

**Laine E. Doggett.** *Love Cures: Healing and Love Magic in Old French Romance*. Penn State Romance Studies. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009. Pp. x + 291. ISBN: 9780271035307.

In her recent book, Laine Doggett asks the reader to entertain the possibility that Tristan and Iseut's love potion was real, and posits that it could have been a mind-altering medicine produced by empiric medical practitioners in medieval Europe. This seemingly strange supposition should not cause the reader to flee, however. Rather, Doggett's book asks important questions about the nature and structure of medieval gender/power relations as embodied by female medical practitioners in Old French romances. Doggett links modern constructions of love as "sexual healing" with the medieval romance conflation of healer and beloved witnessed in the figure of Iseut. To this end, the book focuses on romances about or influenced by the love story of Tristan and Iseut. The book's central argument concerns the conflation of love and healing as a place where the dynamics of medieval marriage practices were negotiated and women were able to access power to choose their own husbands and/or lovers.

The book provides a nice framework for nonspecialists in the Introduction and chapter one. In particular, chapter one offers brief outlines of medieval medicine and magic; the marvelous in medieval literature; medieval marriage as an institution; and the myths and realities of courtly love. The chapters that follow analyze specific romances in the Tristan tradition that feature women as healers: Chrétien de Troyes's *Cligés*, Thomas's *Roman de Tristan*, Bérout's *Roman de Tristan*, and the related *Folie Tristans*, *Le Roman de Silence*, and *Amadas et Ydoine*. Most notably, chapters two, three, and four, on *Cligés* and the Tristan stories, offer some new and exciting readings of these texts. The organization of the book is not chronological; Doggett justifies that structure, but it does not work as well as one would like. The move from *Cligés* (ca. 1170s) back to the earliest Tristan stories (ca. 1150–60) then forward to *Le Roman de Silence* (late thirteenth century) and then back again to *Amadas et Ydoine* (ca. 1180–1220) is cumbersome and obscures the central argument.

The strength of Doggett's book lies in her reappraisal of female healers in medieval romance. Since the nineteenth century, critics have argued that figures such as Thessala in *Cligés* were inspired by mythological witches and Celtic folklore, relegating them to the supernatural world as if women with power could not exist in the "real" world as figures of power. Far too many critics have described Thessala as a witch, even though the text never uses the term "sorcière" in reference to her. Her activities are then automatically magical

rather than medical, despite what is actually described in the text. In one of the more egregious examples of critical bias, Doggett notes that the standard Greimas Old French Dictionary distinguishes between a female and male form of “mestre,” even though they are spelled identically. Thus, when Thessala is referred to as “mestre,” Alexander Micha translates the term to mean “servant” rather than “master.” However, as Doggett shows, the text clearly describes Thessala as a master of empirical medical practices, not as a mere servant, and not as a supernatural witch with otherworldly powers. This is where Doggett’s book shines. She convincingly demonstrates that women such as Thessala and Iseut who practice medicine in these romances are simply employing empirical medical practices as they would have been practiced in the Middle Ages—they are mixing herbs and applying poultices. The inspiration for these characters was not the mythological witch Medea, as many scholars have argued, but the medieval women who worked as healers. And, yes, even the love potion of the Tristan stories could be standard medieval medical practice. Doggett asks the reader to question why we assume that this love potion is magical. Could it not simply be a mind-altering drug that induces feelings of euphoria and a loss of inhibition that allows the lovers to express their nascent feelings? Why, when dealing with a medicine that was made by a woman, do we automatically assume that it is magical? Doggett argues that such assumptions erase the actual power of these women as empirical healers, perhaps intentionally.

As medievalists such as Monica Green (and Doggett here) demonstrate, there is no question that women practiced medicine in the Middle Ages. With the rise of the universities in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, theoretical medicine became privileged and empirical medical practitioners, especially women, faced increasingly institutionalized (and violent) opposition and suppression. Doggett argues that these romances participate in that erasure of women’s power as they conflate women’s medical knowledge with the beloved as healer. It is not Iseut’s medical knowledge that is remembered but the healing power of her love. Unfortunately, Doggett does not explore this argument enough, but chooses to focus on how love and healing are connected to medieval marriage practices as a place where women find a measure of autonomy in their marital destinies. It is not obvious that the specific example of medicine is necessary to Doggett’s argument about marriage. Rather, it could be simply that empirical medicine was one of the few areas where women were able to access power in the Middle Ages—it is the general question of power rather than the specific use of medicine that is at issue in her marriage argument. This constant theoretical tension undermines parts of Doggett’s analysis.

The weakest part of the book is the chapter on *Amadas et Ydoine* which does little to advance Doggett's claims, and, in fact, undermines them in several places. Doggett argues that *Amadas* is a travesty of the Tristan stories, and she makes extended references to high and low literary forms in this romance that have little relevance to her argument about love, healing, and marriage. In this chapter, Doggett moves from her convincing claims about women in romances as actual healers to a mishmash of claims about how the female healers in *Amadas* ARE inspired by Medea and some vague and undeveloped references to "good ladies" of Celtic folklore.

This last chapter leads one to believe that Doggett has attempted to do too much with this book as she tries to address love, healing, and marriage in the Tristan tradition and then in a romance that travesties that tradition. A narrower focus on love and healing without the marriage and travesty would allow for a greater exploration of her most compelling arguments about the erasure of women's power in these stories. There are a number of questions left unanswered, in particular about the role of medicine and love in stories outside of the Tristan tradition and the role of troubadour lyric in the linking of love and healing, which Doggett references once or twice but never cites or explores.

Overall, this book offers tantalizing rereadings of *Cligés*, *Le Roman de Silence*, and the Tristan stories that correct many misconceptions about women's roles in these stories, misconceptions perpetuated by modern critics. For this reason, this is a worthwhile book that offers possibilities of further study into the role of the female empiric in medieval European literature and society.

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