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Cynthia A. Gravlee

Review by: Ralph J. Hexter

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An Unruly *Parlement* of Ovidians

James J. Paxson and Cynthia A. Gravlee (eds.), *Desiring Discourse. The Literature of Love, Ovid through Chaucer* (Selinsgrove, PA: Susquehanna University Press; London: Associated University Presses, 1998), 239 pp.

As the preface to this collection of twelve essays indicates (pp. 7–8), *Desiring Discourse* began its gestation in a 1989 NEH summer seminar focused on Chaucer's *Troilus* in which some of the ultimate contributors took part but reflects ongoing conversation over several years which drew others into the project and saw it expand to make explicit the set of subtexts, Latin and French, that comprise a goodly portion of the medieval "literature of love" (pp. 7, 20). The volume itself affords a valuable opportunity for readers to think about the patch of discourse that stretched temporally from "Ovid through Chaucer," as the title has it, without claiming – how could it? – to have explored the terrain in an exhaustive fashion. Though the editors do not avail themselves of the medieval model, one might see them as presiding over a contemporary "council of love." If so, they are indulgent sovereigns. Though the introduction (by Paxson; on this more at the conclusion of this review) undertakes to explain how all twelve essays contribute to the overall aim and design of the volume, my experience of the collection is that while not a few do focus on the central theme, others seem to head in very different directions. They vary in other ways as well. While all are in English, they speak a great range of critical dialects, and while that is by no means a defect, the editors, who clearly perceived this (cf. Paxson on p. 20), did not attempt to provoke dialogue between and among the entries. Neither did the editors impose on their contributors regularity in the trivial matter of length. While the average length of the contributions (notes included) works out to just over sixteen pages, five of the essays are quite short (10–12 pp. each), while four are almost twice as long (21–23 pp.). This is neither here nor there, and as I shall have occasion to point out, excellent contributions fall at either end of this scale. But what I fear may underlie this, and what appears to me as the gravest consequence of the editors' apparent *laissez faire* approach, is that they did not decide, given the overall size of the book, to exercise stricter control and perhaps even exclude some chapters that did not contribute as directly to the volume's theme. I understand the personal and political difficulties that this editorial obligation entails, especially if the volume was intended to represent and commemorate a series of exchanges inspired by Robert Hanning, director of the original seminar and acknowledged (p. 8) as tutelary divinity of the whole enterprise, but a more focused collection of perhaps 8–10 essays might have served readers better. Indeed, while length and quality do not always go hand in hand, my sense is that some of the contributors did not have sufficient scope fully to develop their arguments, and possibly for this reason do not appear in the best light.

The editors seized the opportunity offered by the essays themselves and divided the collection, in "accord ... with chronological and linguistic or national tradition" (p. 20), into three parts each containing four pieces. Part 1 bears the subtitle "Desiring through Ovid, Ancient and Medieval," and includes the contributions of Sarah Spence, Joan G. Haahr, Warren Ginsberg, and Anne Howland Schotter. Part 2, "Desiring through the Troubadours, Desiring through the *Lais* of Marie de France," has pieces by Simon Gaunt, Charlotte Gross, Sanda Pierson Prior, and Robert W. Hanning. Part 3, "Chauce-

rian Discourses of Desire," concludes the volume with the essays of Nancy M. Reale, Robert M. Stein, and the volume's co-editors, Cynthia A. Gravlee and James J. Paxson. One notes that in the titles to parts 1 and 2, "through" is used in a sense unlike its temporal meaning in the volume's title; that would again be neither here nor there if this other sense was really explained.

