

What is fin'amor (courtly love)?

Courtly love is a Medieval European concept of nobility and chivalry expressing love and admiration. Generally, courtly love was secret and between members of the nobility. It was also generally not practiced between husband and wife.

The term *amour courtois* was introduced by Gaston Paris in 1833. This idea is rooted in an oral tradition. Eleanor of Aquitaine greatly influenced the courtly love idea during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The courtly love relationship is an idea based on the premise of the feudal relationship between a knight and his lord. In comparing the two relationships, the knight serves his courtly lady with the same obedience and loyalty which he owed to his lord. In the relationship, the lady is in complete control of the relationship, while the knight owes her obedience and submission.

However, this literary convention did not prove to be the practice during this era. The knight's love for the lady influenced him to be a better servant, to be worthy of her love and to win her favor. The courtly love was an ennobling force whether the relationship was consummated or not and even whether or not the lady knew about the knight's love or love him in return.

In its essential nature, courtly love, or *fin'amors*, was the expression of the knightly worship of a refining ideal embodied in the person of the beloved. Only a truly noble nature could generate and nurture such a love; only a woman of nobility of spirit was a worthy object. The act of loving was in itself ennobling and refining, the means to the fullest expression of what was potentially fine and elevated in human nature.

This courtly love expressed itself in terms that were feudal and religious. Thus, just as a vassal was expected to honor and serve his lord, so a lover was expected to serve his lady, to obey her commands, and to gratify her merest whims. Absolute obedience and unswerving loyalty were critical. To incur the displeasure of one's lady was to be cast into the void, beyond all light, warmth, and possibility of life.

Customarily, she seemed remote and haughty, imperious and difficult to please. She expected to be served and wooed, at great length. If gratified by her lover-servant. However, physical consummation of love was not obligatory. The importance was the prolonged and exalting experience of being in love.

The courtly love idea influenced literature through expression in lyric poetry and romance narratives. Some of these include the Arthurian tradition, the legends of Tristan and Isolde, Alexander, and Havelock the Dane. The romance literature that presents the idea of courtly love shows the hero's devotion to an unapproachable lady elevates his character. Positive character traits grew out of courtly attainment such as self-consciousness, command of fine manners, practicing proper hunting techniques and dressing, addressing a superior, or wooing a lady.

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