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"COURTLY LOVE": A PROBLEM OF TERMINOLOGY

By John C. Moore

There are a number of terms associated with European history which are enormously useful because of the way they promote good fellowship among the literate public. Words such as *feudalism, renaissance,* and *the church* can be used in educated circles with the confidence that they will be met all around with knowing nods. They provide a bond of learned camaraderie among professionals and amateurs alike, since they create the illusion of shared understanding. Specialists carry on extended debates on the meaning of the terms, and the general educated public, having no taste for semantics, is content to use the terms in a general and indeterminate way. It is enough to know that just about everything before the days of our great-grandparents was brought about by *feudalism* or *the church.* The only exceptions were glimmers of better things to come, and those glimmers, whenever or wherever they occurred, can be safely referred to as the *renaissance.* That is sufficient for the educated public, and the business of quibbling over definitions and refinements can be left to scholars.[1]

"Courtly love" is a term which may yet reach the general usefulness of *feudalism, the church,* and *the renaissance.* It has been used by scholars for 100 years, and now it is frequently on the lips of laymen. It has not yet the currency of the others, but for those amateurs who find *feudalism, the church,* and the *renaissance* an overly simplistic version of 1500 years of European history, *courtly love* can provide an amusing diversion and a subtle refinement. It fits rather nicely into the general scheme of things, since it is a literary and cultural expression of feudalism, it was opposed by the church, and it was one of the first signs of the renaissance.[2]

The beginning of the term "courtly love" is commonly placed in one of two centuries, the nineteenth or the twelfth. In the nineteenth century, in 1883 to be exact, Gaston Paris published an article in which he used the term *amour courtois* to describe the kind of love between Lancelot and Guinevere in Chrétien de Troyes's *Conte de la Charrette* (also called "Chevalier de la

[1] Unfortunately, historians do not even bother to quibble about "the church." The term is used indiscriminately to mean the pope, this or that group of bishops or clergy, or all believers. It is personified to be praised or blamed and is given a whole range of emotions. "Feudalism" and "renaissance", however, are widely discussed. The problems associated with "renaissance" are well known, but for a masterful treatment of the problems associated with the term "feudalism" see Elizabeth A. R. Brown, "The Tyranny of a Construct: Feudalism and Historians of Medieval Europe," *American Historical Review,* **79** (1974), 1063-88.

[2] Because the term has become commonplace, its bibliography is endless. In addition to the items cited below, see the very useful bibliography in Francis X. Newman (ed.), *The Meaning of Courtly Love* (Albany, 1968), 97-102.

Charrette" or "Lancelot").[3] *Amour courtois* was soon translated into "courtly love," and in the next half century innumerable books were written about, or referred to, courtly love. Courtly love was described in these works as an invention of the eleventh or twelfth centuries. It was a special form of love in which the courtly lover idealized his beloved lady and spoke to her or about her in the exalted language usually reserved for a deity.

Recent revisionists have stressed the notion that *amour courtois* was the invention of Gaston Paris, and in a sense it was. Although the Provençal term *cortez'amors* and its variants may have appeared occasionally before the nineteenth century,[4] they were rare indeed in the Middle Ages compared with the ubiquitous *amour courtois* since Paris's article.

Paris gave us the term and he was the first to provide a definition. He described the love between Guinevere and Lancelot in the *Conte de la Charette* and then listed four distinctive traits of that love (518-19): 1) It is illegitimate and furtive; 2) The lover is inferior and insecure; the beloved is elevated, haughty, even disdainful; 3) The lover must earn the lady's affection by undergoing many tests of his prowess, valor, and devotion; 4) The love is an art and a science, subject to many rules and regulations—like courtesy in general. Paris then says, "It seems to me that this *amour courtois* has appeared in no French work before the *Chevalier de la Charrette*" (519). By his definition, this love is exceptional in the twelfth century, not even to be found in the other romances of Chrétien. He then speculates about its origin and finds it in Ovid, in the courtesy of Henry I's court, and in the poetry of the troubadours. As he proceeds, he seems to use the terms *amour courtois* and *amour chevalresque* as though they are interchangeable (520-21). He suggests that the love in the troubadours' lyrics was similar to that of the *Chevalier de la Charrette,* in that it was illegitimate, hidden, and considered to be an art, but he does not attribute to troubadour love all four traits. He does not call the love of the troubadour *amour courtois,* but neither does he explicitly state that the term should not be applied to troubadour poetry. In sum, he describes the love of the *Chevalier de la Charrette* as being unique and calls it *amour courtois,* but he does not explicitly reserve the term for that love, nor does he make clear whether or not he would apply the term to the troubadour lyrics.