Part 1 clearly sets out to establish the Ovidian and classical "horizon" of discourse, and indeed, the very first essay, Sarah Spence's "The Judgment of Aeneas, the Judgment of Paris, and the *Roman d'Eneas*" (pp. 27–38) moves from the Vergilian/epic horizon to the Ovidian/erotic. In the subsequent piece, "Justifying Love: The Classical *Recusatio* in Medieval Love Literature" (pp. 39–61), Joan G. Haahr describes a comparable trajectory though over a longer temporal sweep and with a concomitant loss of subtlety. Spence poses a series of provocative questions, and indeed it is with the posing of a question that she begins the essay: "When Aeneas kills Turnus in the scene that ends Vergil's *Aeneid*, he poses a moral question that remains unresolved to this day: Did he do the right thing?" (p. 27). Though pressed to outline her argument in very few pages, Spence economically and suggestively adumbrates a complex set of relations. (Only rarely does the compression seem too extreme; in the first sentence, "he poses" stands, I presume, as shorthand for "Vergil poses by having Aeneas act in this way," although it may be that further subtlety on Spence's part has simply escaped me.) While Vergil may be a temporal precursor of Ovid, and epic a foil for elegy, Spence refuses such simple binarisms. "[T]he *Eneas* poet chose the *Aeneid*," she contends, "as his primary source precisely because he saw the Latin poem as one in which the epic and the elegiac were unresolved" (p. 29). I do wish Spence had had the space, or had taken the time, to help us understand all she means by "elegy" and the extent this is a conception of elegy that would have been shared by contemporaries of either Ovid or the *Eneas* poet – or even if that is important. What does work nicely in this economic treatment is what I take to be her central insight: "The end of the *Eneas* ... is not flat because the author missed the point of his source. On the contrary, it is flat relative to its source because he transposed the moral issues presented there to the central portion of his work. Camille ... replaces Turnus and, in so doing, frees up both the hero and his text" (p. 31). As Spence writes, explicating the gendered as well as generic economy of the *Eneas*, "By focusing the work on the women killed, the deaths ... become less tragic. What is being killed off is not a part of the hero but, rather, his negative other. In mediating the choice by focusing it on women instead of men, the text presents a series of defining and negative others whose deaths serve not to destroy the hero but rather to construct him" (p. 34).

Where Spence focused on a very few moments in a single work and its classical pretext, Haahr sets out to give us an ambitious survey. The "red thread" that provides unity to her discussion is "the rhetorical device called *recusatio*" (p. 40). As Haahr reads this, this is not an empty gesture but rather a "'refusal' to obey convention" and hence the "means [by] which Ovid and other Roman amorists introduced the issue of the poetic legitimacy of amatory subjects" (*ibid.*). Indeed, Haahr tropes *recusatio* (and at times mere *praeteritio*) as a clearing of a space within a dominant (epic) discourse to make room for an abjected and potentially subversive one (eros). To her examples from Ovid one might well add the quatrain that introduces the second edition of the *Amores* (i.e., the one we have) and now precedes *Am.* 1.1. As she moves to medieval examples, she aims to describe *recusatio* on a cultural level: "Medieval poets ... were not content merely to use the *recusatio* as a specific rhetorical stratagem; for them it

took on broader structural and narrative implications, leading the way to a type of courtly composition characterized by dialectic, irony, and persistent challenge to convention" (p. 45). She certainly convinces me that Guillaume IX of Aquitaine is truly "Ovidian" in this sense. Her essay is expansive where Spence's was compressed, and it is not so tightly argued. I do not understand whether she means "No longer simply ..." (p. 51) in a temporal or some other sense, and I wonder, when she asserts that "the war ultimately dooms the love affair" (p. 54) of Troilo and Criseida in Boccaccio's *Filostrato*, how it is that in a piece on *recusatio* Haahr can write as if an author had no power to control his discourse. A final reflex of the lack of economy is the conclusion of the essay, which seems to me merely to end.

