

# **WORLD LITERATURE I (ENG 251)**

# **Courtly Love Study Guide**

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Development of Courtly Love	Troubadours	Troubadour Poetry	Eve and Mary	Historical Background of Courtly Love	Courts of Love
Andrew the Chaplain	The Art and Rules of Love	Rules of Love and Bernart de Ventadorn	Rules of Love and Marie de France	Rules of Love and Boccaccio	Uncourtly Love

# DEVELOPMENT OF COURTLY LOVE

Courtly Love as a concept, if not as a practice, developed out of a mixture of Arab Love Poetry and Troubadour Poetry. The Cult of the Virgin Mary got mixed in a bit later.

11th cen	ury Arab Love Poetry; lady worship; joi (sexual)
12th century Troubadour Poetry; fin'amorsadultery (Bernart de Ventadorn); Conjugal Courtly Love (	
13th cen	ury EVE & MARY: Marian Cult and Love Poetry; mixture of love and religion (Laura, Beatrice)

Although today the notion of whether or not there ever was a cult or practice of Courtly Love has come under much attack, one can find poetry that clearly used its concepts, especially in the 12th and 13th centuries.

There are three unique aspects of Courtly Love:

the ennobling force of human love
the elevation of the beloved above the lover
love as ever unsatisfied, ever increasing desire

(Following Denomy, *The Heresy of Courtly Love* (1947), 20-21)

This power of transformation, of ennobling the character of the lover, is the distinguishing characteristic of Courtly Love. Courtly love is something entirely new in Europe, and the major source of our modern ideas about romantic love.

Courtly love is not very popular currently, especially not in serious literature and film. Why? Maybe there's a relation between the woman's movement and the decline of courtly love? An interesting question to think about.

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# TROUBADOURS

Troubadours: They flourished between 1100 and 1350 and were attached to various courts in the south of France. The troubadours wrote almost entirely about sexual love and developed the concept and practice of courtly love

There was no tradition of passionate love literature in the European middle ages before the twelfth century, although there was such a tradition in Arabic-speaking Spain and Sicily. This Arab love poetry was readily accessible to Europeans living in Italy and

Spain and was a major source of the Troubadour-developed cult of courtly love.

Troubadour love poetry, although conceptually adulterous, inspired the man (and perhaps the woman) and ennobled the lover's character.

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# THE MAIN FEATURES OF TROUBADOUR POETRY:

an attitude of subservience and fidelity to a cold and cruel mistress an exorbitant and quasi-religious praise of the lady's beauty the requirement that love be extramarital

"Though [this]...love was sensual, their ideal of "pure" love prohibited sexual intercourse between the lovers at least in theory." Of course, in fact, people probably did what they always have done.

(following: Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics, 871)

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### **EVE & MARY - WOMEN IN THE MIDDLE AGES**

Feudal nobility arranged marriage to suit families' advantages, often while the children were still infants.

A married woman was the ward of her husband, had limited legal rights and was subject to the will of her husband, who had the power to punish her physically.

Pregnancy and childbirth were frequent and risky.

The middle ages produced a great deal of misogynic literature expressing the traditional church position:

women were inferior: from Adam's rib
women were sinful: story of the Fall

Not only were women inferior, but they had characters like that of the serpent, cursed by God like the Genesis serpent to a lowly life of servitude and pain

However.

There was Mary as well as Eve to provide images of medieval womanhood. Mary was not only praiseworthy for her holiness, but for her embodiment of ideal feminine traits. Mary's primary virtues centered on her freedom from sexuality. She was conceived by divine intervention and she conceived Jesus immaculately. The "good" feminine was thus divorced from sexuality, although not from motherhood.

During the 13th century, Mary increased in importance as the divine feminine mediator between human beings and God. She interceded for human beings seeking salvation, as Beatrice did for Dante.

The exaltation of the beatified Virgin Mary climaxed in the Marian cult or cult of the Virgin Mary, which influenced the literature, music and art of the high and late Middle Ages.

Consequently, at the same time that people were praying to the Virgin Mary for salvation, they were condemning Eve for the Fall of Man. This **Eve/Mary dualism** allowed and even encouraged conflicting attitudes toward medieval women.

On the one hand, women held a high position in the system of Christian redemption, yet on the other hand, they were responsible for the wretched, sinful, corrupt state of fallen humanity.

This dualistic religious attitude towards women offers us some insight into the curious mixture of love and religion, sex and purity

we find in the courtly love poetry and stories of the Middle Ages.

