

‘The Love We Court.’

Medieval Discourses of Love & the
Performative Politics of Romantic Love

by

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In matters of love, life has often sought to imitate art.

—John W. Baldwin

Aristocratic Life in Medieval France

For my mother, Elaine

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ABSTRACT

Fundamental to the intelligibility of romantic love in contemporary Western romance culture is its common signifier ‘falling in love’, constituted as a ‘magical’ emotional experience of a ‘true’ and ‘special’ kind of love invested with erotic power. Thus far, feminism has paid only sporadic attention to what constitutes ‘falling in love’ and its emotional configuration. While many feminists argue that its emotions are not pre-social but socially and discursively constructed, feminist analysis of romance and its effects are almost always contemporary. Despite general agreement across disciplines that romantic love is the ancestor of medieval ‘courtly love’, historical or genealogical approaches are few. This study addresses that gap in feminist knowledge, investigating the ‘psycho-emotional erotics of falling in love’ and interrogating its construction through a historical and historiographical genealogy—informed by both mainstream and contemporary feminist theory.

The birth-place of courtly love was the medieval royal and aristocratic courts of Occitania where the troubadours wrote their verse lyric. The lyric form called the *cansos* was the first and most significant artistic influence on the falling in love narrative which has had profound and enduring impacts on Western romance culture. Against the current of still prevalent readings of amorous content in the *cansos*, this thesis argues that the *cansos* represent public forms of medieval social and political love—namely courtliness and ennobling love—not sexual/affective love as we know it today; an argument with implications for how romantic love has historically been constructed and understood. In

addition, I argue that the troubadour's veneration of aristocratic women in the *cansos* was not, primarily, in response to their feminine virtue or sexual allure, but to their social status and power as territorial lords, motivated as least in part, by noblewomen's capacity to patronise troubadour works of art and career advancement.

The sophisticated noble courts of Occitania were rich in practices that centred on the display of virtue and emotion in creating the sociality and civility of daily court life. The discourses and practices arising in that environment are analysed by examining the socio-political and cultural forces behind the creation of the *cansos*. Lyric's appropriation for romance and the inculcation of the 'falling in love' narrative in Western romance culture over time is explained through the interaction of intertextuality and lived experience. Aspects of performativity, speech acts and the interpellation of ideology are considered in showing how romantic love is 'the effect, not the cause of discourse'. This proposition has the political potential of subverting the 'magical' erotics of chemistry 'embodied' in heterosexual attraction central to the narrative of falling in love, and reconceptualising romantic love as one of human agency and power.

Declaration:

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief this thesis does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Sandra Maxine Price

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PREFACE

I came to the subject of romantic love via a rather circuitous route. My initial doctoral subject was marriage contracts that would involve the negotiation of equitable divisions of child care and domestic labour. But during my reading about marriage, the issue of romantic love appeared as a major hurdle in negotiating marital contracts. Couples in the throes of ‘romantic love’ are unlikely to imagine a time when they are not. Negotiating a domestic agreement based on feminist principles is a frightening prospect for many women, capable of shattering any illusions about undying love by uncovering the mask of romance so often appearing at the entry point to marriage. But the problems with romantic love for women run deeper still, with intimate relationships thoroughly implicated in the tragic statistics of violence against women resulting in so many deaths and disabilities every year in Australia and overseas.

When I began this interdisciplinary research, I was returning to study after a long absence. To get up to date on feminist theories, I began listening to lectures and one on Judith Butler’s theory of the performativity of gender changed the course of my inquiry. In a rush of ideas and a free flow of words I rarely experience, I began to consider how contemporary feminist theory in general, and Butler’s influential notion of performativity might be understood with respect to romantic love. My research took a passionate, if somewhat trepidatious, turn for the better. This new direction would involve a thorough investigation into the discourses and practices of French medieval life, but I had no

training as a historian. However, on the plus side, English and French medieval history have always fascinated me and this unexpected opportunity to indulge my interest was very welcome. When I commenced this research, I was unprepared for the extent to which medieval romance literature and history have shaped the ideology of romantic love historically. I was surprised and intrigued by what I discovered about gender politics and women's power in medieval Occitania, and its legacy to romantic love.

But there was also another issue concerning this study for which I was completely unprepared. Throughout the research and writing process, I have been constantly pulled between my rather 'unromantic' and pragmatic argument that romantic love is performative and some internal resistance to that premise. The dissonance between these two positions was confronting, and many times I doubted the legitimacy of what I was doing. However, over time these doubts diminished in the realisation that the overwhelming number of examples of romantic love producing my emotional responses, were in fact, the exclusive domain of the arts, of literature, films, plays, music, operas and television programs. Indeed, real life seemed a pale imitation of the artistic creation.

Despite attempts to fulfil romances' narrative by millions worldwide, it seems there is virtually nothing in real life that replicates the imaginative products of creative minds. It appeared a romantic narrative was running romance discourse and practice, affecting what we understand romantic love to be in contemporary culture—that romantic love is the effect, not the cause of discourse. But something else was also going on: despite attempts to readjust my thinking, I could not shift a core feeling that romantic love holds something worthwhile. Was there something beneficial in romantic love? Or were my

feelings a delusion, a cultural construction inscribed through too much exposure to romance? As I discovered, the predecessor of romantic love, medieval romance literature, was primarily didactic; it had a civilising function centred on public forms of love that were part of the intellectual and philosophical transformation of Europe following the Dark Ages. Medieval romance's didactics became a central focus of my research.

Medieval forms of political and social love have been misinterpreted as amorous love; the didactic illustration of public love and its practice has been interpreted and constructed as the 'real' erotic thing. But romantic love is not the effect of physical chemistry; it resides in the intention and practice of love, which was the civilising message of medieval romance literature. Paradoxically, romantic love *can* be realised—at least in theory—through its enactment. Indeed, if romantic love is the effect of the saying and doing of acts of love, its agential quality suggests its radical, liberatory potential. But for this potential to be fulfilled, we must first get past the 'magical' mythology of romantic love and its purportedly erotic power to transcend problems, especially gendered inequalities. Much of its mythology rests on the fundamental idea that romantic love is founded on the 'magical' and erotic transformative power of heterosexual attraction and the chemistry of 'falling in love', which mysteriously does all the work of love.

Theory cannot be useful to anyone interested in resistance and change unless there is a reason to believe that knowing what a theory means and believing it to be true, have some connection to resistance and change.

—Maria C. Lugones and Elizabeth V. Spelman

“Feminism and the Discipline of Old French Studies: Une Belle Disjointure”

Medievalism and the Modernist Temper

INTRODUCTION

Sometime in my mid-teens, during a conversation with my mother about sex, love and the ‘whole damn thing’, I asked if she still loved my father. Her answer surprised me. “I love him” she said, “but I am not ‘in love’ with him anymore.” What was the difference, I asked? It was hard to explain she said but being ‘in-love’ was a very special feeling. Special in what way, I wanted to know: what did it feel like? After a pause, followed by a long deep sigh, she said it was impossible to describe, but that I would *know* when it happened. There was something of resignation in her sigh, recalling perhaps, that what she once had with my father, was now gone. But I was left with the impression that being ‘in love’ was eminently better than just plain old love and wanted to know more, but mum had returned to washing the dishes.

I was left with some intriguing questions following that conversation with my mother. It was the mid-sixties when romantic love seemed to be on the rise during the sexual revolution and the politics of free love. Like so many children of my generation, and since, I had been exposed to the usual fairytales of princes and damsels in need of rescue, and the classic Disney films infused with magic when a kiss worked miracles, and everyone falls in love, even dogs and other four legged and feathered entities. We have all been primed with great expectations about this mysterious love of which my mother could not speak. The questions I grappled with then remain relevant to many women (and men)

today. What is romantic love? Is it real? What does it mean to be ‘in love’? Where does that special feeling get its power? What is this “in-ness” of love upon which everything else seems to depend?

Falling in love’s mysterious power

Romance, and the love that bears its name, is beset with ambiguity and fraught with contradictions, a strange mix of opposites, refusing to be pinned down and defying consistent definition. Often described as idealistic and derided as the unattainable ideal, yet also acknowledged by many as the relationship of preference regardless of its reputation as unrealistic, as not achievable in the day to day of real life. Despite considerable doubts as to its viability, even as to its existence outside of the arts, it remains for many a passionate, mysterious and magical connection akin to destiny or fate, promising great fulfilment or utter desolation; born of unpredictable impulse and strangely forbidden, it is at once sensually chaotic and potentially destructive, yet also quaint, sentimental and nostalgic, almost moribund.

In countering this ambiguity, this study begins at a point of agreement across several disciplines. History, literary and feminist scholars alike theorise romantic love as a narrative demonstrated through the plethora and diversity of its stories; no single narrative is essential to romantic love. However, fundamental to the integrity of romance narrative and forming its semantic core, is the theme of ‘falling in love’ around which multiple stories of different times, ethnicities, race, class and sexualities are structured. Common to the theme of ‘falling in love’ in contemporary Western culture is the

interweaving of three core constructs:

1. It is a unique ‘magical’, almost ‘mystical’ experience of sexual/affective love, transcending the mundane of everyday life and constituted by a strange mix of pleasure, sentimentality, devotion, tempestuous emotions and sometimes destructive passions.¹
2. Its ‘magical’ quality derives from the chemistry of heterosexual attraction making it seem innate, natural, irresistible and inevitable and therefore, outside the individual control of two ‘soulmates’ who surrender to the powers of this love and their destiny. People describe this experience as ‘falling in love’ and being ‘in love’; or put differently, they are in a ‘state’ called love.
3. This ‘state’ is indicative of ‘true’ love, a consuming psycho-sexual embodied experience with the erotic power to transform men for the better, making romantic love especially appealing for women.

These three interrelated constructs form the ideology of romantic love from its early fictionalization, and remain its common signifiers in contemporary culture. I call them the ‘psycho-emotional erotics of falling in love’.

This falling in love narrative has been the substance of romance literature, film, poetry and music for centuries and shows no signs of abating. The cultural persistence of

¹ Stevi Jackson, “Love, Social Change, and Everyday Heterosexuality,” Love: A Question for Feminism in the Twenty-First Century, eds. Anne G. Jónasdóttir and Ann Ferguson (New York and London: Routledge, 2014). Jackson’s work on romantic love is widely acknowledged and she argues that “generally it is associated with passion, and particularly sexual passion” p. 41.

romantic love in modern western society and the problem it poses for feminism was the subject of “The Heart of the Matter: Feminists Revisit Romance” by Jackie Stacey and Lynne Pearce in 1995.² Twenty-two years on, romantic love continues to dominate the culture of sexual/affective relationships. Indeed, with the dissemination of romance expanding into the platforms of social media and reality television programs, the commercialisation of falling in love has entered a new era of marketing that ensures its promotion and endurance into the foreseeable future.