Warren Ginsberg's "*Ovidius ethicus?* Ovid and the Medieval Commentary Tradition" (pp. 62–71) is once again a tightly economical piece, well exemplifying the fact that length is no measure of value. Ginsberg offers insights, and telling formulations, on the depth of irony that underlies – or rather, gapes beneath – Ovid's stance in the *Ars amatoria* (e.g., "what need for an art if from start to finish all that winning amounts to is seizure by force?", p. 64). But in his most telling formulation, he shows that "[b]y anticipating the commentators' moral bias, Ovid preempts their desire to master his text; he has already shown that the ethics of his text, as well as its educative value, depend upon the inclination of the reader. However much interpretation would discipline its meaning, the *Ars* has proleptically assured that we hear a countervoice" (p. 67; in a note we have the even more drastic formulation: "Ovid authors the commentary tradition as well" [p. 71, n. 12]). Indeed, the final three pages of his argument (pp. 67–69) offer a sophisticated but easily comprehensible model of the dialogism of text and commentary in the Ovidian tradition, but he does not stop there. He cites Foucault – and in a volume otherwise not slow to invoke modern theoretical masters, that he is alone in this I find odd —, observing that Ovid, like Foucault, understood that "the discourses of knowledge mask less their will to power than their own impulse toward pleasure [C]arnal cravings haunt all ascetic regimens" (p. 69). This essay represents an important contribution for all students of Ovid in the Middle Ages and especially of the systematics of commentary.

Part 1 concludes with Anne Howland Schotter's "The Transformation of Ovid in the Twelfth-Century *Pamphilus*" (pp. 72–86), a very productive exploration of the Ovidian roots of variously gendered and empowered voices in the so-called *comedia*. It is not just that *Pamphilus'* Galathea echoes Ovidian women; as Schotter shows, she often speaks "like a man," and by so doing gains a remarkable degree of female subjectivity (cf. pp. 75, 77). Given the relative rarity of response to the last pair of lovers in the *Heroides*, Acontius and Cydippe, whose letters are 20 and 21 in modern collections (with 21 drastically apocopated in the medieval transmission), Schotter's demonstration that Galathea clearly echoes some of Acontius' language is quite interesting (p. 79). Schotter's discussion of the rape of Philomela in *Met.* 6 is quite good (pp. 80–81); with the *Metamorphoses* in mind, I missed a discussion of the name of the young woman in *Pamphilus* – Galathea – with her own history in Ovid's poem.

Not that students of the classical tradition might not well also have interests in Occitan lyric, the *lais* of Marie de France, and Chaucer, but given that the present review is expressly for the *IJCT*, I shall proceed more briskly through parts 2 and 3. The first essay in part 2, Simon Gaunt's "Discourse Desired: Desire, Subjectivity, and *Mouvance* in *Can vei la lauzeta mover*" (pp. 89–110), is in fact one of the most accomplished and elegant of the essays in the entire volume. It might well terrify classicists,

especially those who have any investment in Lachmannian textual criticism – not that the medieval tradition of classical texts exhibits the kind of fluidity (“*mouvance*”) that characterizes the texts of many troubadour lyrics as they are preserved in medieval anthologies. Gaunt draws important interpretive conclusions from a careful analysis of the radically different order of the stanzas in this famous lament by Jaufré Rudel. While the demonstration is valuable in itself, Gaunt quite neatly links it to the entire volume’s stated theme: “[i]f the text and structure of a poem are unstable, the status of the subject and of his desire is in consequence problematic” (p. 90). Students of the classical tradition will appreciate the reminder that “Narcissus, in the Middle Ages, was an *exemplum* of unrequited love, not of self-love, and the image he saw in the fountain was not himself but an image of perfection ... ” (p. 94, with reference to further bibliography on p. 108, n.6). However important Narcissus is for modern readings, and readers, of Jaufré’s poem, displaying the orthographical variants at this point in the textual tradition, Gaunt drily observes that “these variants may well indicate that the reference to Narcissus was not as crucial to an understanding of the poem for medieval transmitters as it has been for modern critics” (p. 96). While I fully embrace his conclusion that the poem – and the desire – represented in modern editions is really that of its most influential twentieth-century editor, Carl Appel (pp. 101, 105f.), I do not quite follow Gaunt when he proposes, on the basis of the fact “[t]hat the pieces of jigsaw seem able so successfully to make different pictures,” that “the stanzas were composed with some degree of mobility in mind” (p. 102). Granted he says “may,” but for me the issue is not one of “composition” but that, whatever the order of the lyric’s first performance, few if any scribes regarded it as authoritative.