It is not clear that Paris intended *amour courtois* to become a technical term having a precise definition, but after him that usage became common. The term was soon very popular, giving rise to books such as Lewis Freeman Mott's *The System of Courtly Love* (Boston, 1896), and William Allen Nielson's *Origins and Sources of the Courts of Love* (Boston, 1899). Mott's book, by the way, continues to popularize the idea of a system of courtly love through a 1965 reprint. The term was not, however, to have a single or

[3] "Etudes sur les romans de la table ronde: Lancelot du Lac," *Romania,* 12 (1883), 459-534. Unless otherwise indicated, translations in this paper are my own.

[4] Jean Frappier looked for earlier uses of the term in the nineteenth century but was unable to find any (" 'Amour courtois,' " *Mélanges de philologie romane dédiés à la mémoire de Jean Boutière* [Liège, 1971], 1, 243-52; reptd. in Frappier, *Amour courtois et table ronde* [Geneva, 1973], 33-41.)

a simple meaning. In *La poésie lyrique des troubadours* (Paris and Toulouse, 1934), a substantial and scholarly work, Alfred Jeanroy developed at length another idea of courtly love (II, 94-113). Jeanroy stressed the worship of an idealized lady as the essence of *amour courtois*. He does not make much of its illegitimate character, certainly leaving little room for actual adultery. "Conscious of the distance which separates him from the beloved, he [the lover] remains invariably respectful, humble, discreet, scarcely brave enough to present his love or express his desire: it is the attitude of the devotee in ecstasy before the Madonna" (II, 102).

Note the difference from Paris's theory. Paris used Lancelot and Guinevere as the representatives of *amour courtois* and Andreas Capellanus as its theoretician. (We shall return to Andreas shortly.) Jeanroy uses neither; his subject was the troubadours. And just as Paris made the *Lancelot* an exceptional romance, Jeanroy acknowledged that his definition applied only to the troubadours of the "classic epoch" and that it did not include love poetry by Cercamon, Raimbaut d'Orange, Bertran de Born, or Guillem Adhémar. Inasmuch as these poets explicitly ask for a kiss or more, their love is not, said Jeanroy, *amour courtois* (II, 102).

We have then this curiosity: two of the most influential definers of *amour courtois* used definitions which implicitly exclude the principal examples of the other and also exclude the larger part of the love poetry, lyric and narrative, being heard in the courts of twelfth-century France. That each of these authors was describing something real is likely; but to use the same term for two different things was confusing and to appropriate the term *courtois* for love themes which were exceptional in courtly society was positively misleading.

Probably no book in English has done more to popularize the term courtly love and to propagate the notion that there was a *system* of courtly love than C. S. Lewis's *Allegory of Love*.[5] There we read:

> 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 characteristics of the Troubadour poetry have been repeatedly described. . . . The sentiment, of course, is love, but love of a highly specialized sort, whose characteristics may be enumerated as Humility, Courtesy, Adultery, and the Religion of Love (2).

As Lewis proceeds, however, he does not apply all four traits consistently. For example, to show that courtly love is virtually a rival religion, he cites Aucassin's statement that he would rather go to hell with courtly society than to heaven (22). He doesn't mention that in *Aucassin and Nicolette,* there is no adultery and no extravagant humility on Aucassin's part. Nicolette is not idealized and remote. On the contrary, they are simply two young lovers who want to get married and in fact do.

Had Lewis been content to say, "Here are four themes quite common in twelfth- and thirteenth-century love poetry," there would have been no problem. There are in fact many examples of adulterous love, of knights humbling themselves before idealized ladies, of courteous lovers, of love talk using reli-

[5] (New York, 1958), first published, 1936.

gious vocabulary. But to group these four themes together as the essential traits of a new phenomenon called "courtly love" is to distort seriously the views which courtly people held about love. It is to take all the other poetic themes concerning love and to treat them as exceptional, or "non-courtly," when in fact they are not.

Paris, Jeanroy, and Lewis are three of the most prestigious and influential scholars who have written on courtly love, but many others have addressed themselves to the subject (or subjects). Scholars have commonly exercised themselves in defining courtly love and, having framed their definitions, in explaining where courtly love came from. Some said it was adulterous, others said not. Some said it was spiritual and pure, others said it was sensual and erotic. Some said it was freely given, others said it was the result of fate or uncontrollable passion. As for its origins, some said the idea came from Ovid, some said it came from orthodox Christianity, some said it came from the Arabs. In a famous book Denis de Rougemont argued that courtly love was a cryptic expression of the Cathar heresy—an outlandish theory, brilliantly argued.[6] A Canadian scholar, A. J. Denomy, wrote several extremely learned works to prove that courtly love was heretical, but not Catharist.[7] Rather it was an expression of Averroism, a Moslem heresy which said that two contrary propositions can be true at the same time, one by reason, one by faith. The courtly lovers, he said, tried to adhere to courtly love which was in accord with nature and reason, but also to the contrary, Christian love, which was in accord with faith and revelation.

More modish explanations appeared in psycho-sociological form. In that courtly love was essentially unconsummated, it was a regression into infantile sexuality.[8] In that it elevated women, it was the result of a high sex-ratio in aristocratic society: the value of women rose as the supply fell.[9]

Besides the formal treatises on courtly love, there were countless other works discussing it in passing. Authors who wrote about Dante, Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, or even love or the Middle Ages in general would often include their own explanation of courtly love. Amy Kelly's popular and influential book on *Eleanor of Aquitaine* explained the way in which formal courts of love defined and propagated the rules of courtly love. Eleanor and her daughter Marie, Countess of Champagne, were presented there as the true creators and patrons of courtly love.[10] I might add that in 1976 Marina Warner's provocative book about the cult of Mary in the West, continues the tradition with an extended discussion of courtly love.[11] The clear impression

[6] *L'Amour et l'Occident* (Paris, 1939), English trans. Montgomery Belgion, *Love in the Western World,* rev. ed. (New York, 1956).

[7] Especially *The Heresy of Courtly Love* (New York, 1947).

[8] Herbert Moller, "The Meaning of Courtly Love," *Journal of American Folklore,* 73 (1960), 39-52.

[9] Herbert Moller, "The Social Causation of the Courtly Love Complex," *Comparative Studies in Society and History,* 1 (1959), 137-63.

[10] *Eleanor of Aquitaine and the Four Kings* (New York, 1957), 198-212; 1st ed. 1950.

[11] *Alone of All Her Sex* (New York, 1976), 134-54.

created by much of this literature was that courtly love—whatever it was—was just about the only kind of love found in medieval courtly society.[12]

For the last twenty years or so, however, some scholars have taken different approaches. To some degree, the change has been simply to deemphasize the term and its definition. In his *In Praise of Love,* Maurice Valency spoke of "courtly love" as a "spectrum of attitudes,"[13] and showed in that volume the variety of love-themes to be found in twelfth- and thirteenth-century poetry.

Moshé Lazar also stressed this variety in a doctoral thesis completed in 1957 and published in 1964 as *Amour Courtois et Fin'Amors.* He kept the term *amour courtois,* but he added two more to eliminate the confusion of using the same term for different realities. Courtly love was, he said, "fin'amors," the adulterous love of Lancelot. To that he added Passionate or Tristan-love, one which was also adulterous but had nothing of the idealization of the beloved and ennobling effect of love on the lover. Third, there was "conjugal courtly love," a term which acknowledged that in many twelfth-century love stories, the lovers got married and lived happily ever after.[14]

A major work published in 1965 seemed to be more in the old tradition, beginning as it did with a definition of courtly love. Peter Dronke's *Medieval Latin and the Rise of the European Love-Lyric* used a definition of courtly love derived from an 1896 article by Joseph Bédier, saying that three traits are most worth stressing:[15] first, love is worship of an excellent beloved; second, the love gives value or ennobles the lover; third, the pursuit of the beloved is "infinitely arduous, and would be impossible were it not for the lady's grace" (I,7). Dronke denied that these sentiments of courtly love were especially medieval or especially aristocratic. He said that the same themes were to be found in ancient literature and in the love poetry of non-Western cultures, and they were, he argued, as characteristic of popular culture as of aristocratic. To be sure, he confuses matters considerably by coining a new term, *courtly experience* (I,vii-viii, 3-7 *et passim*), but he has clearly moved some distance from the ideas of Paris, Jeanroy, and Lewis.

When Gaston Paris framed his definition of *amour courtois,* the one work he stressed besides Chrétien's *Conte de la Charrette* was the *De arte honeste amandi by* Andreas Capellanus.[16] Since then, nearly all the theories of courtly

[12] Note the title of this bibliography: F. Xavier Baron, *"Amour Courtois," The Medieval Ideal of Love: A Bibliography* (Louisville, 197-?).

[13] (New York, 1958), 143.

[14] *Amour Courtois et "Fin' Amors" dans la littérature du XIIe siècle* (Paris, 1964), 60-64, 189-93 *et passim.* These categories are restated in his paper "Cupid, the Lady, and the Poet: Modes of Love at Eleanor of Aquitaine's Court," *Eleanor of Aquitaine: Patron and Politician,* ed. W. Kibler (Austin, 1976), 35-59.

[15] Second ed. (Oxford, 1968), 1, 4-7. Dronke quotes Bédier, "Les Fêtes de mai et les commencements de la poésie lyrique au Moyen Age," *Revue des deux mondes* (mai, 1896), 172.

[16] Ed. by E. Trojel as *Andreae Capellani Regii Francorum De Amore Libri Tres* (Munich, 1964, reprint of 1892 ed.). English trans. by John Jay Parry, *The Art of Courtly Love* (New York, 1941). Page citations are from this translation.

love have relied heavily on that curious work. A Latin treatise of the late twelfth or early thirteenth century, it purports to be written by one Andreas for a young friend named Walter. It consists of three books, a long one followed by two very short books. The first book defines love and its traits and then tells how love may be acquired. The last is accomplished through eight dialogues, each showing how a man of this or that social status approaches a woman of this or that social status, for example, how a commoner approaches a woman of his own status, of the lower nobility, of the upper nobility, and so on. This book continues with miscellaneous subjects such as the love of nuns and love got with money. Book II describes how to carry on the affair, once initiated. This short book becomes increasingly casuistic, raising and answering questions in the manner of a legal or ethical handbook. There follows a series of "cases," in which judgments are supposedly being given by some of the outstanding aristocratic ladies of the day: Countess Marie of Champagne, Queen Eleanor of England, Viscountess Ermengarde of Narbonne, Countess Isabell of Flanders. Eleanor is quoted as referring to a judgment made by her daughter: "We dare not oppose the opinion of the Countess of Champagne who ruled that love can exert no power between husband and wife" (175). These judgments are described as having been given in formal "courts of love." Book II concludes with a story about a knight of Britain who obtained a scroll on which were written the rules of love as dictated by the King of Love himself. Among the 31 rules were: marriage is no real excuse for not loving; when made public love rarely endures; love can deny nothing to love.

Finally, book III is on the rejection of love. Here the author counsels young Walter that, having learned the lessons of love, he should earn merit in God's eyes by refusing to apply them. This book continues in a spirit entirely different from the first two books. In the earlier books, women and love are presented as the sources of all things good and beautiful; in the last book, they are the source of endless suffering and evil.

Now nearly every theory of courtly love since Gaston Paris has assumed that the *De arte honeste amandi* is a serious treatise on *amour courtois*. This assumption was popularized in the English-speaking world when its English translation was published in 1941. The term *amour courtois* does not appear in the original work, but John Jay Parry gave his translation the title *The Art of Courtly Love*. He introduced it by saying that it gave a "vivid picture of life in a medieval court like that of Troyes or Poitiers," courts in which was taught "that strange social system to which Gaston Paris has given the name of 'courtly love'" (3). Note that courtly love has here become a "social system."

Now even some of those who took Andreas seriously seem to have had occasional doubts. Sidney Painter used the work as a treatise on courtly love, but said that "it seems highly probable that Andrew was not always entirely serious."[17] Felix Schlösser wrote a lengthy study discussing Andreas's work as a serious treatise, but he at least acknowledged the possibility that the third book, the condemnation of love, might not be serious.[18] For everyone,

[17] *French Chivalry* (Ithaca, 1961, 1st ed. 1940), 118.

[18] *Andreas Capellanus: Seine Minnelehre und das christliche Weltbild um 1200* (Bonn, 1960), 375.

the fact that Andreas wrote in Latin should have caused serious doubts that he wrote for courtly society.

It was D. W. Robertson, Jr. however, who in 1953 first made an all-out attack on the prevailing view. He argued that the first two books praising love were ironic, really intending to show courtly morals to be adulterous and even blasphemous. According to Robertson, the final book, condemning love and women, presented Andreas's true beliefs.[19] So in place of Andreas the worldly theorist of courtly love, we have Andreas the satirical but stern moralist and misogynist, attacking a decadent courtly society. Neither view, I think, presents the real Andreas, a sophisticated clerical humorist writing for the same audience that enjoyed Juvenal, Goliardic songs, and other Latin satires of the twelfth century, but at least Robertson had given Andreas a sense of humor. Robertson's views reached a wide audience through a later volume, *A Preface to Chaucer*.[20]

E. Talbot Donaldson went further and announced that the emperor wore no clothes at all. In a witty essay published in 1965, Donaldson spoke of the "Myth of Courtly Love" and said that the entire work of Andreas was a joke.[21] Donaldson was not impressed with Andreas's wit, to be sure, but he was even less impressed with the sober commentaries of modern scholars, including Robertson, who took any part of Andreas's work to be a serious presentation of his views.

Peter Dronke, publishing in the same year as Donaldson, treated Andreas in the same way. The *De arte* was, he said, a "clerical jeu d'esprit, not a guide to the interpretation of love-lyrics."[22] The idea that Andreas's book was a "devout exposition of courtoisie" was, he said, an "astonishing but almost universally held view of Andreas" (I, 84-85). Even Jean Frappier, a staunch defender of the term *amour courtois,* acknowledged that Andreas might not be the most reliable source for the subject.[23]

The attack on Andreas as a serious source jeopardized not only dozens of theories of courtly love, but also threatened the whole idea of courts of love presided over by aristocratic ladies. The archival research of John F. Benton in Champagne turned up little to support the idea that Marie of Champagne and Eleanor gathered about themselves poets of wordly love and presided over courts which gave judgments of courtly love.[24] Amy Kelly's delightful picture of courtly society at Poitiers and of Eleanor of Aquitaine as its presiding genius appeared to have no foundation other than Andreas.[25]

[19] "The Subject of the *De Amore* of Andreas Capellanus," *Modern Philology,* **50** (1952-53), 145-61.

[20] (Princeton, 1962).

[21] "The Myth of Courtly Love," *Ventures,* **5** (1965), 16-23. Reprinted in the same author's *Speaking of Chaucer* (London, 1970), 154-63.

[22] *Medieval Latin,* 1, 47.

[23] " 'Amour Courtois,' " (1973), 33, n. 2.

[24] "The Court of Champagne as a Literary Center," *Speculum,* **36** (1961), 551-91. See also Elizabeth A. R. Brown, "Eleanor of Aquitaine: Parent, Queen, and Duchess," in *Eleanor,* ed. Kibler, 9-34.

[25] The same criticism applies to Rita Lejeune, "Rôle littéraire d'Aliénor d'Aquitaine et de sa famille," *Cultura Neolatina,* **14** (1954), 5-57. Reto Bezzola is properly skeptical of Kelly and Lejeune, but he also bases his conclusions about Eleanor's court on Andreas (*Les origines et la formation de la littérature courtoise en occi-*

In 1967, a symposium was held at the State University of New York in Binghamton. The subject was the meaning of courtly love.[26] D. W. Robertson, Jr. took up the attack again, basically arguing that courtly love, if anything, was simple lust, and that it was condemned satirically by the very writers whom Gaston Paris identified as its major spokesmen: Chrétien de Troyes and Andreas Capellanus. John Benton, who had earlier raised doubts that the court of Marie of Champagne was a literary center, now ridiculed the idea that adultery would be seriously advocated as a way of life in medieval Europe. Adultery with a married woman was harshly treated in theory and in fact. Benton denied that Andreas was to be taken seriously and concluded, " 'courtly love' has no useful meaning and is not worth saving by redefinition" (37).

The formidable Dante scholar Charles S. Singleton was not fazed. He asserted that there was a courtly-love tradition and that Dante was part of it, though he said that courtly love was basically a game played at by poets. Singleton offered no definition, but he offered several important ingredients: the god of love, the high-placed and cruel madonna, the poet in tears, begging mercy (46). He said nothing about furtive or adulterous love or about the arduous tests to be undergone by the lover.

W. T. H. Jackson took as his title, "The German Reaction to Courtly Love." He argued that there was a system of courtly love but that it was rejected by the German poets Wolfram von Eschenbach and Gottfried von Strassburg. He remarked that even Chrétien rejected courtly love by treating it satirically in most of his works. We can note two things about this system of courtly love. First Jackson is working with a definition narrower than most we have seen. He says that the "two basic constituents of courtly love [are] the right of a woman to demand unquestioning service in whatever triviality she fancies, and the need for a knight to gain honor for his lady by embarking on a series of otherwise pointless adventures" (65). These two constituents later blend into one. *Minnedienst* (love-service) is the "essential element of courtly love" (74). Secondly, courtly love is here becoming not a term for the love advocated in twelfth-and thirteenth-century poetry, but one for the love rejected. Although Jackson finds courtly love in *some* of the provençal love-lyrics and in most of the German love-lyrics, most of the romances are, he says, anti-courtly love. The hope that Jackson will explain this paradox does not survive his last paragraph. He opens it by asking, "What, then, are we to understand by courtly love in German literature?" (75). His answer is to offer two definitions, one which includes German love poetry and another which does not.

Finally, at the same conference, Theodore Silverstein suggested that the term "courtly love" should be understood not as having a "meaning," but rather as having various uses. Acknowledging the confusion attached to the term, he was still not ready "simply to abandon the term and concept together in a grand and purifying holocaust" (87).

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dent [500-1200], third part: *La société courtoise: littérature de cour et littérature courtoise,* tome 1: *La cour d'Angleterre comme centre littéraire sous les rois angevins [1154-1199]* [Paris, 1963], pp. 254-55, 264-71).

[26] Ed. by F. X. Newman, *The Meaning of Courtly Love* (Albany, 1968).

The 1967 symposium provoked two principal responses. In a 1972 article reviewing several books, Francis Lee Utley defended the "concept of courtly love."[27] Although he acknowledged the validity of most of the criticisms of the term and rejected most of the common definitions, he would not give up the term. The reader seeking to know *which* concept of courtly love Utley is defending discovers that it seems to be an entirely new one: the phenomena and apparatus called "courtly love" can be characterized as "the formalized codification of love" (319). "There is not one courtly love but twenty or thirty of them . . ." (322). As codifications, they belong to the ideal, and as such, their reality does not depend upon anyone's actually realizing the ideal. Utley's definition is interesting and provocative, but one wonders whether another definition is what is needed to eliminate the confusion.

The second response to the Binghamton symposium came from the distinguished scholar Jean Frappier. In a 54-page article, Frappier attacked the papers singly and collectively. He argued that courtly love was merely a synonym for *fine amor,* and since *fine amor* certainly existed, then courtly love existed. Even the qualified acceptance given by Singleton and Silverstein was insufficient for Frappier. He acknowledged that since Paris many scholars had changed and extended the definition of *amour courtois,* but that, he said, is not the fault of Paris (as though the question of blame were relevant). He acknowledged that Paris misused Andreas Capellanus, but he claimed that Paris's definition could still be salvaged. To complement his own definition of *amour courtois,* he proposed two additional terms: *amour arturien* and *amour chevalresque.* His definitions we need not examine, merely noting that Frappier is mainly arguing what most scholars accept, that a number of specific love themes existed in the twelfth century. He does not really address himself to the problem of terminology. Can one restore the value of an abused word any more than one can restore the value of an inflated dollar?[28]

Scholars sometimes neglect the fact that the meanings of words depend on usage. If our carefully contrived definitions run contrary to usage, our efforts are in vain. We are frequently powerless to separate a term from the false or misleading connotations it has acquired. If we are to avoid the connotations, we must avoid the word. Moreover, historians are too prone to reify the generalizations that acquire names.