(The above section is based on the Introduction to *Three Medieval Views of Women*, translated and edited by Fiero, Pfeffer, & Allain)

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# HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF COURTLY LOVE

Neither the Greeks nor the Romans thought that passionate love between the sexes could improve or transform the lovers. Rather, they thought of passionate love as either a punishment inflicted on men by the Gods, akin to madness, or as mere sensual gratification, not to be taken very seriously.

While antiquity did not approve of passionate love between the sexes, Christianity absolutely deplored it.

Even passionate love between spouses was considered theologically sinful, if unavoidable, until the thirteenth century when the Church began to modify its attitudes on this issue.

So, when a medieval passionate lover obediently subjects himself to the will of his beloved lady, he grants her a status which women did not enjoy either in Antiquity or in the Middle Ages.

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# COURTS OF LOVE

Eleanor of Aquitaine was queen of the Court at Poitiers, France, in the late 12th c. Here she and her daughter, Marie, Countess of Champagne, set up a court controlled by women which aimed at "civilizing" the rather rough society of the area. Many gifted poets and scholars came to her court at Poitiers. A unique situation where wealthy powerful women were able to create their own environment.

The doctrine of Courtly Love was designed to teach courtiers how to be lovely, charming and delightful. Its basic premise was that being in love would teach you how to be loveable and pleasing; so love taught courtesy.

This kind of love is a social phenomenon, designed for communal living at a wealthy court where people had plentiful leisure and desired to entertain and be entertained delightfully.

This ideal of courtly love which developed in Poitiers helped to free women from the role of inferior, destructive Eve and take on some of the status and elevation of the beatified Mary. Here, a woman instead of being the property of man, which was the case in feudal Europe, is the mistress of a man who is her creature and property.

Marie and Eleanor had a court of perhaps 60 elegant noble ladies who would hold a Court of Love where they would dispute, jury and judge questions of love according to their code of courtly love.

Of course, all of these Court of Love judgments are based on a code and ideals that have little to do with the realities of woman's position in the feudal society. This was a social court, not a legal one.

(The above section is based on Kelly, Eleanor of Aquitaine.)

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### ANDREW THE CHAPLAIN -- THE CODE OF COURTLY LOVE

Marie had Andrew the Chaplain, a cleric at the Court of Poitiers, write a formal code of love which would instruct people in the proper behavior of lovers as part of her attempts to civilize Poitiers.

Ovid's Ars Amatoria or Art of Loving was the source for Andrew's Art of Courtly Love. Ovid had written a cynical spoof on the fine art of seduction reduced to a set of rules. However, when Andrew, under Marie's direction, adapted Ovid to the 12th c. Court

of Poitiers, a major shift occurred:

Ovid presents the man as the master who seduces women for his pleasure

Art of Courtly Love presents woman as mistress and the man is her vassal who serves her.

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# THE ART (AND RULES) OF COURTLY LOVE

(The following quotes and information are from Andreas Cappelanus: The Art of Courtly Love. Ed.Locke)

Love	"Love is a certain inborn suffering derived from the sight of and excessive meditation upon the beauty of the opposite sex, which causes each one to wish above all things the embraces of the other."
Effect of love	" O what a wonderful thing is love, which makes a man shine with so many virtues and teaches everyone, no matter who he is, so many good traits of character!"
Who may love	"everyone of sound mind who is capable of doing the work of Venus may be wounded by one of love's arrows unless prevented by age, or blindness, or excess of passion."
Love and class	if you love a peasant woman, praise her and force herpeasants don't respond to gentle wooing

## How Love May be Retained

keep it secret		
be wise and restrained in conduct		
be generous and charitable		
be humble, not proud		
offer service to all ladies		
do what is pleasing to your loved one		
associate with good men; avoid the wicked		
jealousy increases love		

# How Love Decreases

too much exposure to the beloved	
too much privacy for love	
uncouth behavior	
sudden loss of property	
blasphemy and anti-religious behavior	

## How Love Ends

if one of the lovers breaks faith	
if one of the lovers strays from the Catholic religion	

The First Five Rules of Love According to Andrew

1	Marriage is no real excuse for not loving
2	He who is not jealous cannot love
3	No one can be bound by a double love
4	It is well known that love is always increasing or decreasing
5	That which a lover takes against his will of his beloved has no relish

(There are a total of 31 "rules.")

Andrew's Rejection of Love (Book III of The Art of Courtly Love)

This doctrine of courtly adulterous love evidently did not sit well with Andrew in the end, so he wrote a third book refuting the first two. This may show the conflict he felt between the pagan naturalism of courtly love and his clerical training in Christian self-control. Or, as some suspect, the entire *Art of Courtly Love* may be a spoof on the ungodly, unchristian love religion. At any rate, Andrew sums up his attitude toward Courtly Love in Book III thus:

"The mutual love which you seek in women you cannot find, for no woman ever loved a man or could bind herself to a lover in the mutual bonds of love."

This concept of women as deceitful and faithless is rather typical of medieval monkish misogyny.

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# ANDREW'S RULES OF LOVE APPLIED TO A POEM BY BERNART DE VENTADORN

Bernart de Ventadorn at court of Eleanor of Aquitaine, was an outstanding courtly love troubadour. Here is the second stanza of "When I See the Lark That Moves."

Alas! how much I knew of love, I thought, but so little know of it!
For now I cannot check my love
For her, who'll give me little profit.
She has my heart and all of me,
Herself and all the world; and nothing
Leaves to me, when thus she takes me,
Except desire and heartfelt longing.

(In *Medieval Age*. Ed. and Intro. by Angel Flores. Laurel Masterpieces of World Literature. N.Y.: Dell, 1963. Trans. by Muriel Kittel, p. 178.)

How the Rules of Courtly Love Apply to "When I See the Lark That Moves"

lover cannot control his loving	"I cannot check my love"	
lady is in control of lover	"she has my heart and all of me"	
lady is cold, cruel and ungenerous	"and nothing/ Leaves to me"	
he suffers endless desire without consummation	"except desire and heartfelt longing"	

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# ANDREW'S RULES OF LOVE APPLIED TO MARIE DE FRANCE'S ELIDUC

(note: "Eliduc" is not in your textbook, but if you want to read it, click here: Eliduc)

A happily married knight, Eliduc, is slandered to his king; Eliduc leaves for England until court politics simmer down; he volunteers to help a besieged king and is successful. The king's daughter, Guilliadun, invites him to her quarters to talk;

"She kept stealing looks at him...his face, his body, his every expression...and said to herself how attractive he was, how close to her ideal man. Love fires his arrow, she falls headlong in love." (*Norton Anthology: World Masterpieces, expanded edition, V.1*: 1683)

# Rule 9: No one can love unless he [or she] is impelled by the persuasion of love

Eliduc also falls in love with her, although he had promised his wife not to look at another woman.

## Rule 1: Marriage is no real excuse for not loving

#### Rule 17: A new love puts to flight an old one

The first king regrets Eliduc's departure and asks him to come back and help him. Eliduc agrees, but promises Guilliadun that he will return on the day she names. She names it and says he must then take her away with him. (He's never mentioned to her that he is married.)

### Rule 26: Love can deny nothing to love

He returns on the appointed day and they steal away to sea. A storm at sea and a sailor says, "'My lord, it's the girl you've brought aboard who's going to drown us all. We'll ever reach land. You have a proper wife at home.'" Guilliadun hears this and faints. She stays in a coma as if dead.

Eliduc brings her body to shore and places her in a chapel near his land where he intends to bury her. Then he goes home to his wife who notices that he's very unhappy.

### Rule 3: No one can be bound by a double love

The wife has a servant spy on Eliduc and finds out about the chapel. She goes there and realizes the truth about her husband's sadness.

#### Rule 31: Nothing forbids one woman being loved by two men or one man by two women

While the wife is watching the seemingly dead Guilliadun, a weasel darts out from beneath the altar and the servant kills it with a stick. Then its weasel mate discovers it, runs outside and picks a red flower which it puts into the dead weasel's mouth, reviving it. So Eliduc's wife takes the flower and puts it into Guilliadun's mouth and she revives.

Eliduc's wife consoles and sympathizes with Guilliadun and brings her home to see Eliduc. They are overjoyed to be reunited; the wife takes vows to become a nun, and Eliduc marries Guilliadun.

### Rule 8: No one should be deprived of love without the very best of reasons

## Rule 14: The easy attainment of love makes it of little value; difficulty of attainment makes it prized

After many happy years, Guilliadun and Eliduc also take vows and Guilliadun goes to live in the convent with Eliduc's first wife, while he also takes vows and lives as a religious for the rest of his life.

Consider Book Three of the Art of Courtly Love, which rejects physical love for spiritual love and Christian behavior.

Love and Romance in Eliduc

Courtly love motifs:

- love for a married person
- · seemingly unattainable
- love strikes like an arrow through the eye
- · exquisite behavior by all lovers
- · total self- sacrifice of wife

#### Romance motifs:

- adventures
- travels
- battles
- miracle of weasel-flower (re: moly in Odyssey)

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# ANDREW'S RULES OF LOVE APPLIED TO BOCCACCIO'S DECAMERON

The Ninth Tale of the Fifth Day:

Frederigo, a young gentleman, falls in love with Monna Giovanna, a beautiful, charming, married Florentine lady.

# Rule 1: Marriage is no real excuse for not loving

Frederigo spent all his money on tournaments, jousting, hosting feasts and other extravagances, to win Monna Giovanna's love."

### Rule 10: Love is always a stranger in the home of avarice

### Rule 14: The easy attainment of love makes it of little value; difficulty of attainment makes it prized

She did not care for him or his spendthrift ways. He lost his wealth, retaining only one little farm and one falcon, "among the best in the world."

Monna's husband died and she and her son went to live for a year in the country near Frederigo's farm. The son became friendly with Frederigo and loved his falcon.

The son fell very ill and asked his mother to get Frederigo's falcon for him, which he thought would surely make him get well. She hated to ask Frederigo for his last dear possession, but fear for her son's health led her to do it.

She visits Frederigo's farm and tells him "I have come to compensate you for the harm you have suffered on my account by loving me more than you needed to; and the compensation is this: I, along with this companion of mine, intend to dine with you-a simple meal--this very day." (Norton Anthology: World Masterpieces, expanded edition, V.1: 1890)

He is super-courteous, and invites her to wait in the garden while he sets the table. There is no food in his house, so he kills the

falcon to make a meal.

### Rule 24: Every act of a lover ends in the thought of his beloved

### Rule 25: A true lover considers nothing good except what he thinks will please his beloved

### Rule 26: Love can deny nothing to love

They eat and then she explains about her sick son and requests the falcon. Frederigo weeps and gives a super-courteous speech and shows her the falcon's beak and feathers and feet. She praised his gracious spirit but reproached his killing the falcon for her meal. She went home; her son died a few days later.

Eventually, her brothers wanted her to remarry, since she was young and rich; she said she would only marry Frederigo, which she did, and he was more prudent after that.

Frederigo and Monna Giovanna as Courtly Lovers

the epitome of courtly lovers

love from a distance

love for an unattainable married lady

the lover gives up his all for love

the lover receives the final reward of the lady for such great courtesy

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# UNCOURTLY LOVE IN BOCCACCIO'S DECAMERON

The Second Tale of the Fourth Day

A wicked priest, Brother Alberto has been such a successful hypocrite that he became trusted and influential.

A foolish woman, Madonna Lisetta da Ca'Quirino, whose husband is out of town, goes to him for confession.

Brother Alberto wants to have sex with her and develops a scam to achieve his goal. He tells her that a divinely handsome man (the Angel Gabriel) beat him, because he was harsh on her during confession, and if she does not pardon him, he will be beaten again.

She pardons him and he tells her that the Angel Gabriel would like to spend the night with her. She likes the idea and Brother Alberto tells her that the Angel Gabriel will use his (Alberto's) body for the encounter.

She agrees and he shows up disguised as an angel and spends the night with her. Alberto is supposedly in heaven while Gabriel uses his body.

But Lisetta foolishly boasts to a neighbor and soon everyone knows about her angel. Her in-laws decide to get involved and try to catch him in the act; leaving his wings behind, he dives in the canal, and a neighbor gives him refuge.

His "rescuer" discovers who the man he rescued really is, and tricks Brother Alberto into dressing in honey and feathers as a wild man. The "rescuer" chains Brother Alberto in the town square and tells everyone who he is. Alberto is led away by the friars and locked up until he dies.

Uncourtly elements in Boccaccio's Tale of Brother Alberto

Love as deceit and lust; nothing courtly here

Parody of some courtly love elements.

Instead of earthly love leading to divine love as in Dante and Petrarch, here fraudulent divine love (Alberto wears wings while having sex) leads to sex.

This love is sexual, not longing for an unattainable lady.

The lady is tricked, not adored.

No secrecy; the lover is found out, ridiculed and punished.

Instead of pining for his lady he is locked up by the friars.

The Middle Ages, like today, had every variety of love, from the sacred to the profane.

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