The next essay, Charlotte Gross’s “*Loc Aizi/Anima Mundi: Being, Time, and Desire in the Troubadour Love Lyric*” (pp. 111–22), simply does not gel for me; perhaps the argument(s) that might convince me of the necessity, or interpretive value, of linking the poetic image of the “pleasant place” (not quite a reflex of *locus amoenus*) and the Platonic “world soul” known to readers of the *Timaeus*, were left on the cutting-room floor when it was determined that this essay could only be twelve pages long. (The editors might have seen that n. 27 on p. 121, on “*lo bels Narcisus*” and *Can vei*, i.a., referred to the essay that precedes this one in this very volume.) Sandra Pierson Prior’s “*Kar des dames est avenu / L’aventure*: Displacing the Chivalric Hero in Marie de France’s *Eliduc*” (pp. 123–39) is a nice treatment of Marie’s lay called by that title; issues of naming and focalization comprise the focus of the piece, but I have trouble discerning any significant connection with the theme of the collection.

The same is not true of the last essay in part 2, Robert W. Hanning’s “*The Talking Wounded: Desire, Truth Telling, and Pain in the Lais of Marie de France*” (pp. 140–61). This is another of the most accomplished and rewarding essays in the collection, exemplifying – again without making heavy weather of methodology – the tactics of “cultural poetics.” (Its notes also afford readers one of the richest bibliographical troves in the whole volume.) Hanning’s critical vocabulary is sophisticated, even witty. (I don’t know about witty, but of the wife in *Yonec* he writes that in her case, “‘Talking wounded’ ... does [not] earn one a tomb of one’s own” [p. 153]. Ouch.) Hanning, focusing on *Guigemar* but adducing other texts, offers a fascinating reading of images and image complexes, seeing in the figure of the wounded deer one for Marie’s own marginal positionality: “the *bise* embodies Marie’s sense of herself (and other speaking women) as always already wounded – as speaking from a woman’s permanent cultural situation of marginalization, which is only aggravated if she adopts an authoritative

voice" (p. 149). In the cultural poetic mode, details are telling, so let me quote generously, here of his analysis from Silvie's deer in the *Eneas*:

From one angle of vision, the deer, so domesticated by a woman that it prefers female to male company (its cohort of *bisches*), appears to be a baleful exemplum of the consequences of feminization on male warriors; from another, however, this image of peaceful intergender association suggests a countervailing, possibly resistant ideal of 'cultural androgyny' that finds spectacular emblematic embodiment in the magnificent antlers of the *cerf* transformed into a source of illumination for the lord's table. In short, the tame *cerf* functions as a compelling image of the power and limits of a female-sponsored courtliness – a cultural force enlightening a feudal world but incompatible with (and wounded by) ideals of aristocratic masculine aggressiveness (p. 146).

Opening Part 3, Nancy M. Reale, in "Reading the Language of Love: Boccaccio's *Filostrato* as Intermediary between the *Commedia* and Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*" (pp. 165–76), shows that, following Boccaccio and his Pandaro, Chaucer uses Pandarus as a virtual counter-Dante to trace a trajectory that falls spectacularly short of transcendence. "In order for Pandarus's secular romantic program to be realized, Troilus must resign himself to not knowing his beloved. The closer Troilus comes to Criseyde, the deeper becomes his mystification Pandarus ... is the glue that holds the relationship together in the absence of transcendent knowledge. He is the Virgil, the Bernard, the Beatrice of the sublunary world ... " (p. 169).