Reality television programs have caught the public imagination with huge audiences internationally. For example is the widely popular American show ‘The Bachelor’ and ‘The Bachelorette’ running since 2002 with a strong cult following in America and now Australia.³ Its Australian counterpart commenced in September 2013 with ‘The Bachelor, Australia’⁴ and now ‘The Bachelorette, Australia’ since September 2015.⁵ With its uber models of femininity, masculinity, heterosexuality and coupledness, participants engage in a rather formulaic process of dating to find that special spark of ‘chemistry’ that foretells true love and the possibility of lasting erotic fulfillment. In these programs, finding that ‘spark’ of attraction and connection, and expressions like ‘falling in love’ and being ‘in love’ are ubiquitous for both women and men who talk about

² Jackie Stacey and Lynne Pearce, “The Heart of the Matter: Feminists Revisit Romance,” Romance Revisited, eds. Lynne Pearce and Jackie Stacey (New York and London: New York University Press, 1995).

³ [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bachelor_\(U.S._TV_series\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bachelor_(U.S._TV_series)), accessed 25.09.2014.

⁴ [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bachelor_\(Australian_TV_series\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bachelor_(Australian_TV_series)), accessed 25.09.2014.

⁵ These series have a strong cult following reaching millions of viewers who presumably want the same thing. There is no doubt as to the worldwide appeal of romantic love, something its mass commercialisation maintains. There is a Japanese version called ‘If You Are The One’ and a Danish version brings couples together through ‘Dating Naked’; and internet dating which has been flourishing since the 90s.

wanting the fairy-tale of living happily ever after with the partner of their dreams.

However, as a fitting counterbalance to romance reality shows, are the relatively new programs on what to do when the magic dies. ‘Making Couples Happy’ (2013), ‘The Seven Year Switch’ (2016), and ‘The Last Resort’ (2017) to name a few, focus on helping couples rescue their relationships but again, with an emphasis on falling in love *again* by overcoming psycho-emotional obstacles in regaining intimacy and romance. ‘Married at First Sight’ (2015) fits somewhere in between the other two types of programs; it brings couples together for the first time at the altar, after being matched ‘scientifically’ through psychological and psychometric profiling. But here again, the emphasis is on attraction with the relationship experts sometimes asking; Are you falling in love yet?

Feminist concerns with romantic love

Feminism’s relationship with romantic love is complex and checkered. In general—as far as a ‘line’ can be identified—feminism has historically viewed romantic love as incompatible with its core ideology and political trajectory; the emancipation of women. Feminist concerns centre on how romantic love is used as a patriarchal trap wherein women are so often subjected to men’s abuse and violence. But despite its disappointments for many women, romantic love continues to hold the promise of respect, care and erotic love from ‘*a*’ man, and a safe harbour from ‘*other*’ men. This expectation remains the bedrock of romantic love for many women.

Gender inequality has historically presented structural barriers to love between the

sexes. Finding lasting erotic love remains a desire for many women despite significant social, political and economic improvements providing wider relationship choices and other pursuits. The need to interrogate romantic love remains a political imperative for feminism as it seems likely to remain an integral part of our culture. With that in mind, and in the context of women's increasing economic independence and unwillingness to tolerate dysfunctional relationships, is it time to reconsider the potential romantic love may hold as an evolving resistance movement? Given its cultural saturation and continuing importance as the basis of so many intimate relationships, can romantic love be appropriated for a feminist agenda?

A major barrier to such an appropriation exists at the core of romantic love in the ideology of falling in love, and the expectations embedded in its psycho-emotional erotics and the gentle 'reconstructed' male of romance. Are heterosexual women dupes for aspiring to erotically fulfilling love and respectful treatment from men? Or is this a fictive remnant from a medieval narrative imbued for hundreds of years with mystery and enchantment—even for scholars—from a culture and time steeped in romanticism in the imagination of people from successive eras. The problem as I see it, lies not in women's aspirations, but in the power of beliefs and attitudes imbued in the medieval legacy of 'courtly love'.

Courtly love is widely acknowledged by historians, literary critics, sociologists,

feminist medievalists, and feminists alike, as the predecessor of romantic love.⁶ The historical legacy of romantic love and falling in love must be interrogated for clues as to the politics of the magical erotic, transformative narrative and its potency as a naturalised embodied experience—even for some feminists. This study investigates how the narrative potency of falling in love has been socially and discursively constructed, and how it produced forms of feminine and masculine romantic subjectivity. These are crucial questions in addressing why a romantic ontology is not usually sustained past the initial honeymoon period, leading to so much disappointment and unhappiness.

In addressing the above questions, this research offers a different reading of ‘courtly love’. In historical and contemporary representations of falling in love, power resides in the psycho-emotional erotics of attraction as a natural, innate, uncontrollable, inexplicable and fated ‘event’. Theorising romantic love as something other than this may shift focus to sexual/affective love as a practice of human agency; a practice that might be founded on and exercised in more deliberately ethical ways. Feminist reinvention may be possible if romantic love is reconceptualised as the effect of human agency, as a ‘saying and doing’ with certain effects, rather than as a ‘falling’ dependent on the chemistry of attraction and the forces of nature and fate.

Theorising romantic love as one of agency is in keeping with what many women

⁶ C. S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love: A Study in the Medieval Tradition*, 7th ed. (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1959). See also Howard Bloch, “Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western Romantic Love”, John Stevens, “Medieval Romance: Themes and Approaches”, Jane Burns, *Courtly Love: Who Needs It: Recent Feminist Work in the Medieval French Tradition*, C. Stephen Jaeger, “Ennobling Love: In Search of a Lost Sensibility”, and William Reddy, “The Making of Romantic Love” to name just a few.

have been arguing in their relationships with men for a long time, that love is something you do, and that their partners should do more loving and caring. Women's search for erotic love and their faith in the power of love to create a gentler, more peaceful world has contributed to romances' abiding power throughout history, and its apparent permanence in Western democracies. Love is a universal principle recognised by religions, philosophers, social and behavioural scientists worldwide as creating a better world; although sexual love has historically been condemned by religion and some parts of society, erotic love is arguably as important to human well-being as other forms of love.

Proposed plan of inquiry

Romantic love has been inadequately understood and interrogated in feminist thinking which has tended to replicate, rather than deconstruct, its 'malestream' ideology. Towards a feminist reinvention of romantic love, this study pursues a critical and complex genealogical line, adopting an interdisciplinary women's studies approach, drawing heavily on historiography and history (including some biographical elements), and feminist theory.

Feminist critiques have variously described romantic love as an ideology, as a delusion or 'false consciousness', and as a narrative. But to date, there is little feminist analysis of what constitutes the 'psycho-emotional erotics of falling in love' that many women, including feminists, admit to enjoying as a pleasurable lived experience. This research addresses several gaps in feminist knowledge about romantic love: it considers romantic love as the embodied experience called 'falling in love', and takes account of its

historical and historiographical legacy from ‘courtly love’ in the medieval period.

A historiographical investigation into the development of courtly love’s mystique is employed, including how falling in love has been studied—or not—by scholars. Feminist medievalists’ have been instrumental in providing different readings of courtly love, challenging traditional readings of heteronormative coupling taking medieval scholarship in productive new directions which are examined here. As feminist medievalist E. Jane Burns contends in *Courtly Love: Who Needs It?*:

To pursue these alternative amorous paradigms will yield two important results. It will cause us, first, to reconsider the place of female desire in the Western romantic love plot. Second, it will offer new possibilities for understanding gendered agency on the part of women and men in love. From this perspective, courtly love is neither a cultural legacy we need to discard nor one we can afford to lose.⁷

This inquiry maps socio-cultural and political parameters in the historical and historiographical construction of the conceptual template of romantic love and falling in love. In *Gender Trouble* Judith Butler describes gender as “*an effect*, an object of a genealogical investigation that maps out the political parameters of its construction in the mode of ontology”.⁸ I speculate that romantic love is performative, suggesting that, as with gender, its apparent ‘naturalness’ is the effect of historical reiterations of discourses and practices, and that falling in love is a construction “open to intervention and resignification” through discourse and agency.⁹ This has the potential to subvert the ‘magical’ mystique of falling in love, as well as forms of femininity and masculinity still

⁷ E. Jane Burns, “Courtly Love: Who Needs It? Recent Feminist Work in the Medieval French Tradition,” *Signs* 27.1 (2001): p. 27.

⁸ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990) p. 45.

⁹ *Ibid.*

found in contemporary romance that continue to impact on how romantic love is perceived and practiced.

The social construction of love and emotions

Outside of literature and art history, love as a subject of academic inquiry has been somewhat neglected.¹⁰ This is being ameliorated with a new field called ‘Love Studies’ that has been emerging globally since the early 1990s. As part of this new field GEXcel, the ‘International Collegium for Advanced Transdisciplinary Gender Studies’, is concerned to ensure a strong feminist perspective in studies on love.

Among feminists, love, especially sexual love and maternal love, has been a politically loaded issue for a long time, and therefore, perhaps, the subject of love as such has been even more difficult to deal with seriously than in non-feminist fields. A point of departure here is that *Love Studies* is a heterogeneous and conflictual field of knowledge interests, and feminist theorists are internally divided as to whether and how to enter into it; also, that feminist theory and politics have much to win by broadening and deepening the study of love, partly for the same reason that have made feminists so reluctant towards the subject.¹¹

This thesis examines the “politically loaded” subject of sexual love and its romanticisation through literature. Indeed, the historical influence of literature, and literary and history criticism on how romantic love is perceived in academia and contemporary romance culture, is incalculable. This research traces and deconstructs some of that historical and historiographical influence and offers a different construction of romantic love that is consistent with feminist theory and politics.

¹⁰ <http://gexcel.org/> accessed 18.06.2016.

¹¹ Ibid.

Emotions are key to theorising romantic love, but the study of emotion is a relatively new field of research, including for feminism. In their 2005 book *Representing Emotions*, historians Penelope Gouk and Helen Hills argue that although there has been an increase in the interdisciplinary study of emotion over recent years, there remains a “scarcity of historically-contextualized studies” in this field of research.¹² Historical interpretation of emotions has, according to Gouk and Hills, relied on “[a]n important and persistent model of emotions and their communication and representation [that] depend[ed] on an hermeneutics of depth within the body.”¹³

We see the influence of this somantic hermeneutics of emotions on early historians and literary critics who read courtly love’s emotions as emanating naturally and spontaneously—in unmediated form—from the body, and as indicative of a powerful amorous love. However, this study argues that the emotions represented in courtly love had almost nothing to do with sexual/affective love as we know it today. Instead, courtly love depicts forms of love embedded in medieval discourses and practices central to relations of social and political power at court, including the power of aristocratic women. ‘Court’, in this context, refers to the social communities of royal and aristocratic estates and households of the medieval period. To understand the socio-cultural construction of falling in love, and its enduring romantic (re)iteration, we must turn a critical eye to medieval court life and its performatives.

