Emily Davis. *Rethinking the Romance Genre: Global Intimacies in Contemporary Literary and Visual Culture*. New York: Palgrave, 2013. Pp. 236. US$95.

With a few notable exceptions such as Laura Chrisman's *Rereading the Imperial Romance*, the romance genre has received little sustained analysis from transnational or postcolonial perspectives. Even existing works such as Chrisman's are narrow in geographic scope and tend to focus on Victorian romance fiction. Emily Davis' *Rethinking the Romance Genre* represents an important step in studies of the genre, and the book is in particular a timely and significant resource for the study of contemporary global romance from a postcolonial feminist perspective.

Davis follows a tradition of scholarship on the romance that explores the genre's political complexities. Taking an even more positive stance than early scholarship in the field such as Janice Radway's *Reading the Romance* and Tania Modleski's *Loving with a Vengeance*, Davis argues that "global romances provide crucial lessons for a transnational feminist politics . . . in an era of flexible global capitalism" (2). While acknowledging, as have previous scholars, that popular literature is often politically compromised, Davis nevertheless insists that popular genres can be harnessed to radical politics. While she may be overstating the case somewhat—it is not exactly clear how the global romances under her investigation provide *crucial* lessons for transnational feminism, for example—the book nevertheless successfully challenges the widespread views among scholars and pundits that romance is incompatible with politics or politically conservative.

In the first part of her book, Davis examines utopian texts that use romance narratives to imagine national and transnational alliances. Specifically, this section studies South African, interracial, anti-apartheid romances of the 1980s and finds that they deploy problematic discourses of masculinist nationalism. Davis also examines texts that revise the colonial romance tradition ("a love story between a Western white woman and a colonial male subject" [22]) to overcome the limitations of the nationalist romance and envision the possibilities of transnational alliances, particularly between women from the global North and South.

The second part of Davis' book focuses on gothic texts that challenge the romance tradition. Davis argues that the romance is one of the favored forms of colonialist rhetoric and that anti-colonialist texts therefore use the gothic, romance's "dark twin," in an effort to "expose romance as an instrument of oppression passed on by colonialism to a contemporary neocolonial world

system dominated by economic globalization" (102). This portion of the text demonstrates impressive geographic and textual range and studies novels and plays set in the Caribbean, the Philippines, and India as well as contemporary film and television.

The main problem with Davis' otherwise solid and important book is its tendency toward category errors. This occurs in her history of the romance genre early in the book and in her choice of romances for analysis later in the book. While the former may be more justifiable than the latter, both expose the underlying problem. In her brief history of the romance tradition in the introduction of her book, Davis traces the genre from Greek sources to medieval courtly narrative poems in twelfth-century France to seventeenth- and eighteenth-century novels. At this point in history, she suggests, the romance bifurcates into utopian stories (of "romantic love in a feminized domestic sphere" and "masculinized adventures of nationalist heroes") and dystopian gothic stories representing "fears associated with the social and economic changes" of early modernity (6). Contemporary gothic romances, she argues, reflect fears about globalization—that is, enduring anxieties about modernity.

While some of this history is familiar and consistent with definitions of romance offered by literary historians like Northrop Frye, it has the effect of admitting just about any text into the romance tradition. Rider Haggard's *She*, which we would ordinarily think of today as fantasy or adventure, and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, which we would ordinarily call horror or gothic or science fiction, become romances under Davis' definition. It is undoubtedly true that the term "romance" has undergone powerful changes historically, and this partially justifies including texts in the genre that we would not categorize today as romances. Nevertheless, one senses that Davis uses the historical capaciousness of the genre for instrumental rather than theoretical-historical purposes. That is, it allows her to include texts that advance her argument about the compatibility of romance and politics but which have only loose connections to the kinds of texts we recognize as romances today.

Davis studies works like Jessica Hagedorn's *Dogeaters*, which is a political and domestic story about the lives of several characters living under the regime of a Filipino dictator; an episode of the television show *The X-Files* about a gothic murder investigation; and *Maria Full of Grace*, a film about drug smuggling, all under the rubric of the romance genre. In the conclusion of her book, she considers the way social media like Twitter and Facebook allow new forms of connection and intimacy among users. "Like the romance," Davis argues, "the generic structures of new social media, and the intimacies they generate, are flexible and often politically unpredictable. . . . Activists and artists can find ways to appropriate these technologies, to push

their generic limitations, just as the authors and directors covered in this book have done with romance" (168). Later, she muses: "[W]hat better way [is there] to describe large-scale social movements against globalization than as tentative intimacies between strangers" (170)?

It is not at all clear how social media represent "genres," let alone how political alliances enabled by such technology are connected to romance. While politics certainly makes strange bedfellows, this is only true in a metaphoric sense. Davis seems to assume it is literally true that romantic love and political solidarity are the same. By the end of her book, we have traveled far from the romance genre and the kinds of intimacy it encourages. Readers are likely to agree that many of the texts Davis examines have significant political import, but it does not require much effort to make this case, since many of the works are fundamentally political rather than romantic. Readers are less likely to agree that the texts she examines, particularly in the second part of her book, are in fact romances.

Despite these problems, *Rethinking the Romance Genre* is likely to be an influential text in the field of romance studies. It is certainly overdue, and I anticipate that similar work will soon follow its groundbreaking lead.

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