Cynthia A. Gravlee, co-editor of the volume, offers "Presence, Absence, and Difference: Reception and Deception in *The Franklin's Tale*" (pp. 177–87), a big title for a relatively slight piece. The references to Jauss and "horizon of expectations" at the beginning and end (pp. 177, 185) notwithstanding, "reception" does not seem central to the argument, and I never did find out what "difference" – Derridean? – had to do with it. ("Presence" and "Absence": Arveragus, Aurelius and the rocks all come and go.) Gravlee does make her case as far as "deception" is concerned; I very much liked the formulation "the tale outwits the teller" (p. 178). In short, while this is a perfectly competent "rereading" of the tale, I cannot see that it makes a significant contribution to the theme of the collection.

Likewise, Robert M. Stein's "The Conquest of Femenye: Desire, Power, and Narrative in Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*" (pp. 188–205), seems more satisfying as a reading of the first of the *Canterbury Tales* than as a contribution to the volume's discourse on love. Though not among the smallest, it nonetheless seems to suffer from compression; for example, introducing the "five structural entities" or "series" he wants to present, he repeatedly emphasizes the brevity and selectivity of his treatment here (p. 192), and in fact, two of them cannot be permitted even a full page. Perhaps the most suggestive angle of his analysis, the political and social overtones of the tale (and of the Knight's telling of it), heads in a direction that is not prominently developed elsewhere in the volume. The extreme speed with which Stein must move through his argument is frustrating for that reason, and also because of the quality of some of his close readings. For example, introducing vv. 889–91, he writes, "[p]erhaps the Knight's constant anxiety about the success of his performance is actually an ironic indication of his superior gamesmanship in the quintessentially chivalric game of the renaissance

courtier *avant la lettre*, the predetermined winner playing as if there were a real game" (p. 190).

The final contribution, "The Semiotics of Character, Trope, and Troilus: The Figural Construction of the Self and the Discourse of Desire in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*" (pp. 206–226), by co-editor Paxson, is again among the longer of the volume's pieces and yet again seems to be a part of a much longer discussion, knowledge of which might have been beneficial to the appreciation of the final chapter. Here, the dense vocabulary of rhetorical figures, coupled with unabashed critical name-dropping – forgive me, but in four pages, we have Koretsky, Vance, Greimas, Wasserman, Žižek, Lacan, Kristeva, Hillis Miller, and Dinshaw (pp. 217–20)— leaves this reader more perplexed than illuminated. As far as I can determine, none of the several critical vocabularies Paxson relies on here has been part of readers' experience in the volume; I do not wish to say that they are not of potential value, but it does not contribute to the volume's coherence, especially in its concluding moment, to put them on parade and then run the parade by in fast-forward. Paxson focuses his analysis on Troilus's "frenzy" in book 4, indeed on a pair of stanzas (4.225–38), which, in Paxson's terms, "stages the self-reflexive status of 'Troilus,' a fictionally invented character. To repeat: on discourse-level, Troilus suffers figural depiction as a reified entity [T]he figural images of encasement depict Troilus as the trope *prosopopoeia* itself, as an anthropomorphism of *prosopopoeia*, a personification of personification, if you will. One might conclude further that the passage is an allegory of the invention of a *prosopopoeia*" (p. 214; original emphasis). Intriguing are the examples of linguistic utterances that pass beyond, or fall short, of ordinary language, such as Troilus' sighs, his apostrophizing "O"s, and his inward laughter (pp. 218–19).

Finally, let me turn to "The Medieval World of Desire, Discourse, Reception, and Writing: An Introduction" (pp. 11–23), also by Paxson. Of course, for the reader, it will be a return, as it was for me, since I had read it once when I began the volume. Rereading it only confirmed my sense that the banner under which Paxson would have all twelve essays march – "The essays in *Desiring Discourse* acknowledge desire as a very powerful and dominant discourse in medieval culture" (p. 12) – is so broad as to offer no substantive unifying force for the entire collection. It is true that many of the essays "accommodate a poetics of female response and the commensurate assertion of (potential) female rights or power" (p. 13), following – as is acknowledged – the insights of now several generations of feminist scholars. Having read the entire collection, I did not, however, get the sense that more than a few even attempted to achieve what Paxson goes on immediately to claim, namely, that "they locate the rhetorical scene of persuasion and the admirational discourse of desire not just as acts of immediate and contained male-controlled verbal act and social praxis, but as universal figures for human cognition and ontology in general" (*ibid.*). I'm afraid that too much of what follows veers between the flat-footed (e.g., the explication of the volume's title, pp. 14–15) and the portentous (e.g., the conclusion of the above-mentioned explication: "Already in our volume's title, the fixed ontology of grammar – with its privileging of subject over object, active over passive, masculine over feminine – inches towards readjustment, rupture, deconstruction," p. 15). Many critics are hailed in passing, but perhaps the most telling invocation is that of Roland Barthes (*The Lover's Discourse* cited on p. 14 and then again on p. 20). Goodness knows that neither the volume nor Paxson needs another critical "-ism," but the perspective of the late '90s might have suggested that one possible mode of conceptualization that might have

described the rupture and overcoming of (gendered) binarism might be named the “queer.”

Paxson claims for the volume that “[t]aken together, the essays work to reshape modern readers’ receptional horizon regarding the currency of Ovid in medieval and postmedieval Western culture in particular and of the ‘lovers’ discourse’ in general. This discourse, preeminently among all discourses, persists at first *appearing* to be self-evident while it is in truth fraught with complications, confusions, disjunctions, and aporias in need of affirmation and reconstitution” (p. 20, original emphasis). Does the volume achieve this end? Well, it furthers it, but I must say that *as a collection* – please note the emphasis – *Desiring Discourse* doesn’t strike me as marking a particularly coherent or distinguished advance within that larger conversation. This of course is not to say that the same is true of even the majority of the contributions. Several I find of the highest quality, as I trust my review has made clear. I don’t believe, though, that the volume offers sufficient “added value” to the individual contributions, which, to my mind, thus stand or fall on their own. Now in saying this, I also do not mean to imply that they do not participate in ongoing scholarly discussion – that they clearly do – but rather that this scholarly conversation, and the work of “reshaping” Paxson describes, extends far, far beyond the covers of this particular book.

The volume concludes with a list of contributors and indices of authors and subjects. There are an exceedingly small number of those kind of trivial errors that it is virtually impossible for even careful editors to banish utterly: “represssed” (p. 29); the English translation on p. 52 begins at a point prior to the verses of *Cligès* actually quoted (p. 52); “Allisan” (p. 84) and “Allison” (p. 85) for “Alison”; “cousin’s” for “cousins” (p. 193). It escapes me why on p. 39 “*optimae vocis*” is given – cited? – in the genitive.

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Lexikographisch-lexikologische Streifzüge zum Wortschatz Notkers des Deutschen

Heinrich Götz, *Deutsch und Latein bei Notker. Ergänzungen zum Notker-Glossar von E.H. Sehr* (Tübingen: M. Niemeyer, 1997), IX + 120 pp. (im folgenden = Götz 1997)

1. Einführung

Notker der Deutsche (ca. 950–1022), *magister* im Benediktinerkloster St. Gallen, hat ein erstaunlich umfangreiches, vielseitig gelehrtes Werk hinterlassen, das ihn auf der höchsten Höhe der Wissenschaft seiner Zeit zeigt. Es besteht, soweit es erhalten ist, neben wenigen lat. Originalwerken zum größten Teil aus zweisprachigen, d.h. lat.-dt. Bearbeitungen lat. Werke. Die Hauptwerke sind die *Consolatio Philosophiae* des Boethius, die aristotelischen Schriften *Categoriae* und *Peri Hermeneias (De interpretatione)* in den lat. Übersetzungen des Boethius, die beiden ersten Bücher *De nuptiis Philologiae et*