¹² Penelope Gouk and Helen Hills, eds., Representing Emotions: New Connections in the Histories of Art, Music and Medicine (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2005) p. 16.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

I am not suggesting, however, that the emotions of courtly love can be traced in a straight forward chronology from that period through history to contemporary times. Instead, as Gouk and Hills argue, certain “themes ... sometimes span considerable geographical and chronological distances”,¹⁴ which I maintain is the case with the psycho-emotional erotics of falling in love. Medieval forms of love, misinterpreted and romanticised by early scholars, have been passed on through literature and the arts, reiterated through the relationship between romances’ fictionalization and intertextuality and their affects on lived experience spanning hundreds of years. The ideas that are almost universally attached to (‘western’) romantic love are not as straightforward as many seem to imagine. Indeed, there is an imagined history of romantic love that is at odds with the historical record. Several feminist quandaries and paradoxes about romantic love seem to have emerged from, and are complicated by, the misfit between the imaginary history of this love and the lived experience; a misfit that begins with its ancestor courtly love and the invention of its mystique.

Scholars use the term ‘courtly love’ to refer to a particular type of love, but also as a broad term to encompass the literature of medieval romance, comprising the epic, the lyric and the romance. The epic long preceded lyric and is the quest of the so-called ‘chivalrous’ knight where warrior masculinity operates at the centre of the narrative.¹⁵ Following a major intellectual and cultural transformation of society during the eleventh

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 18.

¹⁵ Moshé Lazar, “*Fin’amor*,” A Handbook of the Troubadours, eds. F.R.P. Akehurst and Judith M. Davis (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995) p. 61.

and twelfth centuries, lyric emerged with representations of civilised masculinity purportedly telling the ‘classic’ love story, central to which is the transformative power of (hetero)sexual erotic love on men. Lyric was later appropriated for romance, its most iconic adaptation being Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*. In mainstream criticism, the epic and the romance are classified as imaginary works of fiction with a didactic function. Lyric, however, was long considered representative of social reality in aristocratic courts, as depicting adulterous love between troubadours and noblewomen. Understanding lyric is crucial to comprehending romantic love in our time. Pivotal to this research is an analysis of the nexus between courtly lyric and its historical association with a love capable of transforming masculinity which helped effect courtly love’s mystique.

The enduring power of troubadour lyric

As Burns explains, the term troubadour lyric is usually used to “connote only one of many poetic genres” in a large and diverse tradition, collectively known as courtly love.¹⁶ The lyric focus here is on the verse *cansos*, the poems and songs written and performed for entertainment at the French royal and aristocratic courts of Occitania where they originated during the late eleventh century, surviving through to the late thirteenth century.¹⁷ Extant from that period are more than 2,500 compositions by some 400 poets.¹⁸ The creators of the *cansos* were the troubadours, poets, songwriters and musicians who

¹⁶ Burns: op. cit., p. 29, note 10. This is an excellent examination and analysis of feminist work on courtly love.

¹⁷ The geographical area of Occitania is outlined in chapter 7.

¹⁸ Paul Zumthor, “An Overview: Why the Troubadours?,” *A Handbook of the Troubadours*, eds. F.R.P. Akehurst and Jennifer R. Davis (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995) p. 16.

wrote about what was only subsequently named courtly love, some five hundred years later by literary critics and historians. The falling in love narrative begins with the troubadours' *cansos*, and as such, they are the primary focus of this study; other lyric forms such as the *tensos* and *partimens*, or debate poems, are excluded on that basis.

The *cansos* are by far the largest proportion of the troubadours' corpus.¹⁹ However, not all the *cansos* were written about love. Many featured misogyny and vulgarity, rivalry and sparring between troubadours, attacks on clerics and bringing disgrace on others. This research deals only with the *cansos* that feature love, henceforth *cansos* and lyric should be read as 'love *cansos*' throughout this study. According to professor of French Sarah Kay in *Subjectivity in Troubadour Poetry*, the *cansos*' are important due to the invention of the first-person lyric subject which is later "appropriated by romance writers as a character for insertion into romance plots";²⁰ hence its crucial importance to the ideology of romantic love.

The love *cansos* are fundamental to romance due to the 'apparent' erotic representation of sexual/affective love, the reversal of gender roles and the veneration of noblewomen. Mainstream criticism has historically been fascinated with the power and influence of noblewomen depicted in the *cansos*, where the troubadours refer to aristocratic women as the *domna* meaning married woman and/or 'lady lord', a feminised term for feudal lords. Against early dominant readings, this study argues that the

¹⁹ Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner, "The Trobairitz," *ibid.*, eds. R.R.P. Akehurst and Judith M. Davis p. 217.

²⁰ Sarah Kay, *Subjectivity in Troubadour Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) pp. 212 - 13.

troubadours' use of the term *domna* constitutes deliberate acknowledgement of their social status as territorial lords. Such recognition would have been consistent with the requirements of courtly social and political etiquette, if not reflecting a genuine regard for noblewomen while also cognisant of their capacity to patronise the arts. But because the *cansos* were written in the first-person they were considered autobiographical by early scholars, who assumed they were speaking about real stories of amorous adulterous love between troubadours and *domnas*.

In early historiography, the troubadours were supposedly besotted with aristocratic women, whose beauty and feminine virtues were venerated in their creative works. In a time noted for its scathing misogyny, the troubadours in the *cansos* appeared submissive to noblewomen, under the spell of a powerful, special kind of 'true' love, which developed into a potent mystique about the transformative power of erotic love. This early interpretation of the *cansos* dominated Continental criticism well into the twentieth century with far-reaching impacts on romance culture in the West. This construction, I argue, was the genesis of the idea of 'falling in love' of the magical, rapturous and devoted kind commonly associated with the chemistry of (hetero)sexual attraction thought to be spiritually transforming, capable of turning rough brutes into courteous and respectful lovers of women.

Reimagining the courtly love cansos

To understand how this 'falling in love' narrative was constructed, we need to rethink medieval concepts of love and their representation in the love *cansos*. In *Men's Studies*,

Women's Studies, Medieval Studies, medieval historian Clare A. Lees argues that medievalism is a “vital area of investigation that helps to restore and redefine the connections between the past and the present.”²¹ Beginning this genealogical endeavour, four alternate hypotheses are offered regarding the courtly *cansos*' ideological construction and meaning:

1. Rather than adulterous love between troubadours and noblewomen, the *cansos* depict forms of medieval social and political love embedded in the discourses and practices of courtliness and ennobling love. Both pertained to wider historical civilising and political forces, and were used in lyric to reflect, in part, the proper deference and respect from troubadours for the social status, authority and power of noblewomen at royal and aristocratic courts.

2. Courtliness was a didactic movement from antiquity that had a resurgence in the tenth century aimed at creating the socially meritorious masculine subject for employment at court. It was initiated to control the violent behaviour of knights (in the main) and became a movement that benefitted women because it taught physical restraint and emotional control through erudition, self-reflection and insight.

3. Ennobling love was an ancient form of aristocratic speech, a flattering mode of address used towards members of royalty and the aristocracy at court. Its rich emotional and

²¹ Clare A. Lees, “Introduction: Men’s Studies, Women’s Studies, Medieval Studies,” Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages, eds. Clare A. Lees, Thelma Fenster and Jo Ann McNamara (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1994) p. xix.

corporeal linguistics gave erotic potency to courtly lyric, interpreted as a powerful psycho-emotional and erotic experience, giving plausibility to adulterous affairs in the imaginations of early scholars.

4. Rather than passive sexual objects atop their metaphorical pedestals, aristocratic women were major stakeholders and agents in patronising the love *cansos* for its promulgation of social and political forms of love that, by acknowledging their social status, power and authority, meant recognition of noblewomen and their better treatment by men.

My reading of the *cansos* provides an alternative explanation for its gender politics and psycho-emotional erotics, altering its meaning. It is now common in medieval studies to understand what is called ‘the *cansos* erotic system’ in terms of the didactic influence of courtliness. However, outside of adulterous affairs, this does not fully explain the sensual corporality of the love *cansos* in my view. The more likely and compelling sources I contend were *two* medieval discourses and practices of daily court life working in tandem that may shed light on its erotics: courtliness for its civilising influence, and the reverential practices of ennobling love expressed through erotic aristocratic speech. These two forms of public and social love were not sexual/affective in the way courtly love has been perceived historically, and in modern times; they are derived from the social and political imperatives at court creating an ethical etiquette of conduct based on the courteous and (non-sexual) loving treatment of others. These conventions were performed towards noblewomen in acknowledgement of their aristocratic status as powerful and influential members at court and in society.

Medieval scholarship has tended to view ennobling love as the *effect* of deferential, devoted love rather than as the *cause* of a courtly socio-political discourse of power relations with personal and professional consequences—in the same vein as courtliness. Building on previous scholarship, this research provides a close examination of studies into ennobling love in combination with courtliness, for their shared role in the construction of the *cansos*' erotics.

The value of historical context

Understanding the world that produced the courtly *cansos* is essential to its theorisation. Historian Fredric L. Cheyette argues in *Women, Poets, and Politics in Occitania*, that the troubadours' poems and songs can only really be understood within the social, political, and cultural context of their historical time and place.²² According to French historian Jean Flori, the study of courtly love has suffered from “tunnel vision” created by the separate inquiry of history and literature, and he advocates these two disciplines should be studied in unison;²³ the methodology used here. Other factors contributing to the “tunnel vision” have been attitudes that romanticised the medieval period, the reliance on misogynist medieval literature by early scholars and a dearth of information about the role of aristocratic women, who have been largely excluded from history.

²² Fredric L. Cheyette, “Women, Poets, and Politics in Occitania,” *Aristocratic Women in Medieval France*, ed. Theodore Evergates (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999).

²³ Jean Flori, *Eleanor of Aquitaine: Queen and Rebel*, trans. Olive Classe (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007) p. 240.

Just as women have been treated as the ‘other’ throughout history, medieval studies have suffered similar treatment. Feminist medievalist Lee Patterson states, “the medieval period is often cast as the “other” of postmedieval disciplines”.²⁴ However, new research by feminist medievalists on courtly love and the role of women in the medieval world is amending this situation. This new research is used here to support my argument that representations of aristocratic women in the *cansos* were a response to their power as feudal lords not their erotic attractions. Some noblewomen had vast territories they ruled over for long periods in their own right, and the troubadours’ use of the term *domna* in lyric reflected this status.

History is more than the accumulation of recorded lived events, it also flavours our accounts of developments in human mentality and emotions. The medieval era of courtly love was a period of massive intellectual, philosophical and emotional transformation in the struggle to emerge from what has often been called ‘the horrors of the Dark Ages’. It is the civilising discourses and practices fundamental to that transformation that concern this inquiry, particularly their influence on depictions of gracious, often reverential troubadour masculinity and subjectivity in lyric, and their respectful conduct towards the *domna*. Representations of the reversal of gender roles in lyric is crucial to this thesis for how it evoked the metamorphizing power of erotic love on troubadour subjectivity, coupled with the *domnas* power and ‘apparent’ sexual

²⁴ Lee Patterson cited in Lees, op. cit., p. xix.

liberation; themes that continue to dominate scholarship well into the twentieth century.

This research brings contemporary theories of gender and romantic love “into a dialogue with medieval society and culture”.²⁵ In *The Herrenfrage: The Restructuring of the Gender System 1050-1150*, feminist medievalist Jo Ann McNamara argues, “history is indispensable to understanding gender”.²⁶ And according to historian Susan Mosher Stuart:

Social history aids in understanding women’s condition in any age; it is particularly essential for comprehending women in the Middle Ages, an era remote enough from our own so that common social presumptions do not pertain. As a discipline it demands that information gleaned from research be understood in the social context of the day, integrating knowledge at the expense, perhaps, of glamorous misconceptions of an earlier and exotic age.²⁷

The *domnas* ‘apparent’ sexual liberation in the love *cansos* is more the product of “glamorous misconceptions” about the medieval period, in contrast to the strict prohibitions against adultery, particularly for noblewomen who had to protect the line of succession. While traditional scholarship saw the *domna* as the central subject of the *cansos*, in fact masculinity features heavily in courtly lyric. Chivalry has long been seen as the origins of the fictive ‘reconstructed’ male of romance. I argue the chivalrous male must be jettisoned as an imposter of the real courtly male, educated in the ways of courtliness, with the potential to be appropriated for a feminist agenda in reimagining a

²⁵ Lees, *op. cit.*, p. xix.

²⁶ Jo Ann McNamara, “The Herrenfrage: The Restructuring of the Gender System 1050-1150,” *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages*, ed. Clare A. Lees (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1994) p. 3.

²⁷ Susan Mosher Stuart, ed., *Women in Medieval Society* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1976) p. 53.

performative and agential theory of romantic love.

By highlighting the courtly mode of masculinity represented in the love *cansos*, I am endeavouring to emphasise those cultured models of ‘reconstructed’ masculinity as an ideal that remains relevant for contemporary women that underscores their continued interest in romantic love. In part, what women fall in love with, I argue, is the *idea* of better ‘special’ treatment by men and its association with a fulfilling psycho-emotional and erotic connection. As a model of love, it stands in opposition to the dutiful love of traditional patriarchal marriage with its restricted gender roles, where women are the possession of their husbands. And this is the knot at the heart of the conundrum for feminism yet to be untied; if feminism dismantles or dismisses romantic love—an ideology from the *cansos* that depicts men’s loving treatment of women and submission to the demands of love—will we be “throwing the baby out with the bathwater”. Can romantic love be rehabilitated for a feminist agenda?

Method/ology

This thesis was written with feminist readers in mind. I wanted to bring the historical medieval representation and historiographical construction of romantic love and falling in love into feminist debates on this controversial subject. Most medieval scholars would be well acquainted with the material on courtly love and courtliness, and so would not find anything new here. However, the application of ennobling love as a possible explanation for the erotics of the *cansos* may constitute new knowledge, that may be of interest to some medieval scholars, particularly feminist medieval scholars.

This study constructs a historical and historiographical genealogy of romantic love using an interdisciplinary framework to investigate the sociality and politics of medieval Occitania, and its royal and aristocratic courts. Within that framework, this research brings contemporary feminist debates about romantic love into dialogue with several interdisciplinary fields: mainstream history and literary criticism of the love *cansos* and its historiography; feminist medievalist criticism of courtly love along with studies of medieval women and men; studies of medieval courtly discourses and practices; and contemporary theories of gender performativity, speech acts and interpellation. An interdisciplinary feminist analysis is applied throughout to interrogate the ‘psycho-emotional erotics of falling in love’.

In recent years, the problem of the *cansos* interpretation is being ameliorated with research that combines the study of literature along with that of medieval society, particularly gender and the social status of aristocratic women; the methodology used here. This study examines the intersection between the courtly lover and women’s power through an analysis of medieval romance literature and the sociality of aristocratic courts. The primary concerns here are two medieval forms of public social love represented in two discourses and practices of courtly aristocratic life.

The medieval era has been so romanticised by the canon that many view the period as if it were ‘one long romance’.²⁸ In countering this, historical context is crucial for

²⁸ John M. Ganim, “The Myth of Medieval Romance,” *Medievalism and the Modernist Temper*, eds. R. Howard Bloch and Stephen G. Nichols (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1996).

comprehending the literature it produced, in giving life and substance to a medieval world so unlike our own. In this endeavour, an extensive and detailed examination of medieval sociality and its emotions has been employed in understanding the cultural home of the *cansos*' creation. Detailed and extended quotes concerning the culture, customs, ideas and emotions of the period 939 – 1300 under examination are explored and interpreted.

As my only language is English and many of the original texts dealing with courtly love are French, Occitan or German, this research is necessarily historiographical. I have relied on the interpretations of secondary and even tertiary sources for reading material. These do not always give the authors first name or dates of publication for their references. I have also relied on a few key authors for their detailed studies in specific areas crucial to this research. For example, renowned professor emeritus of medieval studies, C. Steven Jaeger for 'courtliness' and 'ennobling love'. Jaeger's work has been extensively peer reviewed and referenced in hundreds of articles and books. Another author is Sandra Alfonsi, French medieval historian, for her meticulous examination of the troubadours' Occitan vernacular of moral precepts from the *cansos* on the theme of 'masculine submission'. While Alfonsi's work has not had wide currency, it was invaluable to me, as due to my limitations of language, her interrogation of the troubadour's language and its meaning was highly accessible. Sarah Kay's work on subjectivity in troubadour lyric and the many poems provided in her text was also invaluable.

The convention for citing troubadour songs is the Pillet-Carstens (P.C.) numbering system. However, again due to my language limitations, all the troubadour songs and poems, and their translations used in this thesis have been sourced from secondary and

tertiary works and referenced accordingly, none of which used the P.C. system.

This research omits the *trobáiritz*, or female troubadours, on the basis that their work, while valuable to feminist research on courtly love, was not directly implicated in the invention of courtly love's mystique as it was not studied by early scholars.

The focus of this research is on heterosexual love and romance. This does not mean that romantic love is not relevant to lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, queer, transgender or inter-sex people, but the contours of that relevance remain beyond the scope of this research. Thus, unless otherwise specified, the adjective 'heterosexual' should be implicitly inferred throughout my discussion of romantic love and relationships. Heterosexual love features because of how its gendered sexual politics—embedded in the notion of sexual chemistry associated with the promise of heightened passion and erotic fulfillment—plays a pivotal historical role in the falling in love narrative. Indeed, heterosexual love is so firmly embedded in this mystique in contemporary culture that it is almost synonymous with romantic love—reference to hetero coupling is commonly referred to as 'romantic' love.

Throughout this study the term 'romantic love' refers to its meaning in today's common parlance which is quite different from the medieval origins of 'romance' and 'romantic'. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, romance had its roots in 'romanz', an Old French word c1140 which during the medieval period referred to anything written in the vernacular as distinct from Latin; medieval narrative texts were

originally in verse, and only later made a slow transition to prose.²⁹ The term ‘romantic’ came from Latin mixed with English aspects although its “semantic development ... parallels that of romance.”³⁰ During the medieval period there was no concept of romance as we know it today.

The adjective ‘romantic’ was first used in 1650 as a derivation of the noun ‘romance’; the two were considered ‘synonymous’ at the time.³¹ Romantic had different connotations depending on where it was applied; it could mean “‘fantastic,’ ‘exaggerated,’ or even ‘absurd’,” romantic fiction was considered “absurdly unrealistic, [or even] lying” and romantic love as “extravagantly devoted, chivalrous or naïve”, although a romantic landscape “was likely to imply praise.”³² ‘Romantic’ gradually took on an optimistic and constructive use in the intellectual, artistic and literary philosophy of Romanticism. Its passionate emotions and flowery language was juxtaposed with neoclassicism and the importance of the “Middle Ages as an epoch [was] judged on its own terms.”³³

There is no separate entry for ‘romantic love’ as a concept in the Oxford English Dictionary; love and romantic are entered under romance. The first entry under romance defines it as “[a] medieval narrative (originally in verse, later also in prose) relating the

²⁹ <http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.flinders.edu.au/view/Entry/167065?rskey=fhigv2&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid>, accessed 05.04.2017.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Hans Eichner, ed., *Introduction: ‘Romantic’ and Its Cognates / The European History of a Word* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972).

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid., pp. 6 – 7.

legendary or extraordinary adventures of some hero of chivalry”.³⁴ This definition alerts us to the importance of the medieval period and chivalry in the construction of romantic love. Romantic is defined as, “[o]f a narrative, work of fiction, etc.: having the nature or qualities of a romance as regards form or content.”³⁵ Both definitions make clear the role of narrative and literature in the construction of romantic love. To fall in love is defined as “to become enamoured; to become passionately attached to, dote on” and “in early use to **yfall (also be brought) into love’s dance**”; the date of first appearance in literature of to “fall in love” was c1437.³⁶

Chapter outlines

The first two chapters are on feminist attitudes and critiques of romantic love, charting the course of debates over the three successive waves of feminism as defined in feminist literature. In keeping with the historical focus of this study, chapter 1 sets the discussion of romantic love in the historical context of love relationships between women and men from the 1660s through to feminism’s first-wave, exploring early feminist accounts of that relationship. Acknowledging that ‘the personal is political’, it examines the misfit posed by the promise of romantic love and the reality of the lived experience of some major feminist thinkers from that period. This is done by juxtaposing their personal love lives with their writings about love and marriage. Emerging from this exposition is a double

³⁴ <http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.flinders.edu.au/view/Entry/167065?rskey=fhigv2&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid>, accessed 05.04.2017.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid. Bold emphasis in original text.

discourse that simultaneously embraces and rejects romantic love that is carried forward into the second-wave.

Chapter 2 examines feminist critiques of romance throughout the second-wave and beyond. Overall, feminist critiques during this period are dominated by a focus on the *effects* of romantic love for women, rather than *what constitutes* romantic love. This focus gives rise to a double discourse and a number of paradoxical constructions, chief of which is centred on the way romantic love works as a kind of subordinating and disempowering mystique while simultaneously experienced as highly pleasurable. I suggest that unpacking feminist paradoxes of romance requires attending to the very constitution of romantic love.

I speculate that romantic love, and its corollary ‘falling in love’, is what we might call a performative dialogue and practice. In that endeavour, chapter 3 draws on literary theory, illocutionary speech acts, and Butler’s theory of the performativity of gender and a number of its antecedents, in laying the groundwork for the chapters ahead. These theoretical elements are brought into dialogue with the complex relationship between the social and the bio-material environments in romantic love’s historical and historiographical construction. This dialogue is invested with significance, constructing and naming a special kind of love that today we call ‘romantic’.

Chapter 4 presents my reading of the *cansos*, arguing that romantic love’s ideology is a legacy of courtly love’s mystique. This mystique was an invention founded on the autobiographical assumption by early mainstream literary and history scholars who read

the first-person mode in lyric, and its apparent erotic content, as indicative of amorous affairs between troubadours and *domnas*—that supposedly describe ‘falling in love’. Courtly love’s mystique is deconstructed, and its evocation of ‘true’ love as the power of erotic love to transform men’s behaviour is closely examined.

Chivalry has traditionally been regarded as the mode of the gallant ‘reconstructed’ man. This chivalrous man’s reputation as the gentle-man of romance is in fact out of all proportion to historical evidence. Chapter 5 unmasks chivalry as a patriarchal institution founded on militarism and heroic, but brutal forms of masculinity, entirely inconsistent with love. However, chivalry continues to play a part in contemporary romance culture as protectors and romancers of women. In this chapter, I explain just how thoroughly disconnected the imagined chivalry of romance is from its historical incarnation, and consider the effects of this misreading of masculinity for gendered relations.

Chapter 6 presents a different figure of masculinity present in lyric and romance. This is the man transformed by neither erotic love nor chivalry, but by his own endeavour through courtliness; a didactic, humanist movement emerging in the tenth century to bring men’s brutal and disorderly behaviour under the control of church and state. The subjectivity and identity of the ‘courtly’ male is produced through a course of personal education focussing on self-awareness and reflectivity. The courtly man is emotionally intelligent, in control of his impulses and base emotions and as such, I suggest that he provides a possible model of the ‘reconstructed’ male consistent with a feminist reimagining of romance.

In chapter 7, I argue for the significance of Occitania's noblewomen in the patronage and promulgation of the *cansos*, an art form that honoured their status and power, and depicted the respectful courtly male. Occitania had a long history of courtliness that supported a sophisticated psycho-emotional environment conducive to better relationships between people across all sectors of life. It also had progressive legal and property rights for women that supported the financial independence of its aristocratic women, who participated in all areas of public, military and social life, albeit in fewer numbers than men.

Central to courtly love's mystique is the 'magical' power of its erotics, viewed in traditional criticism as transformational. The *cansos* erotics are deconstructed in chapter 8 by examining another medieval discourse and practice, known as 'ennobling love'; a form of aristocratic speech, a flattering mode of address used towards members of royalty and the aristocracy. Its rich emotional and corporeal language allowed erotic inference to be attached to courtly lyric, and gave substance to the idea that the *cansos* depicted real-life adulterous affairs, intimating the passion and power of falling in love. This chapter examines noblewomen's emergence in this previously exclusive male homo-social practice, and what that signified in Occitanian society.

The conclusion brings all the historical and historiographical material of the preceding chapters together in a discussion that traverses nine hundred years, showing the connection between the medieval past and the contemporary present in theorising romantic love for feminism. The importance of that connection cannot be over-stated for its relevance to the 'psycho-emotional erotics of falling in love' which continues to

dominate Western contemporary culture, impacting the lives, hopes and dreams of women (and men) today. Making a distinction between love as agential and performative, and the relinquishing of control in falling in love, means moving beyond the ‘magical’ fairy-tale discourse of (hetero) sexual attraction and chemistry, fate and destiny, that has for so long left so many disillusioned and disappointed.

In this introductory chapter, I have outlined the questions to be addressed throughout this thesis, defined key terms, established a rationale for my investigation and its scope, and sketched the sequence of steps to be taken. The journey to follow traverses a long historical span which at every point is informed by my own situation as a 21st century student of women’s studies. As such, there is no more obvious place to begin than with feminist engagements with the (romantic) personal-political.

CHAPTER 1

Even (first-wave) Feminists ‘Fall in Love’¹

Romantic love has always occupied a troubled place in the feminist imagination. The primary concern is that men use romantic love as a strategy to coerce women into marriage after which the romance ceases and the subordination begins. In the history of feminist thought there is a long and robust tradition of warning against romantic love, and of criticising romance as something like false consciousness. But running in tandem to that, beginning in late first-wave texts, is another discourse affirming romantic love as a desirable experience for women. This conflicting discourse appears throughout feminist texts over time, with some accounts tending to be prescriptive in approach, warning women to be suspicious of romantic attention from prospective marriage partners, while endorsing women’s search for erotic satisfaction with men (or women).

In this and the following chapter, I explore this conflicting discourse in feminist accounts of romantic life across the vast reach of feminism itself. In this chapter, the lives and works of a number of key feminist figures of the ‘first wave’ are examined, beginning

¹ This term has been borrowed from Stevi Jackson, “Even Sociologists Fall in Love: An Exploration in the Sociology of Emotions,” *Sociology* 27.2 (1993a).

in the 17th and 18th centuries with feminist figures whose accounts and lives could be said to constitute something of a canon of first-wave writing. It is not exhaustive however, and not every woman strongly associated with the first wave is represented here. I chose those women whose lives and work highlight the conundrum of the conflicting discourse; the tension between the pleasures of romantic love as a lived experience, the potential dangers of romantic love for women posed by men, and the impact of marriage on women's subjectivity, sexuality and eroticism. The stories of these women demonstrate how the success or otherwise of their intimate relationships turns on how they are treated by men, which rests on men's attitudes about women and love.

The Personal is Political

Biographical criticism came under attack from the New Criticism in the twentieth century and was virtually banned from academic discourse, with some arguing for a scientific approach to the study of literature. This was later challenged on the grounds that objectivity is inconsistent with the nature and purpose of literature.² Beginning in the 1980's, feminists sought to reclaim the personal, arguing for multiple readings of texts, that the reader's response and interpretation was valid. Feminist critic Tori Moi explains this development in *Sexual/Textual Politics* (1986):

For the patriarchal critic, the author is the source, origin and meaning of the text. If we are to undo this patriarchal practice of *authority*, we must take one further step and

² Rene Wellek, "The New Criticism: Pro and Contra," *Critical Inquiry* 4.4 (1978).
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Criticism, accessed 14.12.2017.

proclaim with Roland Barthes the death of the author.³

Speaking to the historical authorial power of men as one of the mechanisms through which patriarchy socially constructs women, scholar of English and humanities, Cheryl Walker, argues in *Feminist Literary Criticism and the Author* (1990), that “[t]he self is a structuring mechanism, not a godlike creator.”⁴ Men’s control of discourse through texts and their dominant influence on art, is highly relevant to the ideological construction of romantic love and falling in love.

The use of biographical material here came from my curiosity about the personal lives of the women behind the major feminist works I was reading, the early to late first-wave feminists. I began wondering whether, and how, their sexual/affective experiences may have influenced their ideas, and so read biographies on their private lives alongside their public commentaries on women’s position in society. Doing so has proved enriching in several ways. First, I was surprised by the degree to which their lives seemed so much like my life and the lives of my mother, my sisters and girlfriends. It was not the practical or political details of our everyday lives—which in so many ways *are* different—that was at issue, but that I was left with the impression that the frustrations caused by sexual inequality, the fundamental yearnings and longings within the hearts of women regarding their relationships with men, in whatever form, are as relevant today as they have ever been. Second, I was deeply moved by the courage, intelligence and tenacity of these women who spoke out against the hostile and extreme sexual prejudices of their times,

³ Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (London and New York: Routledge, 1985) pp. 62 - 63.

⁴ Cheryl Walker, “Feminist Literary Criticism and the Author,” *Critical Inquiry* 16.3 (1990): p. 552.

and had the fortitude to stand their ground. I wonder where women would be today without them. They were pioneers in the long struggle to achieve what we have today; the open acknowledgement of ‘the problem’ and the socio-economic and political power to challenge men.

The feminists cited here are English and French. These women defied patriarchal traditions and the restrictions imposed on their sexual freedom, finding alternate ways of living with men—or not—that did not compromise their sexual/affective well-being. The thinkers selected include political agitators for women’s rights, such as Mary Astell, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Harriett Taylor. But I also consider the lives and work of novelists George Sand and George Elliot for their unconventional relationships with men, and who let fictional writing be their political activism. Their work highlights the interplay between life and art, imagination and reality that plays such a fundamental role in the construction of romantic love. This chapter concludes with Simone de Beauvoir as the bridge between the first and second waves, with her intellectual and philosophical contribution to feminism, her politics of sexual freedom for women and her troubled relationship with Jean-Paul Sartre. With each thinker, I consider whether romantic love is celebrated or condemned, championed or criticised, and observe a number of tensions that emerge from their accounts. Finally, I identify the most significant ideas developing through first-wave feminism’s engagement with romantic love to assess whether romantic love might be conceived of as potentially liberating, or whether its historical weight is overwhelmingly subordinating.

Mary Astell: a passion for women

Feminist hostility toward romantic love dates back to one of the most prominent early first-wave writers, Mary Astell (1666-1731) who perhaps first articulates the dangers of romantic love coming between women's duty as wives and mothers. In *The Celebrated Mary Astell*, Ruth Perry considers Astell to be perhaps the first English feminist given how she articulated "the way men systematically tyrannized over women in society."⁵ Astell's 1706 '*Reflections Upon Marriage*' is a thorough analysis of the unequal power of the marital relationship, revolutionary for its time. Astell regarded men as "sexual predators" with "brutish Appetite[s]" and little regard for women.⁶ She wrote in a bold, combative style beseeching women to take stock of their lives, launching scathing attacks on the sensuousness of men, and admonishing women for allowing themselves to be seduced.

We value *them* too much, and our *selves* too little, if we place any part of our desert in their Opinion; and don't think ourselves capable of Nobler Things than the pitiful Conquest of some worthless heart.⁷

Astell portrays women as having inferior power and little agency in their lives even though she acknowledges its roots stem from a lack of education, a subject she took a progressive stance on as a basic right for women and fundamental in resolving inequality.

Astell's awareness of how women are mistreated in marriage conflicts with her

⁵ M. Astell, cited in Ruth Perry, *The Celebrated Mary Astell: An Early English Feminist* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1986) p. 17.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

⁷ Mary Astell, "*Reflections upon Marriage*," *The First English Feminist: Reflections upon Marriage and other writings by Mary Astell*, ed. Bridget Hill (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986) p. 141. Italics and capitals in original text.

stated position over its importance for a healthy society. While she condemned men's passions as "brutish" for its effects on women, she nevertheless defended marriage, advocating a type that seems to have been informed by her sometimes-incompatible commitments to Christianity and to women's lives.⁸ Astell advocated "a species of chaste marriage",⁹ consistent with her personal convictions and practice of asceticism and restraint. Appealing to the common-sense notion that happiness is not a permanent state but interspersed with "inconveniences" that are a part of life, she suggested that the choice of a marriage partner should be subject to reason not passion and that the principle consideration should be one of friendship.¹⁰ This juxtaposition of passion with reason is a recurring theme in feminist theorisation of romantic love that is examined in chapter 2.

For Astell, marriage is figured as a social necessity for the correct nurture of children, and should be based on Christian doctrine with the home replicating the church's hierarchical structure and masculine dominance. Sex within marriage is a perfunctory procreative duty for women who, being forced through economic necessity, are cautioned to think carefully about marriage proposals and choose wisely between men who lack the wit or will to control their impulses. Astell's advocacy of marriage as women's duty conflicted with "her allegiance to the rights of women as individuals" and her knowledge of their victimization within that institution.¹¹ Astell's ultimate solution was to advise women not to marry even as she recognised its necessity. For those women unwilling or

⁸ Bridget Hill, *The First English Feminist: Reflections Upon Marriage and other writings by Mary Astell* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986).

⁹ Perry, op. cit., p. 140.

¹⁰ Astell, op. cit., p. 93.

¹¹ Perry, op. cit., p.9.

unable to marry, Astell advocated celibacy and sanctuary in women's communities where resources would be shared for those capable of embracing a life of self-sufficiency, education and personal improvement. These were the ideals upon which Astell built her own life that were in turn, contingent upon the control of impulse and desire; the Christian principles governing her everyday life.

It would seem then, that there is no appropriate place for romantic love in Astell's world view—except, perhaps, as love for God. Complicating matters, however, is the evidence that Astell struggled with her passionate feelings for other women. On this, Astell sought doctrinal advice from John Norris, the rector of Bemerton with whom she engaged in intellectual and philosophical debates. Having followed his initial instruction, Astell requested further assistance in a letter saying,

For having by Nature a strong Propensity to friendly love, which I have all along encouraged as a good Disposition to Vertue, and do still think it so if it may be kept within the Bounds of Benevolence. But having likewise thought till you taught me better, that I need not cut off all Desire from the Creature, provided it were in Subordination to, and for the sake of the Creator: I have contracted such a Weakness ... by voluntary Habit, that it is a difficult thing for me to love at all without something of Desire. ... And though in some measure I have rectified this Fault, yet still I find an agreeable Movement in my Soul towards her I love, and a Displeasure and Pain when I meet with Unkindness. ... Be pleased therefore to oblige me with a Remedy for this Disorder, since what you have already writ has made considerable Progress towards a Cure, but not quite perfected it.¹²

Norris responded that God was the only true and worthy recipient of our absolute and undivided love.

The primary objects stirring Astell's spirit were women but it would be incorrect

¹² Astell, *op. cit.*, pp. 195 – 96. All spelling is as in the original text.

to surmise that she was therefore lesbian, even though we might recognise her as such today. In her own time, as Ruth Perry observes, “spiritualized friendships with other women were not unusual.”¹³ Moreover, in Astell’s time the categories of sexual identity within which we place people today were not yet operating, and certainly did not mean precisely what we take them to mean today. Nonetheless, it is not drawing too long a bow to suggest that women sought refuge, comfort and support in each other against the tyranny of patriarchy back then, just as they do now.¹⁴ Astell’s orientation to passion, as such, was disciplined: while Perry doubts whether Astell ever experienced sexual relationships with either women or men, she notes that “[n]evertheless, one senses a libidinous energy in her pleas for women”.¹⁵ It is tempting, too, to wonder whether the passion Astell so condemned in men might be turned to less brutish ends where it existed between women.

For the time being, however, I set such temptations aside to consider the (love)life and work of that other most prominent first-wave feminist, Mary Wollstonecraft. Both Astell and Wollstonecraft viewed marriage and motherhood as women’s primary duty as the foundation of a healthy society, but thought unrestrained sexual passion incompatible with marriage. Their view was that such passion must be sublimated to friendship if marriage is to be sustained for the betterment of civil life. Interestingly, both women described themselves as emotionally and intellectually passionate by ‘nature’, but each

¹³ Perry, op. cit., p. 140.

¹⁴ See John C. Beynon and Caroline Gonda, eds., Lesbian Dames: Sapphism in the Long Eighteenth Century (Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2010). This book is a thorough and diverse historical anthology on lesbianism during this period.

¹⁵ Perry, op. cit., p. 141.

dealt with it differently.

The discussion on Mary Wollstonecraft is deliberately longer, more detailed and considered that the other feminists represented in this chapter. The rationale is that her own life exemplified the huge chasm between her feminist dreams, and her lived reality. Her relationship with Gilbert Imlay was one of intense emotional turmoil, expressed in her many letters to him pleading her feminist case in the desperate but unfulfilled hope of his return. Wollstonecrafts' story is enigmatic of millions of women who love and are abandoned or come to harm at the hands of men.

Mary Wollstonecraft: 'a passionate, elemental woman'

Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797) is credited with writing the first feminist manifesto; an integrated analysis of women's compromised educational, psychological, economic and cultural situation, and calling for its remedy in "basic social changes in the distribution of political and economic power."¹⁶ Like Astell, Wollstonecraft deplored the uneducated state of women resulting in their unhealthy minds, arguing that educated women would make better mothers and that reason should be the principle directing the management of both domestic and civil life. Both women shared a concern for the welfare of children and the conviction that the unrestrained passions of men corrupted the domestic sphere, undermining the rights and safety of women and children. But unlike Astell, Wollstonecraft broke with the Church and the establishment in general; whereas Astell

¹⁶ Miriam Brody Kramnick, ed., Mary Wollstonecraft: A Vindication of the Rights of Women (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1983) p. 64.

advocated sexual restraint as a Christian virtue, Wollstonecraft questioned “conventional sexual morality” and could not see virtue in a marriage that tyrannized women and denied their freedom.¹⁷

Mary Wollstonecraft is acknowledged as a founding feminist philosopher whose work remains relevant. Mary’s¹⁸ 1792 *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* was a feminist “manifesto”¹⁹ outlining the social, educational and economic disadvantages of women. She attacked the writers of feminine conduct books and Rousseau who thought women should not be educated. Mary’s childhood in London was by no means idyllic. She was the second of seven children. Her father was an alcoholic who gambled away his family’s money and abused Mary’s mother. The young Mary tried to protect her mother from his violence by putting herself between them,²⁰ early experiences that may have made her vulnerable in her relationships with men. But Mary was resourceful; she formed close ties with others who helped support her emotionally and nurtured her talents. This was the case in her friendship with the famous painter Fuseli, who was a married man and much older than Mary.

Mary met Fuseli in her early thirties and enjoyed an intellectual relationship with him that became so necessary to her, she felt the need for daily contact with him. She approached Mrs Fuseli and suggested moving in with the couple, but perhaps not

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 65.

¹⁸ I use first names throughout the discussion of Wollstonecraft as it seems in keeping with the personal nature of the context.

¹⁹ Brody Kramnick, ed. op. cit., p. 29.

²⁰ Ibid.

surprisingly Mrs Fuseli was not amenable. Mary was a person of great integrity whose motives were sincere and her behaviour could be interpreted as an attempt to gain the love and protection lacking from her father. Embarrassed, Mary fled to Paris in December 1792 where she decided to write about the French Revolution. Her apartment overlooked a main road and she watched from her second-floor window as the aristocracy of Paris was carted past to the sounds of jeering and shouting from the crowds amassed below. Amidst this turmoil, where her status as “an unaccompanied English woman” and the increasing political unrest put her at risk, Mary met Gilbert Imlay, an American businessman and author.²¹

Consistent with so many love stories before and since, at first Mary disliked Imlay, enough to avoid him in public. But her stance softened once she understood his “enlightened” views on women.²² His treatment of women in his novel, *The Emigrants*, which discussed women’s rights and rape in marriage, made a favourable impression on her and his stand on anti-slavery and racism were in keeping with her own. He appeared to be a new genus of man, one to match her personal aspirations as stated in a letter to her sister Everina in 1787; “I am ... going to be the first of a new genus – I tremble at the attempt.”²³ In Gilbert, Mary thought she had found “a sign of moral beauty”, someone

²¹ Alice S. Rossi, ed., *The Feminist Papers: from Adams to de Beauvoir*, Published by arrangement with Bandam Books, Inc. ed. (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1973) p. 33.

²² Ralph M. Wardle, *Mary Wollstonecraft, a Critical Biography* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1951) p. 187.

²³ Lyndall Gordon, *Vindication: A Life of Mary Wollstonecraft* (New York: Harper Collins, 2005) this quote appears as an inscription following the title page.

with whom to share what she considered to be the sacred act of physical union.²⁴ At the age of “thirty-four[,] she was a virgin, apprehensive of situations that shaded into the wide meaning she gave to prostitution.”²⁵ However, Mary had misjudged his character and would be deceived and left broken-hearted by this relationship.

Though never officially married, they lived for a time as husband and wife, and had a daughter, Fanny, together. Even before Fanny was born, Gilbert began to neglect the pregnant Mary. Citing business demands, he stayed away for long periods, seemingly cold to Mary’s persistent pleas for them to be reunited. Quite early in their relationship, Mary seems to express doubts about Gilbert’s capacity to love her the way she wanted. She writes “I shall not ... be content with only a kiss of DUTY ... You must be glad to see me because you are glad ... [;]”²⁶ Mary’s letters to Gilbert voice her inner conflict over how much of herself she is prepared to surrender to have his love. Finally, Gilbert suggests Mary come to Le Havre and she makes the journey in mid-January 1794 where they are reunited. Apart from Gilbert being called back to Paris for a few days in March and April they are together. On the 14th of May 1794 Mary gave birth to Fanny and reported that Gilbert has “proved to be a devoted father.”²⁷ But this happiness is short-lived. In September, when Fanny is just three months old and not yet recovered from smallpox,²⁸ Gilbert is again called away on business, this time to England. This departure would mark

²⁴ Ibid., p. 22.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 203.

²⁶ Wardle, op. cit., pp. 191 – 192.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 202.

²⁸ Janet M. Todd, ed., The Collected Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003) note 613 on pp. 262-63.

the last time they lived together—it was effectively the end of their relationship.

In the three years of their affair Mary wrote seventy-six letters to him in her painful, and ultimately fruitless, attempts to salvage the relationship.

I do not want to be loved like a goddess, but I wish to be necessary to you. ... This is talking a new language for me!²⁹

Mary “had mocked this sort of language and attitude in”³⁰ *A Vindication* but is beginning to comprehend how this new language arises from the depths of her frustrations in attempting to convey her experience and its meaning to Gilbert. However, Gilbert is either unable or unwilling to engage in communication with Mary at this level, a common problem voiced by women in their relationships with men. Mary’s letters reveal a woman in turmoil, but one determined to stay true to herself—to her emotional life, as well as her feminist principles—in the knowledge that doing so may be the undoing of her relationship.

Mary’s feminist ideals were constantly tested as she asserted her rights as an individual and demanded to be treated fairly and equitably by Gilbert. She wants more than dutiful love though, despite her theory about marital passion in *A Vindication* where she writes:

In order to fulfil the duties of life, and to be able to pursue with vigour the various employments which form the moral character, a master and mistress of a family ought not to continue to love each other with passion.³¹

²⁹ Ibid., pp. 263 and 45.

³⁰ Ibid., note 573 on p. 245.

³¹ M. Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication*, cited in G. R. Stirling Taylor, Mary Wollstonecraft: A Study in Economics and Romance (London: Martin Secker, 1921) p. 105.

Mary resisted Gilbert's attempts to construct her in the role of 'wife' and was beginning to fathom how her vulnerability played on her feelings for him: how would she cope without his love and emotional support? How would she survive without his practical and financial support?

This was compounded by the political events unfolding around her. Although they had registered as married with the authorities to allow her a prolonged stay in France, she had no legal protection as a wife and most of her English friends had been arrested and jailed awaiting an uncertain future.³² In short, she was the mother of a small child, economically dependent, alone in a foreign country in the midst of a revolution with no legal protection from possible arrest and execution, with no clear indication when, or if, the father of her baby would return. This level of stress begins to undermine her mental and physical well-being.

During the 15 months that Gilbert is away, Mary is alone with her baby and her correspondence records her inner battle between the gradual acceptance that the hoped-for life-long union had in fact been nothing more than a brief liaison. She swings between the wild joy of love and hope for their future together, to the pit of utter despair as she wrestles with her attempts to comprehend Gilbert's feelings and intentions. Mary's personal morality is founded on the beauty of truth which makes her naïve in assessing the motives of others.³³ Gilbert reacts to Mary's written pleas by making empty promises,

³² Wardle, *op. cit.*

³³ *Ibid.*

keeping her in a state of limbo as he waits for her to exhaust her efforts and give up on him; he does not want to take responsibility for ending the relationship or the social disgrace that comes with abandoning his ‘wife’ and child.³⁴ Unfortunately, Mary does not know, that for Gilbert, the relationship is already over.

After yet another promise from Gilbert that they will still be a family, Mary travelled with two-year-old Fanny back to England, only to find that he had already commenced another relationship. Mary finally had to accept that her relationship with him was over. Duplicity may well have been ingrained in Gilbert’s character: he lied about his origins in America and it has come to light in Gordon’s biography of Mary that Gilbert may have been a spy, even a double spy.³⁵ Mary was devastated and deeply depressed. We can only speculate how this level of deceit and indifference to her feelings affected her mental health; this combination of forces by any measure represents extreme stress which no doubt contributed to Mary’s two attempts at suicide. Despite his previous neglect however, Gilbert steps in and through his interventions, she survived both attempts. Because according to Gordon, Gilbert did not want the taint of Mary’s death on his reputation.

Mary’s situation soon improved however. Two years after giving birth to her daughter by Imlay, she entered a relationship with William Godwin— “the first philosophical anarchist in English history”³⁶—with whom she was intellectually and

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Gordon. Gordon’s biography contains new details about Wollstonecraft’s life and relationships and is a fascinating read.

³⁶ Wardle, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

philosophically compatible. William embraced the totality of Mary and treated her as an equal. Judging by the letters they exchanged, they appear to have enjoyed a satisfying erotic relationship. They had a very modern living arrangement enjoying separate dwellings on the same street, spending their evenings together and keeping in touch via notes during the day—including this one from Mary:

If the felicity of last night has had the same effect on your health as on my countenance, you have no cause to lament your failure of resolution: for I have seldom seen so much live fire running about my features as this morning when recollections-very dear, called forth the blush of pleasure, as I adjusted my hair.³⁷

The resolution referred to here may have been Godwin's battle with changing his mind on marriage which he argued was a power-based institution of which he wanted no part. But Mary had just informed him of their pregnancy and that reality, along with his growing affection for her, was now in conflict with his philosophical position. They bowed to the pressure to marry due to Mary's pregnancy but their happiness was cut short. Tragically, Mary died due to complications a few days after giving birth to their daughter, leaving William heartbroken.³⁸

Wollstonecraft is important not only for her feminist writing, but because her life demonstrates both sides of the argument as to whether romantic love is possible with men and compatible with marriage. While her first encounter with romantic love epitomised feminist warnings against it, the second, despite its short duration due to her untimely death, was a model of a happy union based on equality, founded on compatible intellectual

³⁷ Ibid., p. 36.

³⁸ Their daughter Mary would grow up to live an interesting, unconventional and accomplished life, she was the author of 'Frankenstein'.

and philosophical values and a satisfying erotic union.

What is evident from the many biographies of Wollstonecraft is the importance she placed on her own sexuality and that she “did not underrate the importance of the sexual passions” and their role in our lives.³⁹ As Janet Todd observes, one is left with an impression of “a ‘romantic’ woman, passionate and elemental.”⁴⁰ Regardless, Wollstonecraft argues persuasively on the impermanence of romantic love and how its passions are incompatible with marriage.

Love from its very nature must be transitory. To seek for a secret that would render it constant would be as wild a search as for the philosopher’s stone or the grand panacea; and the discovery would be equally useless, or rather pernicious, to mankind [sic].⁴¹

But rather than remain celibate like Astell, Mary Wollstonecraft struggled with the contradictions between her own advice and her lived experience, following the dictates of her heart to live an unashamedly passionate life in pursuit of erotic love. When her sexual/affective experiences clash with her theoretical suppositions, she must come to terms with the difference between her lived reality and her conjecture in accepting her fundamentally passionate constitution. At the end of her disastrous relationship with Gilbert Imlay, Wollstonecraft declares, “on examining my heart, I find that it is so constituted, I cannot live without some particular affection—I am afraid, not without a passion”.⁴²

³⁹ Janet M. Todd, “The Biographies of Mary Wollstonecraft,” Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society 1.3 (Spring, 1976): p. 726.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Stirling Taylor, op. cit., p. 105.

⁴² Wardle, op. cit., p. 258.

Wollstonecraft's unorthodox personal life was a repudiation of the notion that unlike men, women were pure beings without sexual needs. Drawing criticism from several quarters, she advocated women's right to sexual freedom while her contemporaries were content "to pacify ... male 'viciousness' rather than claim the right for sexual satisfaction themselves."⁴³ Her affairs were met with hostile condemnation. When William Godwin published a memoir in honour of his wife after her death, the following poem was printed in lieu of a review in the *Anti-Jacobin Review*:

Then saw I mounted on a braying ass,
William and Mary, sooth, a couple jolly ;
Who married, note ye how it came to pass,
Although each held that marriage was but folly?-
And she of curses would discharge a volley
If the ass stumbled, leaping pales or ditches :
Her husband, sans-culottes, was melancholy,
For Mary verily would wear the breeches-
God help poor silly men from such usurping b-----s.

Whilm this dame the Rights of Women writ,
That is the title to her book she places,
Exhorting bashful womankind to quit
All foolish modesty, and coy grimaces ;
And name their backsides as it were their faces ;
Such license loose-tongued liberty adores,
Which adds to female speech exceeding graces ;
Lucky the maid that on her volume pores,
A scripture, archly fram'd, for propagating w----s.

William hath penn'd a waggon-load of stuff,
And Mary's life at last he needs must write,
Thinking her whoredoms were not known enough,
Till fairly printed off in black and white.-
With wondrous glee and pride, this simple wight
Her brothel feats of wantonness sets down,
Being her spouse, he tells with huge delight,
How oft she cuckolded the silly clown,
And lent, O lovely piece! herself to half the town.⁴⁴

⁴³ Brody Kramnick, op. cit., p. 65.

⁴⁴ 'The Vision of Liberty', *Anti-Jacobin Review* (1801), Appendix 9, pp. 515-20 cited in Wardle, op. cit., p. 322.

The viciousness of this attack serves to highlight the crushing level of misogyny at the time: Janet Todd suggests that the anonymous poem represents “an extreme version of what many thought and wrote.”⁴⁵ It must have taken incredible courage for Mary to have flouted convention to live in accordance with her conscience, and the toll this took on her health and well-being is obvious.

The contradiction between her theories and the course of her sexual/affective relationships is commented on by many of her biographers. On her affair with Imlay, Miriam Brody Kramnick observes:

such love posed a particular danger for persons who wished to advance women’s rights. While for individuals romantic love might indeed lead, as it did in her own life, to despairing attempts at self-destruction, or to other abuses of reason, Wollstonecraft comes to argue in the *Vindication* that insofar as society is concerned, romantic love, based as it is in sexual passion, can undermine and corrode the order on which civil and egalitarian relationships are to be based.⁴⁶

As Taylor somewhat harshly points out, “[i]t may be that the deeds of her life are more illuminating than all her theories.”⁴⁷ But it is precisely that central contradiction of her life that exemplifies the paradox feminism and women continue to deal with today, that makes Wollstonecraft such an important example for feminist theories about romantic love. While she acknowledged the incompatibility of romantic love with marriage and the foolishness of attempting to make love constant, her life was a struggle in coming to terms with the very forces she warned against. The story of that struggle is evident throughout

⁴⁵ Todd, “The Biographies of Mary Wollstonecraft,” p. 726.

⁴⁶ Miriam Brody Kramnick, “Mary Wollstonecraft: Sexuality and Women’s Rights (1759-1797),” *Feminist Theorists: Three Centuries of Women’s Intellectual Traditions*, ed. Dale Spender (London: The Women’s Press Limited, 1983) p. 42.

⁴⁷ Stirling Taylor, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

her correspondence; in the ongoing insights it offers into her personality; in the awareness of her own subjection and its connection to love that is evidenced there; and in her descriptions of the physical, emotional and economic ties of motherhood. It is an invaluable record in the history of feminist activism in women's struggle for equality in their relationships with men.

Like Astell and many others as we shall see, Wollstonecraft focused on the sexually passionate characteristics and disruptive effects of romantic love, warning women of its dangers and its role in their subordination. The connection between romantic love and its appeal for women coupled with warnings about its negative effects on their emancipation, mark the beginning of a discourse within feminist texts that has become an entrenched double narrative. The reiteration of the analogy between sexual passion and romantic love and how men might use it to trap women into marriage, counter-posed with its allure and pleasures for women, are interlocking themes that dominate feminist thinking about romantic love.

Harriet Taylor: a fortunate woman

Harriet Taylor (1807-1858) and John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) engaged in a discreet intimate relationship for twenty-one years before they finally married after the death of Taylor's husband. Mr Taylor was aware of the affair and condoned it so long as Harriet kept up appearances as his wife. Taylor and Mill shared radical views on marriage and equality as expressed in *The Subjection of Women*. Although it is not referred to in Mill's work, it is difficult to imagine that they would not have read Wollstonecraft's *Vindication*.

Mill acknowledged the profound influence Harriet Taylor had in shaping his ideas and as the joint author of most of his books and articles, describing her contribution as follows:

that perception of the vast practical bearings of women's disabilities which found expression in the book on the "Subjection of Women" was acquired mainly through her teaching ... But for her rare knowledge of human nature and comprehension of moral and social influences, I should have had a very insufficient perception of the mode in which the consequences of the inferior position of women intertwine themselves with all the evils of existing society and with all the difficulties of human improvement.⁴⁸

Taylor and Mill's relationship was based on Enlightenment principles and equality, revolutionary for their time. Their marriage was formed on a contract in the form of a personal pledge by Mill setting out the philosophical and practical aspects of their union. It was a written agreement in which Mill explicitly relinquished the legal and institutional powers and privileges bestowed on him by virtue of his sex:

Being about, if I am so happy as to obtain her consent, to enter into the marriage relation with the only woman I have ever known, with whom I would have entered into that state; and the whole character of the marriage relation as constituted by law being such as both she and I entirely and conscientiously disapprove, for this amount other reasons, that it confers upon one of the parties to the contract, legal power and control over the person, property, and freedom of action of the other party, independent of her own wishes and will; I, having no means of legally divesting myself of these odious powers (as I most assuredly would do if an engagement to that effect could be made legally binding on me) feel it my duty to put on record a formal protest against the existing law of marriage, in so far as conferring such powers; and a solemn promise never in any case or under any circumstances to use them. And in the event of marriage between Mrs. Taylor and me I declare it to be my will and intention, and the condition of the engagement between us, that she retains in all respects whatever the same absolute freedom of action and freedom of disposal of herself and of all that does or may at any time belong to her, as if no such marriage had taken place; and I absolutely disclaim and repudiate all pretension to have acquired any rights whatever by virtue of such marriage.

