



Ovid's Art and the Wife of Bath: The Ethics of Erotic Violence

Marilynn Desmond

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Ovid's *Art and the Wife of Bath* examines how Ovid's *Ars amatoria* shaped the erotic discourses of the medieval West. The *Ars amatoria* circulated in medieval France and England as an authoritative treatise on desire; consequently, the sexualities of the medieval West are haunted by the imperial Roman constructions of desire that emerge from Ovid's text. The *Ars amatoria* ironically proposes the erotic potential of violence, and this aspect of the *Ars* proved to be enormously influential. Ovid's discourse on erotic violence provides a script for Heloise's epistolary expression of desire for Abelard. The *Roman de la Rose* extends the directives of the *Ars* with a rhetorical flourish and poetic excess that tests the limits of Ovidian irony. While Christine de Pizan critiqued the representations of erotic violence in the *Rose*, Chaucer appropriates the Ovidian discourse from the *Roman de la Rose* to construct the *Wife of Bath*—a female figure that today's readers find uncannily familiar. Well written and provocative, this book will interest scholars of premodern literature, especially those who work on Medieval English and French, as well as classical, texts. Marilyn Desmond draws on feminist and queer theory, which places Ovid's *Art and the Wife of Bath* at the cutting edge of debates in gender and sexuality.

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