventions of *fin amor* despite the squire’s praise for Dorigen’s and Arveragus’s mutual affection, might also undercut that horizontal ideal for relationships among men. The second chapter elaborates the tension between public chivalric identity and private conjugal values through a reading of Gower’s *Traitié pour Essampler les Amantz Marietz*. This ballad sequence, often appended to the *Confessio Amantis*, diverges from the idealized masculinity celebrated in epics and romances by elevating moral responsibility for sexual practice over military success. In keeping with Lipton’s consistent attention to the relationship between challenges to aristocratic and religious authority, this chapter also points out that conjugal virtue promotes marriage over chastity as a challenge to clerical values. Both chapters emphasize masculine identity,

and the “potentially equalizing vision of social order” that Lipton persuasively identifies in these texts depends on understanding the relationships between men and women as models for the social relationships between men (p. 82).

The question of how women, as themselves members of the middle social strata, might fit into the broader social vision is addressed more directly in the second half of the book, which focuses on how representations of sacramental marriage legitimated and elevated marital piety. The third chapter examines the “reformist implications of orthodox marriage theology” in the N-Town Mary plays, showing that the plays deftly navigate debates about the compatibility between Mary’s marriage to Joseph and her chaste holiness and exploit the related inconsistencies in church teachings that elevate virginity but require marital sexuality (p. 92). Most interestingly, this chapter claims that, in privileging the linguistic rather than the corporeal performance of marriage, the dramas hint at the radical “sacramental force” of any lay words and actions, from theatrical performances like the N-Town plays to the everyday lives of married couples (p. 127). The final chapter explores the conflict between hagiographical and bourgeois attitudes toward

marriage in the *Book of Margery Kempe*. Even though Margery Kempe represents the violence of the marital debt as an impediment to her otherwise affectionate marriage, Margery's mystical marriage to the Godhead models a relationship in which love and sex are compatible. In Lipton's account, the *Book of Margery Kempe* reconstructs the dichotomies of theological debates about marriage to unsettle the spiritual hierarchy that places virgins above wives and widows and to reflect her own bourgeois values: "the moral valuation of marriage, and the idea that sex is an expression of love" (149).

*Affections of the Mind* does not seek to offer a comprehensive portrait of representations of late-medieval marriage; Lipton's ambitions, to her credit, are more narrowly focused on the particular interests and discursive strategies of the lay middle strata. Although each chapter focuses on a single text (and in some cases an arguably idiosyncratic one), each chapter bolsters the book's wider claim with extensive contextual material. Much of this material emphasizes the aristocratic and theological discourses that the central text engages, but there is also discussion of texts that further exemplify the lay middle strata's engagement with those discourses. For example, the

third chapter relates the dramas' destabilization of spiritual distinctions between married and celibate life to Lollard promotion of marital virtue. Nonetheless, some readers may find themselves wishing for more literary examples as evidence that bourgeois manipulation of marriage discourses was, indeed, a widespread representational strategy. Other readers, however, will find the book richer and more persuasive for its straightforward embrace of the challenge faced by any book that seeks to make a claim about a broad cultural phenomenon and to attend to the specific forms that phenomenon takes.

Lipton's insightful close readings will resonate particularly with scholars in literary studies, but this rigorous and admirably lucid book will be of interest to medievalists from a range of disciplines—including history, religious studies, and philosophy—and to any scholar interested in gender and sexuality in more recent periods as well. *Affections of the Mind* offers an important historical perspective on politicized debates about marriage that continue today.

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