Henri Marrou issued an important warning when he spoke of two types of historical concepts.[29] The first is Weber's Ideal-Type, such as "the Ancient City," a concept not intended to conform to any particular ancient city but which has most of the salient features of most ancient cities and which can

[27] "Must We Abandon the Concept of Courtly Love?" *Medievalia et humanistica,* 3 (1972), 299-324.

[28] "Sur un procès fait à l'amour courtois," *Romania,* 93 (1972), 145-93; rptd. in *Amour courtois,* 61-96. René Nelli also distinguishes between *amour courtois* and *amour chevalresque* but makes better use of less troublesome terms such as *amour provencal* and *l'érotique des troubadours* (*L'érotique des troubadours* [Toulouse, 1963], 63-77).

[29] H. Marrou, *The Meaning of History,* trans. J. Olsen (Baltimore, 1966), 155-76.

then be used, as it were, as a measuring stick for discussing and describing individual cities of antiquity. The second kind of concept is more comprehensive and less subject to precise definition, e.g., terms like the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, the Baroque. "They denote an ensemble, for example a more or less vast period of history of a certain human milieu, or of the history of art or of thought: the totality of all that we are able to know of the object thus defined" (174). Now Marrou quite rightly defends the utility of these two kinds of concepts, but he also warns of the dangers. Of the former, he says that the historian must remain "fully conscious of its strictly nominalistic character. . . . If he [the historian] is not careful, he will spontaneously be inclined to bring his "ideal-types" into being and reify them, using them as though they were really Platonic Ideas, Essences, tending in their purity to be more real than the authentic historic reality" (171). Of the second type, he offers very similar warnings: "The danger remains . . . of hypostasizing these ideas and conferring upon them, in turn, the value of an idea, of an essence, of a superior reality, of a principle of cohesion and intelligibility . . . . Lord Acton was angered at the sight of diplomatic history continually calling on these stereotyped actors: Great Britain, France, where one should say the ruling class, the government, the Foreign Office, the Quai d'Orsay, or rather such and such a minister . . ." (174-75).

We should take Marrou's warning a step further and note that these "concepts," once reified, become the object of definition and redefinition, so that the words no longer represent a single concept, but several. "Courtly love" is such a term. It is a term used for a number of different, in some cases contradictory, conceptions; and as such, it gives the illusion of communication without the reality. One might argue that terms of such indeterminate meaning have their uses. In accord with Wittgenstein's theory of "family resemblance,"[30] one might say, for example, that there was no single, essential trait of a twelfth-century nobleman, but that all nobles had at least some of a set of characteristics, no one of which is essential: landed property, dominion over men, training in mounted combat, good birth. In that sense, "noble" denotes a group having a "family resemblance." "Courtly love," however, has rarely been treated this way, definers always seeking to identify its *essential* traits. Moreover, a nobleman was a concrete, real thing in the twelfth century, acknowledged as such by contemporaries, who applied to him the term *nobilis*. The term *nobilis* is anchored in the sources, whereas *amour courtois* is the creature of every wind stirred up by scholars.

A superficial survey of German and Italian scholarship suggests that the term has been less popular there and therefore less troublesome. Having terms at their disposal such as *Minne, Minnelehre, Frauendienst, Minnedichtung,* and *Minnedienst* has apparently helped save German scholars. These terms have fairly clear general meanings without specialized, technical definitions. *Höfische Minne* or *höfische Liebe* have not claimed inordinate at-

[30] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations,* trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford, 1968), Bk. I, parag. 65-67. I am indebted for this reference to Professor Joseph LaLumia.

tention.[31] Similarly, the term seems less important in Italian scholarship than in French or English.[32]

So what are the prospects for the term "courtly love"? Clearly it is a mischievous term which should be abandoned, but I regret to forecast that it has a long life ahead of it. At a 1973 symposium on Eleanor of Aquitaine, nearly all the papers hailed her as the patron of courtly literature and of courtly love.[33] In 1975, a collection of papers appeared entitled *In Pursuit of Perfection: Courtly Love in Medieval Literature.*[34] In their introduction, the editors insisted that "courtly love is real." It is, they said, not "an established doctrine, a rigid system of rules of behavior, but rather a cluster of personal feelings and social values . . ." (3). Five of the six papers in that volume had "courtly love" in the title. In early 1977, the International Courtly Literature Society held its triennial congress in Athens, Georgia, and 15 of the papers delivered had "courtly love" in their titles. We can be sure that it seasoned the texts of many more. The term has an unmistakable glamor, and it is useful in marketing. I made sure to include it in the title of this paper, just as I always list my twelfth-century seminar as "The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century." Even the austere world of scholarship makes use of cosmetics.

Perhaps the most we can hope for is that "courtly love" will recede a little to enable people to note the variety of love-themes in medieval literature. Several recent anthologies of troubadour lyrics now make that variety accessible to readers of modern languages.[35] And many scholars who continue to use the term use it in a very general way. The editors of the anthologies just mentioned are generally able to present love songs of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries without making use of the term. In his *Troubadours and Love* (Cambridge, 1975), L. T. Topsfield keeps the term alive, but he uses it only

[31] There is no article on *amour courtois* or its equivalent in *Reallexikon der deutschen Literaturgeschichte,* 2nd ed., Paul Merker *et al.* (Berlin, 1958-); and Friedrich Neumann's article "Minnesang" in that work does not use the term (2, 303-14). I do not find the term in any form in *Geschichte der deutschen Literatur,* ed. by Helmut de Boor and Richard Newald, II, Helmut de Boor, *Die höfische Literatur,* 7th ed. (Munich, 1966). Theodor Frings does not use it in *Die Anfänge der europäischen Liebesdichtung im 11. und 12. Jahrhundert* (Munich, 1960).

[32] For example, the term is used in neither of these general accounts of medieval Italian literature: Francesco Flora, *Storia della letteratura italiana,* 16th ed., 1 (Verona, 1967); Antonio Viscardi, "Dalle Origini al Rinascimento," in *Letteratura Italiana: Le Correnti,* 1 (Milan, 1956). Viscardi quotes Gaston Paris on other subjects (122, 141) but not on *amour courtois.*

[33] *Eleanor,* ed. Kibler.

[34] Ed. by Joan M. Ferrante and George D. Economou (Port Washington, 1975).

[35] *Les Troubadours,* ed. and trans. into French, René Nelli and René Lavaud, 2 vols. (Paris, 1960-66); *Anthology of Troubadour Lyric Poetry,* ed. and trans. Alan R. Press (Austin, 1971); *Medieval Song,* ed. and trans. James J. Wilhelm (New York, 1971); see also Wilhelm's *Seven Troubadours* (University Park, 1970); *Lyrics of the Troubadours and Trouvères,* ed. and trans. Frederick Goldin (Garden City, 1973); *German and Italian Lyrics of the Middle Ages,* ed. and trans. Frederick Goldin (Garden City, 1973).

occasionally and vaguely. This sort of restraint may be the best we can expect. It is very likely, though, that the old works will continue to be reprinted and to be read. Definitions of courtly love will continue to be advanced and rebuffed. And since the term is not found in the sources, the debate cannot be settled by recourse to the evidence—so it will never be settled.[36]

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[36] Since writing this article I have received a copy of Roger Boase, *The Origin and Meaning of Courtly Love: A Critical Study of European Scholarship* (Manchester, England and Totowa, N.J., 1977). Boase uses the term "courtly love" with remarkable nonchalance. He says that "the meaning of the term has never been satisfactorily defined" (123), but he uses it throughout the book in a variety of ways. The only definition he provides himself is that "courtly love" is "the complex of ideas and sentiments implicit in the troubadour movement" (129). Whether such things as the fated love of Tristan or the married love of Aucassin or the fulfilled love of the dawn-songs were implicit in the troubadour movement is never made clear. Throughout, Boase writes about those using the term "courtly love" or, for that matter, those not using the term but still referring to life or literature in medieval courts, as though all of them are talking about the same thing (which he calls "courtly love"), and this despite his own abundant evidence to the contrary. Boase generally is quite successful in stating succinctly the views of the other scholars he discusses, and his net is wide indeed. But at times he groups opinions with too little discernment. He speaks of Paris and Jeanroy as though they used the same definition of *amour courtois* (120), and he treats the speakers at Binghamton almost as disciples of Robertson: Robertson's paper "set the general tone of the conference" (122). Boase's book continues the confusion about the term "courtly love," but it is an extremely useful survey of scholarship concerning love themes in medieval vernacular literature. It also provides an excellent bibliography.