

The first thing that strikes one about this slim volume is that it is gorgeously illustrated. There are twenty-one full-page illustrations, eight of which make up four double-page spreads, with two of these double-pages representing single pages from their manuscript sources. Indeed, almost none of the pages is without illustration, and all the images are in color, so the reader has the luxurious sense of leafing through a manuscript library. The book is a co-publication with the British Library, and so all the reproductions are taken from that collection.

The book begins with three illustrations which immediately introduce the subject of the book, the representation of courtly love in medieval manuscripts. The half-title page shows a small picture in what appears to be a gold frame. The painting depicts a couple riding out, taken from a French Book of Hours of 1525 (BL Add MS 18854, f. 5). Following this, the frontispiece is a full page reproduction including a colored and illustrated frame. The main image shows a boat passing under a bridge over which a party is riding on horseback, and parts of a city are shown in the upper left-hand side of the page. The title is *A Boating Party c.1500*, and the source is BL Add MS 24098, f. 22v,

a Flemish Book of Hours apparently known as the 'Golf Book'. The title page itself contains a small circular image, *Lovers take a stroll, Late Fifteenth Century* from BL Add MS 4836, f. 4. It shows two figures, one wearing a blue and gold dress with a brown underskirt and a black head-dress, the other in a red gown with a brown hat. In the background, we see a trellis covered in greenery, and there is grass beneath their feet. The manuscript from which the image is taken is a French Book of Hours.

Porter's text opens with a discussion of nineteenth-century English and French constructions of medieval courtly love. She explains the origins of the term, and then describes the Gothic Revival that took place in Victorian England, setting its historical realism in the context of the antiquarianism of the period. Subsequent chapters outline a conception of romantic love in the Middle Ages which Porter sees as largely unconnected to the idea of courtly love. Here, she seems to run into difficulties as she presents both the idea that a desire for love and intimacy was as much of an underlying factor in the society of the Middle Ages as it is in society today, and the notion that we know very little about the emotions of those living in the period because of a

lack of documentation. It is difficult for Porter to capture either all the evidence, or the nuances of recent scholarship which has seen something of a revival of serious interest in the idea of courtly love, in a book of this size, and in the educational tone that is adopted throughout.

The second chapter, 'Courtly Love: "The Other Woman,"' sets out a convention of courtly love which is familiar from C. S. Lewis' account. Porter suggests that while the term refers to a stylized and idealistic relationship between a knight and his lady, it seems likely that the convention could have provided cover for adulterous behavior at court. The sections on the literary history of courtly love, beginning with Ovid and Andreas Capellanus, are easier to read, presumably because Porter is on surer ground. Beginning with the troubadours and the *Minesang*, she offers an informative account which includes the *Roman de la Rose* and an extended section on the various Arthurian traditions. These discussions are interspersed with sections on tournaments and other aspects of courtly life.

What Porter cannot include within the scope of her book are the various elements of pastiche and parody that creep into the later medieval texts on love, and it is this type of omission that makes it difficult to be sure of the level at which to judge this book. The suggestions for further reading are, for the most part, drawn from recent scholarship;

four of the suggestions date from the 1990s. There are, however, only seven texts on the reading list, and there is no bibliography to let the reader know about the wider sources that Porter consulted. Equally, the tone of the book is extremely definite, with a preponderance of declarative sentences, such as "The idea of courtly love had very little to do with the reality of ordinary romantic relationships" (9), which are unmitigated by the usual scholarly hedges.

Finally, I have difficulties which stem from the fact that the links between the text and the illustrations are rarely made explicit. Even in the discussion of the Arthurian texts, which appear to have attracted a number of commissions of manuscripts as well as capturing the imaginations of manuscript artists, there is no discussion of the manner of the depictions. In common with many scholars with access to modern editions, I have read a fair number of medieval romances, and certainly the canonical texts by Chrétien de Troyes and Malory that Porter discusses. What I am less sure about is how to 'read' a manuscript painting. I do not know what kinds of constraints the artists practiced under, or how the representations develop over time to reflect the cultural expectations of the societies that produced them. The wealth of illustrations means that I can try to imagine some of the answers for myself, based on the evidence that Porter offers, but I would have ap-

preciated some more direct discussion of these questions. There is much to enjoy, however, and it may be that I am asking too much of a volume that is already lucid, up-to-date in its approach to its topic, and carefully indexed, and which makes available such a wealth of contemporary illustrations of courtly love.

LOUISE SYLVESTER  
UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER