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Course Code: EN917
Course of Study: Modes of Masculinity
Name of Designated Person authorising scanning: Christine Shipman
Title: Medieval Literature : Criticism, ideology and history
Name of Author: Moi, T
Name of Publisher: Harvester Press
Name of Visual Creator (as appropriate):

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Desire in Language: Andreas Capellanus and the Controversy of Courtly Love

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'Love is a thing of jealousy and dread.'

(*Troilus and Criseyde*, IV.235)

Composed in France in the 1180s, Andreas's treatise on love, the *De amore*,[1] is celebrated as the first comprehensive discussion of the theory of courtly love. Often hailed as the key to the understanding of a whole range of medieval texts on love from Chrétien de Troyes's *Lancelot* to Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, the *De amore* is situated at the centre of the modern debate on the nature of courtly love. Indeed, it would seem that much of this debate is little more than a conflict over the 'correct' interpretation of Andreas's text. The first part of this essay, 'Text and History: the Controversy of Courtly Love', relates the different readings of Andreas to the debate over the historical reality of the institution of courtly love in the Middle Ages, showing how this debate raises the wider question of the relations between texts and reality. Focusing on the interlocking structures of desire, knowledge and rhetoric, the second part, 'Love, Jealousy and Epistemology in the *De amore*', presents a new, feminist reading of Andreas's essay. Given the importance of the *De amore* for our understanding of the ideology of courtly love, a re-reading of Andreas would naturally lead to the reconsideration of a series of other medieval love-texts as well. Such a project, however, would far exceed the scope of a single paper, and the task of re-reading Chrétien or Chaucer will have to be left to others.

Text and History: the Controversy of Courtly Love

To English-speaking readers, C. S. Lewis's study, *The Allegory of Love*, is the book which first presented courtly love, defined as an idealisation of women in the name of romantic passion, as a fundamental aspect of medieval culture. Inspired by Gaston Paris's original essay on Chrétien's *Lancelot (Le Chevalier de la Charrette)* (Paris, 1883), Lewis gives a short and succinct summary of the main features of what he sees as a cult of love:

> Every one has heard of courtly love, and every one knows that it appears quite suddenly at the end of the eleventh century in Languedoc.... The sentiment, of course, is love, but love of a highly specialised sort, whose characteristics may be enumerated as Humility, Courtesy, Adultery, and the Religion of Love. The lover is always abject. Obedience to his lady's slightest wish, however whimsical, and silent acquiescence in her rebukes, however unjust, are the only virtues he dares to claim. There is a service of love closely modelled on the service which a feudal vassal owes to his lord. The lover is the lady's 'man'. ... The poet normally addresses another man's wife, and the situation is so carelessly accepted that he seldom concerns himself much with her husband: his real enemy is the rival. (Lewis, 1936, pp.2–3)

Perhaps even more influential than *The Allegory of Love*, Denis de Rougemont's *L'Amour et l'Occident* (1939: translated as *Passion and Society* or *Love in the Western World*) has shaped western belief in the existence of unpunished adulterous passion in the Middle Ages. For Rougemont, the 'great European myth of adultery', *Tristan et Yseut*, enacts the courtly code much as described by C. S. Lewis; however, far from sharing Lewis's romanticising vision of courtly love, Rougemont deplores its idealisation of the destructive and narcissistic form of desire which he labels 'Eros'. For Rougemont, only *agape*, or disinterested love in God, can elevate and purify mankind.[2] However, in spite of their otherwise opposing views, Lewis and Rougemont, both writing in the 1930s, shared the belief that 'courtly love' was an actual medieval institution which flourished in the Provence of the troubadours, and then, in the 1170s, came to dominate the love practices of the Court of Champagne, ruled at the time by the Countess Marie and her spouse, Count Henri of Champagne.

It was not until the 1960s that scholars unleased a veritable campaign against this eroticised vision of medieval life.[3] Thus John F. Benton's minutely researched account of life at the Court of Champagne in the 1170s dealt a considerable blow to the devotees of courtly love. He concluded that there is absolutely no historical evidence that 'courtly' love was practised there at that time, nor that the famous 'courts of love', where beautiful and noble ladies gave judgements on points of erotic etiquette, ever existed (Benton, 1961). Later, he also came categorically to reject the value of the term 'courtly love' itself, and in doing so he focused precisely on the problem of reading Andreas's *De amore*:

> I have found the term 'courtly love' no advantage in trying to understand the theory and practice of love in medieval Europe. It is not a medieval technical term. It has no specific content. A reference to 'the rules of courtly love' is almost invariably a citation of Andreas's *De amore*, a work which I think is intentionally and humourously ambiguous about love. The study of love in the Middle Ages would be far easier if we were not impeded by a term which now inevitably confuses the issue. (Benton, 1968, pp.36–7)

According to Benton, then, some people's misguided ideas about courtly love stem directly from their misreading of Andreas: they have committed the cardinal sin of taking seriously a work which should be seen as no more than light-hearted fun. In other words, the ambiguous status of the concept of courtly love reflects the ambiguous nature of the *De amore* itself. But how does Benton know that his own reading of Andreas is superior? And how is it that the text of the *De amore* supports such seemingly contradictory interpretations?

The *De amore* consists of three Books addressed to a young man called Walter. The first two Books instruct Walter in the art of courtly love, and seem at first glance wholly to justify C. S. Lewis's description of its conventions. The third, however, is entitled 'The Repudiation of Love', and not only contains a vehement rejection of secular love, but also reels off a list of the vices of womankind in the misogynist tradition of the Church Fathers. According to Book III, far from ennobling man, as claimed in Books I and II, his love for woman can only pollute and destroy him. Given this apparent contradiction, it is hardly surprising that critics have presented divergent readings of

Andreas's treatise. Most of these readings, however, can be summarised under four main headings:

1: Andreas defends courtly love. Books I and II are serious; Book III must be seen as a conventional piece of retraction only meant to save the author, a priest, from getting into trouble with the Church.
2: Andreas holds that both the Church and the adherents of courtly love are right. All three books are serious; Andreas is an exponent of the doctrine of 'double truth'.
3: Andreas defends the Church and condemns courtly love. Books I and II are ironic; Book III is serious and contains Andreas's real opinion.
4: All three books are ironic. Andreas has provided an entertaining, but not necessarily subversive, pastiche of scholasticism and courtly love alike.

The most famous representatives of Reading 1 are, as already mentioned, C. S. Lewis and Denis de Rougemont. Reading 2 can be found in A. J. Denomy's *The Heresy of Courtly Love.* Denomy argues that Andreas held the so-called doctrine of 'double truth', which implied that 'what Andreas teaches to be true according to nature and reason, he teaches to be false according to grace and divine authority' (Denomy, 1947, p. 39). In other words, Andreas believed that according to reason and nature, secular love is the source of all virtue, but also that according to revelation the highest good originates in God; revelation, moreover, always takes precedence over the insights provided by reason. For Denomy there is therefore no doubt that Andreas ultimately was a good Christian.[4]

The major exponent of Reading 3 is D. W. Robertson who, in his *A Preface to Chaucer*, reveals himself as a formidable opponent of courtly love. His thesis is that the 'discouragement of the pursuit of love is ... something that runs through the whole work *De Amore*, not something confined to the last book' (Robertson, 1962, p. 395). Stressing Andreas's equation of love with fear and jealousy in the first two Books, Robertson argues that Book III only makes explicit the implications of the first two. As a whole, then, the *De amore* should show that the 'fear and jealousy of love constitute a miserable servitude' (ibid., p. 447). He

thus sees Andreas's treatise as a coherent attack on profane love, made in order to advocate St Augustine's doctrine of charity as the only ennobling form of love; a doctrine which also constitutes the true meaning of works as different as Chrétien de Troyes's *Lancelot* (*Le Chevalier de la Charrette*), *Tristan et Yseut*, and Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*. Argued in relation to Andreas, the case may seem plausible enough. Repeated in relation to a whole series of medieval works, Robertson's plea for Augustinian theology sounds rather less convincing. Thus other critics have seriously questioned Robertson's readings. E. Talbot Donaldson, for instance, argues that Andreas cannot by any stretch of the imagination be turned into a devotee of St Augustine's:

> I do not agree with Robertson's oft-stated premise that any serious work written in the Middle Ages that does not overtly promote St Augustine's doctrine of charity will be found, on close examination, to be doing so allegorically or ironically, nor do I agree that Andreas can be made to read as a good disciple of St. Augustine. Yet I agree with Robertson that Andreas is not to be understood as seriously promulgating immoral doctrine. (Donaldson, 1970, pp. 159–60)

According to Donaldson, Andreas has 'merely adopted Ovid's theme of adulterous love and medievalized it by subjecting it to scholastic analysis, and by infusing it with that spiritualization of the erotic that the troubadours show' (Donaldson, 1970, p. 160). Andreas simply wanted to be outrageous, Donaldson claims, and therefore also grossly exaggerated the anti-eroticism and anti-feminism of Book III: Book III, in other words, is as ironic as Books I and II (Reading 4).[5]

When it comes to the question of the historical reality of courtly love, the different readers of Andreas split neatly down the middle: critics adopting Readings 1 or 2 (that Andreas in some way can be said to be positive about the practice of courtly love) believe that courtly love was a real, historical practice, whereas critics who adopt Readings 3 or 4 (that Andreas condemns courtly love in some way) believe equally firmly that it was not. Thus Donaldson holds that 'at least a part of what is called courtly love was no more real in the Middle Ages than it had been before and has been since' (Donaldson, 1970, p. 163). And Robertson, like Benton, rejects the concept entirely:

> The study of courtly love, if it belongs anywhere, should be conducted only as the subject is an aspect of nineteenth- and twentieth-century cultural history. The subject has nothing to do with the Middle Ages, and its use as a governing concept can only be an impediment to our understanding of medieval texts. (Robertson, 1968, p. 17)

Robertson is, of course, quite right in stressing the historically determined nature of this kind of research: if 'courtly love' became a focal point of interest first in the 1930s and then again in the 1960s, this is surely not unrelated to the fact that these two decades witnessed a crisis of conventional sexual ideology and values. Similarly, my own interest in Andreas and courtly love is inspired by contemporary feminist debate on love and sexuality. The point is, surely, that there is nothing particularly unusual about this: to a careful observer all research will bear the mark of its own historical situation. But if Robertson's point can be shown to be generally true, it loses its force as a specific argument against certain readings of Andreas. The question of the historical reality of courtly practices cannot, in other words, be decided as easily as Robertson seems to believe, nor can it, *pace* Benton, be decided simply through empirical research of the Court of Champagne in the twelfth century. For Benton has taken for granted that the relationship between text and history is static and one-sided: his painstaking work is based on the implicit assumption that texts (in this case Andreas's treatise) are no more than reflections of a given reality.

Since the 1960s this kind of naive reflectionism has come in for an increasing amount of criticism, particularly from Marxist theorists (for further discussion of this problem, see Macherey, 1966; Eagleton, 1976; Jameson, 1981; and Pearsall in this volume), and it is now quite possible to argue that Benton's efforts do not really tell us very much at all about the meaning of Andreas's text. But before we return to this point it may be useful to take a closer look at the function of courtly ideology in France, since this will provide us with a concrete example of the difficulty of arguing, as Benton does, a simple reflectionist case about the relations between the literary text and society.

The function of chivalry and courtliness seems to have been to provide the ruling feudal aristocracy with a legitimising ideology. According to Marc Bloch (1940), the twelfth century witnessed the

apotheosis of feudal power in France, a power as yet unthreatened by the bourgeoisie. This stabilisation of power produced a culture designed to display aristocratic superiority; the codes of courtly and chivalric behaviour seem selected precisely by virtue of their inaccessibility to the lower classes. The fundamental requirements for any exercise of courtliness were leisure and money: the time and resources necessary to woo the fair lady according to the courtly canon would only have been available to an aristocratic minority. The stress put on cleanliness (frequent use of baths, perfumed oils, etc.) as well as the need to wear beautiful and well-kept clothes also made it impossible for poor and working people to be courtly, had they wanted to be. The necessity of being generous on a large scale (giving banquets, holding tournaments, giving away precious objects) made *courtoisie* the exclusive domain of the rich; the whole chivalric code (the knight proving his worth and his love for the lady by his prowess in armed combat) would seem to be tailor-made for the feudal nobility who perceived themselves as a warrior class. Although the insistence on culture as a necessary part of the accomplishments of the courtly hero and lover (he had to be able to compose and recite poems and songs, write letters to the lady, and read suitable books with her) gave some scope for the special talents of the clergy, it also catered specifically for the other reading and writing class at the time: the aristocracy. In this context it is interesting to note that Andreas takes great care to define all clergy as belonging to the highest class of all on the grounds of their noble occupation (p. 36). As far as class is concerned, this code is almost watertight: a wealthy and educated bourgeois man might have fulfilled all these requirements only to fall foul of the demand for knightly deeds. The weak link in the chain is the bourgeois woman: since a lady was not supposed to fight in heroic battle, nothing would prevent a rich and graceful bourgeoise from winning the favours of a man of the highest nobility. Andreas neatly solves this problem by making his two bourgeois ladies stalwart defenders of the status quo: refusing all hope of their love to their noble suitors, their discourse eloquently demonstrates the dangers of upsetting the social order, thus obligingly helping Andreas to fend off his obvious anxiety about the potentially subversive nature of passion.

In addition to its evident appeal to aristocratic exclusivity, the code of courtly love and chivalry also mobilises a more subtle

interpretation of the categories of nature and culture in order to produce its ideological impact. Fundamentally unnatural, courtly love emphasises the cultural and spiritual values of love. Love ennobles the (male) lover, Andreas claims, it refines and reforms him through the influence of the beloved lady, presumably already a fairly ethereal being herself. Dante's Beatrice is only the most sublime in a series of spiritualised ladies in courtly literature. In Andreas's text, as in the *Chevalier de la Charrette*, the spiritualising power of love nevertheless remains at odds with its crudely physical manifestations. Andreas seems to be uneasily aware that there is something illogical about a spiritual desire for the good and virtuous which in the end posits the same tediously physical act as the lover's highest bliss. He thus goes to great lengths to imply that there is a difference between courtly love, even if this is of a 'mixed' (i.e. sexual) kind, and straightforward, 'natural' sex: 'We say it rarely happens that we find farmers serving in Love's court,' Andreas writes, 'but, naturally, like a horse or a mule, they give themselves up to the work of Venus, as nature's urgings teaches them to do' (p. 149). Natural desire has nothing, or very little, to do with love in the courtly sense, at least according to Andreas's commentary at this stage. This, incidentally, leads him to conclude that a courtly lover (clearly not a farmer) ought simply to rape peasant women at will:

> If you should, by some chance, fall in love with some of their [peasants'] women, be careful to puff them up with praise and then, when you find a convenient place, do not hesitate to take what you seek and to embrace them by force. For you can hardly soften their outward inflexibility so far that they will grant you their embraces quietly or permit you to have the solaces you desire unless first you usè a little compulsion as a convenient cure for their shyness. (p. 150)

Though there is some ambiguity in Andreas's use of the word love in this passage, it would seem that the message is clear: peasants are natural creatures and must be treated as such. Intercourse with peasant women can neither refine nor ennoble the courtly lover; in fact, Andreas advises Walter to restrain his dealings with them to the utmost, presumably because such *natural* relations could seriously undermine his claim to possess a sophisticated, cultured courtliness.

This aversion to the natural life of peasants reveals the real

function of courtly ideology. If, as Bloch (1940) has argued, courtly ideology can be seen as an effort to impose the more refined habits of the aristocratic ladies on the boorish feudal lords, the cultured noble lady becomes the arbiter of taste in courtly society; no wonder then that peasant women were considered their absolute antithesis. The whole point of the various courtly and chivalric exercises described in Andreas's and Chrétien's texts was to escape all comparison with villeins. Signalling their cultural superiority, the 'effeminisation' of the aristocracy paradoxically enough comes to signify their 'natural' right to power. It is precisely in its insistence on the 'natural' differences between rulers and ruled that courtly ideology achieved its legitimising function, a function which operates long after the feudal aristocracy has lost its central position in society.

In his influential study of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, *The Waning of the Middle Ages*, J. Huizinga emphasises the lasting influence of courtly and chivalric codes of behaviour on the aristocracy: 'Long after nobility and feudalism had ceased to be really essential factors in the state and in society,' Huizinga writes, 'they continued to impress the mind as the dominant form of life' (1924, p. 54). This society was obsessed with courtly love:

> In no other epoch did the ideal of civilisation amalgamate to such a degree with that of love. Just as scholasticism represents the grand effort of the medieval spirit to unite all philosophic thought in a single centre, so the theory of courtly love, in a less elevated sphere, tends to embrace all that appertains to the noble life. (ibid., p. 105)

In this period the courtly texts seem to precede reality, not vice versa: the courts of love which Benton could not find in the twelfth century are enacted now as an imitation of the courtly ideals of Andreas's and Chrétien's time by an aristocracy whose 'whole system of ideas was permeated by the fiction that chivalry ruled the world,' as Huizinga put it (p. 65).

At this point it is tempting to argue, *pace* Benton and Robertson, that *no* reading of the *De amore* (or any other courtly text) will tell us anything at all about 'reality' in the twelfth century. But this case is not altogether convincing. If, after our study of courtly ideology in the Middle Ages, we feel obliged to drop the idea that literature should be no more than a pale reflection of reality, we might want to consider the view that texts

produce a reality of their own. But it does not follow that this textual reality is entirely cut off from its own historical moment of production. Rejecting the fashionable view that history is just another text and therefore cannot constitute a 'ground' of truth for other texts, Fredric Jameson suggests that: 'History is not so much a text as rather a text-to-be-(re)-constructed. Better still, it is an obligation to do so, whose means and techniques are themselves historically irreversible, so that we are not at liberty to construct any historical narrative at all' (Jameson, 1977, p. 388). For Jameson, history is the Real in the Lacanian sense, that is to say, 'that which resists symbolisation'. The Real is only available to us through language, and language can never coincide with reality; the text stands in an asymptotic relationship to history.

One of the reasons why it is extremely difficult to say just where on the asymptote a particular text is situated is that all texts, among other things are manifestations of ideology. Ideology, of course, represents social relations, but nothing guarantees the veracity of the ideological representation: it may very well be mistaken about the real nature of its own society. In this sense, it is the very nature of the text's mistakes and omissions which most tellingly reveals its ideological preoccupations (for a full discussion of this view, see Macherey, 1966). It is thus paradoxically only through the study of the text's 'misrepresentation' of reality that we can seize its ideological dimension as that 'indispensable mapping fantasy or narrative by which the individual subject invents a "lived" relationship with collective systems', as Jameson puts it (Jameson, 1977, p. 394). In this way we can construct the text as a map of its own ideological and psychological investments, its fears, hopes and desires. The fact that the map never coincides with the terrain does not mean that there never was a terrain at all.

Love, Jealousy and Epistemology in the De amore

In his admirable study of Proust, Leo Bersani claims that the hopelessly jealous and insecure love of a Swann or a Marcel has little in common with the nobler forms of passion represented in courtly literature:

> In the medieval courtly epics and lyrics, for example, as well as in Corneille, Rousseau and Claudel, love includes moral admiration; the lover's personality is ennobled by his passion for someone worthy of being loved. Love thus realizes and intensifies a profound harmony between the self and the world: the lover *knows* the object of his love, and his responses are governed by moral qualities he rightly perceives. (Bersani, 1965, pp. 98–9)

One of the purposes of this essay is to show that, at least as far as the *De amore* is concerned, such an idyllic vision of medieval passions is simply mistaken. Already in the introductory passages (Chapters 1–5 of Book I) where Andreas sets out, in his best scholastic manner, to define his topic, love is the object of considerable ambivalence and hesitation:

> 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 and by common desire to carry out all of love's precepts in the other's embrace. (p. 28)

Here *suffering* is presented as the essence of love: unfulfilled sexual desire never ceases to torment the (male) lover. This suffering, moreover, is 'inborn', or in other words, *natural.* In this way Andreas's treatise can be read as an effort to conceal or displace the painful naturalness of love by dressing it up in the necessary courtly trappings. This process is, however, never entirely successful: the 'inborn' suffering never disappears; love for Andreas, like desire for Freud or Lacan, is doomed to remain unsatisfied.

The sexual frustration suffered by the lover is aggravated by his constant anxiety: in one paragraph the word 'fear' occurs no less than eleven times. Or as Andreas himself puts it: 'To tell the truth, no one can number the fears of one single lover' (p. 28). The lover's main fear is that his chosen lady will reject him, either because of rumours about their illicit love, or because she finds him insufficient or unworthy in character, behaviour or social status. There is no 'safe' position here: if the lover is poor, he fears that the lady will scorn his poverty; if he is rich, he trembles that she may despise his past parsimony. By far the greatest threat to the lover's project of conquering the lady's favours, however, is

posed by his rivals: constantly agonising in his neurotic fear of being rejected for another suitor, the lover is driven to despair by extreme jealousy.

It is always the lady who is invested with the power to make judgements of a social nature: *her* desire seems either to be non-existent or entirely cultural, inextricably caught up, as it must be, in a series of mundane considerations of wealth and social prestige. Perhaps it is from her very unnaturalness, the fact that she incarnates the cultural standards of her society, that she derives the power to ennoble and civilise her lustful lover. 'Every attempt of a lover tends towards the enjoyment of the embraces of her whom he loves,' Andreas writes, 'he thinks about it continually, for he hopes that with her he may fulfill all the mandates of love... in the sight of a lover nothing can be compared to the act of love' (p. 30). It is strange that this very basic drive for sexual satisfaction should have such ennobling consequences: 'O what a wonderful thing is love,' enthuses Andreas, 'which makes a man shine with so many virtues and teaches everyone, no matter who he is, so many good traits of character!' (p. 31). The paradox is that if the lover were to become as refined as his lady, he might lose the very natural desire which led him to seek her 'solaces' in the first place.

Andreas extends his definition of love by providing it with an etymological origin, apparently derived from Isidore of Seville's (false) etymology for the word *amicus*, friend:

> Love gets its name (*amor*) from the word for hook (*amus*), which means 'to capture' or 'to be captured', for he who is in love is captured in the chains of desire and wishes to capture someone else with his hook. Just as a skilful fisherman tries to attract fishes by his bait and to capture them on his crooked hook, so the man who is a captive of love tries to attract another person by his allurements and exerts all his efforts to unite two different hearts with an intangible bond, or if they are already united he tries to keep them so forever. (p. 31)

The lover here is both beast and prey; a slave bound by the chains of desire, he is at the same time a skilful fisherman trying to trick the lady into swallowing his bait. The ambiguity of the image of the lover as simultaneously fish, bait and fisherman signals the same hesitations as in Andreas's uneasy definition of love as an inborn suffering which relentlessly forces men to seek bliss. No wonder, perhaps, that the lover's 'crooked hook' seems curiously

unsuited to the delicate task of creating an 'intangible bond' between two hearts.

In spite of his expressions of admiration for the ennobling force of love, Andreas finishes off this introductory section by warning Walter that 'love, at times, does not use fair weights' (p. 32). In fact, Andreas believes that desire is both deceitful and untrustworthy: 'Because [love] is in the habit of carrying an unjust weight in his hand, I do not have full confidence in him any more than I do in a judge whom men suspect' (p. 32). Living then as he does in a universe filled with jealousy, fear and deceit, Andreas's lover apparently has little choice. Since love's sufferings are inborn, he cannot escape the yoke of desire; his only option is to make the best of a bad job. Andreas therefore reluctantly agrees to instruct Walter in the art of courtly love since, as he puts it in his prefatory note, 'I know clearer than day that after you have learned the art of love your progress in it will be more cautious' (p. 28). On the surface then, Andreas presents the *De amore* more as an emergency kit for wounded (male) lovers than as an introduction to the delights of love.

After this introduction to love, Andreas gets down to his main task, which is to teach Walter 'in what manner love may be acquired, and in how many ways' (p. 33), and launches into eight sample dialogues organised according to the participants' class-background ('A man of the middle class speaks with a woman of the same class'; 'A man of the higher nobility speaks with a woman of the simple nobility', etc.). These dialogues are, not surprisingly, obsessed with class, and particularly with the threat that desire poses to stable social structures. And, as in the introductory sections, it is the man who is tempted towards subversive action by his unruly passions, whereas the woman defends the social status quo.

The dialogues of Book I alone take up over half of Andreas's treatise, and constitute the bulk of the two Books dealing with the art of love, whereas the rejection of love (Book III) apparently requires no such linguistic patterns. In fact, language is so prominent in Andreas's model of courtship that the reader, like the lady, occasionally feels submerged by the endless flow of the lover's discourse. For it is the lover who does most of the talking: the lady, although obviously capable of a quick repartee, limits her remarks to shrewd criticism of the lover's points, and hardly ever

instigates a new topic of her own. The lover's lust makes him speak, and when he does so his style is rational in the extreme: every single one of Andreas's lovers attempts to *prove* to the woman that she ought to love him. However discouraging her response, the lover is prepared to go on talking until dismissed by her. It is as if this veritable deluge of passionate, scholastic argumentation could go on forever: the lover's eloquence seems to give him pleasure for its own sake. And it is, of course, true that by the very act of speaking the lover has already achieved an important courtly aim, the elegant use of language being precisely one of the distinctions which set the upper classes apart from the common crowd. A courtly lover cannot speak like a country yokel; the lover's untiringly intellectual discourse validates his claim to *be* a lover in the first place. In spite of appearances then, desire does not necessarily precede language in Andreas's text; on the contrary, if the man's linguistic performance establishes him *as* a lover, his desire is produced *by* language and seeks its satisfaction *in* it. (It is, for instance, remarkable how little sexual success the lovers in these dialogues have in proportion to their verbal efforts: the prowess is linguistic, not erotic.)

The language which thus constitutes the lover's passion is curiously aggressive. His pleasure lies in his *mastery* of language, obtained through his neurotic ordering and scholastic subdivision of his discourse. In this sense, of course, the dramatised lovers in Andreas's dialogues give but a shadow of Andreas's own performance in the *De amore* as a whole. The lover is in love with his own eloquent lucidity: by dominating the word, he gains a phallic power that contradicts his seemingly humble stance towards his lady. This mastery is only achieved, however, by the most humble submission to the inflexible rules of scholastic rhetoric. Chained and fettered, the lover's discourse enacts his own lack of freedom, which is bearable only because it procures him at the same time the satisfaction of a certain sadistic dominance. As in Andreas's etymology of love, the lover is both master of and slave to his own discourse of desire. The effect of his aggressive verbal onslaught is that the lady in these dialogues, in spite of her vigorous replies to the lover, remains a curiously cold, distant and enigmatic creature whose love is perceived as a capricious and unreliable entity precisely because we, as well as the lover, suspect her of having no passion at all, deprived as she is

of a discursive initiative of her own.

It is perhaps for this reason that Andreas's lovers often recur to scarcely veiled threats in order to make her succumb. In the fifth dialogue the lover launches into an elaborate allegory which is supposed to prove that women who refuse to take lovers suffer horrible torments after death. The courtly lover's strategy is thus one of intimidation and verbal sadism: his language enacts his aggression (which becomes all the more menacing precisely because of its dependence on an abject surrender to the rules of discourse), and the fact that the courtly lady, unlike the peasant woman, escapes outright rape ought not to be interpreted as conclusive evidence of his respect for her.[6] In the end, the lover is not interested in the woman; his narcissistic self-display centres on his own desire, his own discursive performance.

The *De amore* does, of course, also present language as the 'hook of love' which allows the lover to attract the lady by his 'allurements' in order to create an 'intangible bond' between their hearts. There is in Andreas's treatise a deep desire for a trusting union with the other, a union which, if successful, would infinitely improve the man's character and behaviour. But as the original image of the 'hook of love' is double-edged (to be caught on the fisherman's hook is a painful and ultimately deadly business), the intermittently expressed desire for full knowledge of the partner is undercut by a whole series of rhetorical and thematic moves which indicate that true love, the blissful union of two different hearts, is an unrealisable fantasy. It is the misfortune of (male) lovers that they have to spend their lives in pursuit of such a chimera.

The fundamental scepticism of Andreas's vision emerges in his treatment of jealousy. For Andreas, jealousy is the 'mother and nurse of love' (p. 101). True jealousy, not to be confused with the possessive tyranny of a husband, consists of a triple fear:

> Now jealousy is a true emotion whereby we greatly fear that the substance of our love may be weakened by some defect in serving the desires of our beloved, and it is an anxiety lest our love may not be returned, and it is a suspicion of the beloved, but without any shameful thought. (p. 102)

In this passage we recognise the endless fears of the lover described as an essential part of love at the very outset of Andreas's treatise. The puzzling part of this passage is the

reference to jealousy as an *unshameful* suspicion of the beloved. *Shameful* suspicion, according to Andreas, is that nourished by possessive husbands only interested in protecting their own dynastic interests.[7] The lover's jealous suspicion seems entirely different: perhaps it is not shameful simply because it is an integral part of love. 'He who is not jealous cannot love', Andreas comments (p. 107). From the context, it seems clear that his jealousy is a form of fear, a generalised worry about the lady's activities and thoughts, clearly not limited (as in the case of the husband) to straightforward sexual jealousy (it is not 'shameful'). His jealousy, then, seems caused by the feeling that the lady remains *other*: however hard he tries to master her by his discourse, he will always suffer in the knowledge that her consciousness is not his. In this respect, Andreas is no different from a Marcel or a Swann. As with the Proustian lover, the beloved becomes enigmatic precisely in so far as the lover perceives her as a secretive space which at all costs must be penetrated.

Desire, in the *De amore*, is not only a discursive enterprise but a hermeneutical challenge. The lover's happiness depends on his ability to decipher the lady's words and uncover their hidden meaning. This is surely why Andreas insists on the dialogue form: the lover is in desperate need of an introduction to the art of rhetoric which might make him a more proficient hermeneuticist, a better reader of the lady's text. But in this case it is *love* (desire) itself which requires the lover to become an expert reader. The necessity of deciphering the beloved's discourse would of course not be particularly painful if the lover could be reasonably sure of reaching the correct interpretation. If the torments of jealousy constitute, as Andreas claims, the 'very substance of love' (p. 101), it is because they reveal the most unspeakable secret of all: that the lover *never* knows whether he has hit upon the true reading. For the jealous lover, the world is transformed into a treacherous text full of traps; since every utterance, every event, is susceptible to different, often contradictory readings, he must suspect every single word or phrase. There is no refuge from this vertiginous multiplicity of meanings; the jealous lover must live in a universe deprived of a firm ground upon which truth can rest. His raging desire for knowledge ('epistemophilia', as Freud would call it; Othello's need for the 'ocular proof') is pathetic and painful

precisely because this desire can never be satisfied. The paradox is that it is the nature of jealousy itself which ensures that the jealous lover (and for Andreas all lovers are jealous) will never find a transcendental signified, a point at which his interpretations can come to rest.[8]

If we are to believe Andreas's claim that 'jealousy is the substance of love', this epistemophiliac drive also constitutes the essential movement of desire. The lover's need for union with the beloved represents a need for absolute insight into the innermost recesses of her mind, but her very otherness, the fact that her consciousness is not his, means that she will always escape his hermeneutical probings. The logic of his desire may thus lead him to conclude that the best way of preventing her consciousness from escaping him yet again is simply by annihilating it: however counter-productive, Othello's murder of Desdemona at least put an end to his anxiety about her behaviour. The endless fears of the jealous lover is thus accompanied by the temptation to put an end to it all by an act of sadistic violence.

Andreas's treatise is not only candidly open about the lover's jealous dilemma; it also focuses on the problem of the amorous language in this context. The problem, as Andreas sees it, is how the man can interpret the woman's words correctly (in keeping with his insistence on male lust and female impassivity, the man is of course always the reader, the woman the text to be read).

A particularly graphic example of this can be found towards the end of Book I, in the chapter entitled 'Love got with Money'. Here Andreas discusses the dangers of dealing with women who only pretend to be in love in order to 'draw money' out of the lover. These women conceal their desire for money behind a mask of love, and Andreas mobilises his most aggressive language in his description of their deceit: 'A woman who you know desires money in return for her love should be looked upon as a deadly enemy, and you should be careful to avoid her like a venomous animal that strikes with its tail and fawns with its mouth' (p. 145). In an extraordinarily violent passage, Andreas seeks to persuade himself and Walter that if the lover just acts early enough it is not impossible to capture the sordid truth behind the lady's loving appearance:

> Therefore, my friend, you should always follow this maxim: whenever you have reason to believe that a woman is interested in piling up the

> coin, be careful to avoid her in the very beginning and not to involve yourself at all in her snares. For if you try to fall in with what she says in order to find out what her real intention is, you will find yourself foiled by your own plan, because no amount of searching will reveal how she feels and what she means to do until the leech is full of blood and leaves you only half alive with all the blood of your wealth drained off. A wise man's best efforts can hardly find out what is beneath the guile of a deceitful lady-love, for she knows how to colour her frauds by so many arts and with so much cleverness that the faithful lover is rarely clever enough to see through them. The ability of a greedy woman is greater than that of the Ancient Enemy was when by his shrewdness he cleverly perverted the mind of our first parent. Therefore you should use all your cleverness to see that you are not tripped up by the snares of such a woman, because a woman of that kind does not want to love, but to revel in your wealth. (p. 147)

The grisly imagery of the woman as a venomous animal (a scorpion?), a blood-sucking leech, as more cunning than the devil, is, if anything, even more sadistic than the openly misogynistic passages of Book III. The difference is that here Andreas claims that 'We do not say these things with the desire of running down honourable women' (p. 147), whereas in Book III he allows no such distinction between good and bad women: '*no* woman ever loved a man' (p. 200) he asserts, '*no* woman ever has enough money' (p. 201), and so on. In Book III there are no exceptions from the rule:

> Furthermore, not only is every woman by nature a miser, but she is also envious and a slanderer of other women, greedy, a slave to her belly, inconstant, fickle in her speech, disobedient and impatient of restraint, spotted with the sin of pride and desirous of vainglory, a liar, a drunkard, a babbler, no keeper of secrets, too much given to wantonness, prone to every evil, and never loving any man in her heart. (p. 201)

The blood-sucking leech never ceases to 'drain away' her unsuspecting lover's property, an action which leaves him without any 'substance' (p. 144). But this 'substance' is clearly more than just property: 'There is nothing so contemptible as for a man to waste his substance on the work of the flesh and the solace of Venus' (p. 147), Andreas claims. This substance/semen also appears disguised as the man's life-blood: 'No amount of searching

will reveal how she feels and what she means to do until the leech is full of blood and leaves you only half alive with all the blood of your wealth drained off' (p. 147). When the greedy and deceitful female vampire is done she will leave the man drained of all substance/semen/property/blood.[9]

But is Andreas's distinction between deceitful and honourable women really tenable? If we return to the passage quoted above, it is easy to see that the text is caught here in a particularly unpleasant paradox. If it is true that the greedy woman's cunning pretence of love is so convincing that even a 'wise man's best efforts' cannot find the truth located 'beneath the guile of a deceitful lady-love', the lover clearly has a problem. The deceitful woman's duplicity is even greater than the devil's, and so it follows that no amount of conversation will uncover the unpalatable truth. Andreas's only advice to Walter is therefore to avoid such women altogether. But this is far too easy a way out. If the deceitful woman's language is indistinguishable from an honest woman's, the lover will never know whether he is listening to truth or deceit. He thus finds himself caught in exactly the same trap as the jealous lover: they are both in a situation where no amount of subtle interpretation will reveal the lady's true intention. Jealousy is indeed the essence of love; and Andreas's advice to Walter really amounts to saying that he ought to avoid *all* women, given the impossibility of distinguishing between them.

Andreas conveniently represses the fact that he has unmasked a problem of general linguistic and epistemological importance (how can language convey truth?), and blames it all on the deviousness of women instead. If the deceit of language only presents us with appearances, the distinction between good and evil women necessarily collapses, and Andreas's Book III logically enough explicitly recommends a total rejection of all women. The fact that by his own analysis men's language would be equally devious and impossible to pin down to an essential truth apparently does not occur to him. Irksome as this may be to feminists, it is interesting to observe that in the modern debate over the 'true' meaning of the *De amore*, the critics accurately enact the problematics of the text: like hermeneutically distraught lovers, they untiringly try to decipher the sibylline utterances of the lady, who now, in a final twist of the plot, turns out to be Andreas himself. There is much consolation for feminists in the

thought that in the end the old misogynist has been forced to play the female lead himself.

If desire is constituted by and conducted in language, the lover is helplessly thrown from one set of deceitful appearances to another. Andreas's final solution is again rigourously logical: reject earthly love altogether and turn to God, who is Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the only self-sufficient cause in the universe; in short, the transcendental signifier and signified *par excellence*. In the end, then, the courtly lover's constant search for the essence beneath the multiple, treacherous appearances of language is resolved: God for Andreas, like death for Lacan, is the only instance which can put a final end to the discourse of desire.

Notes

1. My quotations are from John Jay Parry's elegant translation *The Art of Courtly Love* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1941; rpt. 1969). Readers interested in studying the Latin original should consult the bilingual Latin/English edition, edited and translated by P.G. Walsh, entitled *Andreas Capellanus on Love*, (London: Duckworth, 1982). I chose Parry's translation in the knowledge that as far as my selected quotations are concerned, there are no important disagreements between Parry and Walsh. All page references to Parry's translation are put in brackets in the text without any preceding identification.
2. In his *The Mind and Heart of Love*, Martin d'Arcy argues against Rougemont's definitions of Eros and *agape* as entirely separate and opposed concepts (d'Arcy, 1945).
3. Henry Ansgar Kelly, in his *Love and Marriage in the Age of Chaucer*, states that the first full attack on this idealising view of courtly love was presented as early as in 1938 in an unpublished thesis by Donnel van de Voort at Vanderbilt University (Kelly, 1975, p. 21).
4. Denomy's reading is heavily dependent on a late dating of the *De amore*. The doctrine of 'double truth' was not widely known until the Latin translation of Averroes appeared in 1179. If the *De amore*, as Denomy argues, was composed in the 1170s, the 'double truth' claim becomes dubious. Peter Dronke has pointed out this inconsistency, but has also argued that Andreas's treatise could have been written at any time between 1174 and 1238 (Dronke, 1976).
5. Donald R. Howard shares Donaldson's view. In his *The Three*

Temptations: Medieval Man in Search of the World, he writes about the *De amore*: 'I should be inclined to ... say that while the first two books are ironic and game-like, the last is no less so' (Howard, 1966, p. 96). Jean Leclercq's *Monks and Love in Twelfth-Century France* (1979) takes a similar view.

6. Andrée Kahn Blumstein, in her study of German courtly romances in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, has also criticised the implicit patriarchal assumptions of the courtly code: 'The courtly code' of love and most especially the idealization of women in the romance are in many respects a *covert* form of misogyny; chivalry is but one more method by which what has been called the 'great patriarchal conspiracy' is perpetrated and perpetuated in our culture (Blumstein, 1977, p. 2).
7. In an illuminating article, Erich Köhler (1970) compares the attitude towards jealousy in troubadour lyrics with Andreas's views, and shows that the seemingly opposed ideas in the two kinds of text really cover the same jealous mechanisms. According to Köhler, the *troubadours* are not particularly jealous of the husband since he represents an established attitude towards property and social class, which they as an upwardly mobile group (the *chevalerie*) despise. Their jealousy is directed towards the whole of their peer group, all of whom are seeking social promotion through the favours of the lady. This generalised, competitive form of jealousy is then often projected onto one figure, representative of the whole group, the much despised 'lauzengier', the *slanderer* or *flatterer*, who by divulging the secret of the poet's love destroys all possibility of exclusive communication between him and the lady.
8. A modern psychiatrist has described the same phenomenon in cases of pathological jealousy: 'The desire to obtain proof of the offence is often overwhelmingly strong; it appears to be related to a need to resolve a tormenting doubt which in some cases leads to repeated attempts to extort a confession from the partner. Such patients declare this to be the only satisfaction that they demand, but the irrational nature of their request is strikingly demonstrated by the futility of the confession which is occasionally feigned by a blameless but desperate spouse' (Shepherd, 1961, p. 690).
9. Several authors have discussed the psychological structures of courtly love from a psychoanalytical perspective. Richard A. Koenigsberg reads the *De amore* as a straightforward case of Oedipal desire for a mother figure (Koenigsberg, 1967); whereas Herbert Moller, in a thoughtful article, explains the love-lyrics of the troubadours as a case of infantile desire for the pre-Oedipal mother (Moller, 1960). Melvin Askew's 'Courtly Love: Neurosis as Institution' is a more

superficial approach to the topic (Askew, 1965). Lack of space prevents me from discussing this type of reading more fully.

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