6 March 1851 J. S. Mill⁴⁹

The relationships of Wollstonecraft and Godwin, and Taylor and Mill, seem to

⁴⁸ Coss, *Autobiography of John Stuart Mill*, p. 173 in Alice S. Rossi, ed., *Essays on Sex Equality: John Stuart Mill & Harriet Taylor Mill* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970) p. 58.

⁴⁹ Elliot, *The Letters of John Stuart Mill*, 1:58, in *ibid.*, p. 46.

suggest that a primary indicator of happy ‘romantic’ unions is equality arising from the ‘feminist consciousness’ or pro-feminist attitude of the man involved. For many women, Mill’s declaration might represent the kind of personal relational conviction that is in and of itself, highly ‘romantic’; it values the singularity and individuality of ‘the partner’, prioritizing the wellbeing of the relationship ahead of a hierarchy of competing legal, religious, social and cultural demands. Mill describes a marriage between equals as

two persons of cultivated faculties, identical in opinions and purposes, between whom there exists that best of equality, similarity of powers and capacities with reciprocal superiority in them so that each can enjoy the luxury of looking up to the other, and can have alternately the pleasure of leading and being led in the path of development This and this only is the ideal of marriage; . . . all opinions, customs and institutions which favor any other notion of it [are] relics of primitive barbarism.⁵⁰

Despite this declaration, Mills advocated that women should receive specific education for their role as wife and mother; an area of disagreement between him and Taylor, who thought women should receive the same education as men. Mills’ ideal of both partners having “similar powers” with reciprocity in helping each other is undermined by his attitude to education for women, which would have been deficient in many areas compared with the education of males. The notion of ‘identical’ opinions may be somewhat unrealistic and even unnecessary for a happy union but his awareness of the ethical and emotional benefits of “cultivated faculties” and the reciprocity at the heart of successful unions is important.

Mills’ sensibility, uncommon in men at that time, may have been Taylor’s model

⁵⁰ Coss, *Autobiography of John Stuart Mill*, p. 186 in Rossi, ed., *Essays on Sex Equality: John Stuart Mill & Harriet Taylor Mill* p. 57.

and inspiration for her following contention on the subject of masculine sexual passion:

I think it probable that this particular passion will become with men, as it is already with a large number of women, *completely under the control of reason*. It has become so with women because its becoming so has been the condition upon which women hoped to obtain the strongest love and admiration of men. The gratification of this passion in its highest form, therefore, has been with women conditional upon their restraining it in its lowest. It has not yet been tried what the same conditions will do for men. I believe that they will do all that we wish, nor am I alone in thinking that men are by nature capable of as thorough a control over these passions as women are . . .⁵¹

Again, the vexing subject of male passion features as a barrier to healthy intimate relationships. Controlling male passion in the service of love is a key theme in the ethos of ‘courtly love’ where men “hoped to gain the strongest love and admiration of” women through control of passion, a subject examined in chapters 3 and 5. Taylor’s contention makes a direct link between the emotionally controlled ‘reconstructed’ or ‘pro-feminist’ man and women’s equality, as the material and socio-cultural condition necessary for the possibility of something authentic in sexual/affective relations; something transcending mere fleeting sexual release, or social duty that was the standard of the day.

This was particularly true for women who were constrained within the parameters of two extremes; as self-sacrificing and compliant wives and adoring selfless mothers in the ‘sentimental’ mode of the ‘angel in the house’; or living independently against the social norm and having ‘romantic’ liaisons. Given most women’s economic dependence, the latter option was really only a ‘choice’ for very wealthy or well-connected women of independent means, and perhaps also required considerable emotional fortitude. Going against the patriarchal norm brought stigma and ostracism. Taylor’s ideas seem to predict

⁵¹ Elliot, *The Letters of John Stuart Mill*, in *ibid.*, p. 50. Emphasis added.

cultural trends within our contemporary period demonstrating great insight on her behalf.

George Sand: a sexual radical

During the same period as Taylor and Mill, the French woman George Sand (1804-1876) shared similar views on equality between women and men. Achieving equality demanded the proper education of women who she argued,

receive a deplorable education. ... This is the great crime that men commit against them. ... They have succeeded in bringing about the enslavement and degradation of women, a condition they now claim to be instituted by God, and part of an immutable law.⁵²

Once again there is the repeating theme of marriage as woman's duty in raising children for a better society in conflict with the sexual/affective needs of women although unlike the Taylor Mills, Sand was not interested in being discrete in her sexual affairs. Sand thought marriage "one of the most barbaric institutions [society] has ever invented",⁵³ articulating through her novels how men victimised women in marriage. At the same time, she held the view that marriage was necessary for raising children, but left her own marriage when it breached her ethical principles.

Marriage without love was immoral in Sand's view and her philosophy on marriage can be summed up thus, "The marital bond is broken from the moment it becomes unbearable to one of its members."⁵⁴ On hearing of Sand's marital

⁵² "Letters a Marcie," *Le Monde*, 1837, republished in GS, *Questions politiques et sociales* (Paris, 1879), pp. 230-1 cited in Belinda Elizabeth Jack, *George Sand: A Woman's Life Writ Large* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 2000) p. 258.

⁵³ Claire Buck, ed., *Women's Literature A - Z* (Bloomsbury: Bloomsbury Publishing, 1994).

⁵⁴ George Sand, *Story of My Life: The Autobiography of George Sand*, trans. A Group Translation, ed. Thelma Jurgrau (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991) p. 1066.

dissatisfactions, a male friend advised her that “by becoming [your] husband’s mistress [you] could become mistress of [your] situation”,

This did not appeal to me in any way. Closeness without love is wretched to contemplate. A woman who courts her husband for the purpose of subduing his will is doing something analogous to what prostitutes do for bread and courtesans do for luxuries. Such reconciliations make the husband a despicable toy and a ridiculous fool.⁵⁵

Sand traces the moment at which her marriage became unbearable to being slapped across the face by her husband during a public event; this was

the catalyst, the point of crisis. For Aurora [Sand], Casimir’s public display of marital authority went deep, and the wound it inflicted never healed: “From that day on I scarcely loved him, and things went from bad to worse.”⁵⁶

Sand left her husband in 1831 for a series of affairs, notably with the poet de Musset and the composers Liszt and Chopin, letting nothing stand in the way of achieving personal happiness and living in accord with her own code of ethics. Her lifestyle and her much publicised love affairs with men earned her the reputation of a “female Don Juan”.⁵⁷

There is also evidence suggesting that her full awakening to erotic feeling was as much a matter of intimate encounters with, and love of, women. But this comes a little later.⁵⁸

Sand was a controversial figure within feminism. Some credited her with representing women’s voice at that time while others accused her of distancing herself from the suffragist movement and taking her own freedom at the expense of other

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 1009.

⁵⁶ George Sand Correspondance, 25 vol., ed. Georges Lubin (Paris, 1964-85), vol.III, p. 135 cited in Jack, p. 118.

⁵⁷ George Sand, Corr, vol. I, p. 7000 cited in *ibid.*, p. 145.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 117. Unfortunately I was unable to find any direct reference to lesbianism in either the text or index in either of the two biographies I read or in Sand’s autobiography.

women.⁵⁹ She antagonised feminists by arguing for “separate spheres” for women and men,

It seems that the socialist ladies confuse equality with identity. Men and women can have different functions without this giving women inferior status.⁶⁰

Sand had the personal resources that allowed her to negotiate both “spheres” with aplomb; her identity was quite fluid, alternating between ‘feminine’ and ‘masculine’ attire, donning “top coat and trousers”, taking a male name and smoking cigars.⁶¹ At this time, Elizabeth Harlan argues, “love affairs between unwed partners were as ordinary as loveless marriages”, and there seems to have been no shortage of women seeking access to men’s spaces; Sand’s attitude and behaviour was certainly privileged, but not entirely “unique”.⁶²

Perhaps her greatest contribution to the feminist cause, apart from portrayals of strong, sexually active women in her erotic novels, was the example of her own life. The very public court trial in which she won a favourable property settlement and successfully regained custody of her children from her former husband was an act of political activism and leadership for other women. And at twenty-seven, with two small children, Sand left her marriage and comfortable life to establish “herself as a writer at the epicentre of French culture, and earned her own living.”⁶³ “Very often,” Simone André-Maurois observes, “an

⁵⁹ Elizabeth Harlan, *George Sand* (Yale University Press, 2004) p. xiii.

⁶⁰ Rabine, “Sand and the Myth of Femininity,” 8, 15. Sand, “Souvenirs de 1848” (Paris: Editions d’Aujourd’hui, 1977) cited by Vermeulen in *Lew Idées politiques et sociales de George Sand*, 97 cited in *ibid.*, p. xiii.

⁶¹ Harlan, *op. cit.*

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. xii.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. xii.

artist's masterpiece is her life itself.”⁶⁴

George Eliot: an unconventional romantic union

George Eliot (1819-1880) was very affected by Sand's novels; fortunately, she had enough French to gain access to her works that were considered too immoral to be translated into English at that time. Like Sand, she took a male pseudonym for her writing and later modelled her London salon on those held by Sand in Paris. She found Sand's stand on the immorality of marriage without love liberating and was reassured that she was not alone in questioning convention.

But Eliot had mixed feelings about marriage for herself; although she hungered for affection⁶⁵ and “the sensation of falling in love was exhilarating”, she was alarmed by her observations of marriage and how, inevitably, they did not meet the expectations of women.⁶⁶ She watched as her beloved sister's health deteriorated with every pregnancy, birth and miscarriage. In addition, her sister was impotent to act legally on her own behalf while her husband slowly frittered away her inheritance; she was nothing but a slave and her life, one of drudgery.⁶⁷

Following the death of her father Eliot was under pressure from her family to

⁶⁴ Andre-Maurois, *Correspondance inedite*, 11 cited in Harlan, p. xiv.

⁶⁵ Ina Taylor, *George Eliot: Woman of Contradictions* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1989) p. 36.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

marry in order to secure her future. Prospective husbands were being presented while Eliot was pulled between worry over her financial security and her wish to marry for love, and she wondered whether her only source of passion would be George Sand's novels.⁶⁸ After suffering many rejections by men who considered her unattractive, she finally found love with George Henry Lewes. Eliot had read Lewes defence of Sand in the press and felt an affinity with him long before they met. They decided to co-habit in 1854, three years after meeting and lived happily together for 23 years before his death. But their unconventional cohabitation caused a scandal as Lewes was already married with a number of children, and because Lewes had given his name to his wife's unlawful children, this was viewed as being complicit with her adultery which barred him from ever divorcing her.⁶⁹

Lewes encouraged George Eliot to write and through his entrepreneurialship is credited with making her "the richest novelist of her day."⁷⁰ Eliot "dominated the Victorian novel in the 1860's and 1870's"⁷¹ and was an intelligent and sympathetic chronicler of English society during that period. She was perhaps the first feminist to critique romance fiction for women in her essay on "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists"—the Mills and Boons of her day—which she argues are,

a genus with many species, determined by the particular quality of silliness that predominates in them—the frothy, the prosy, the pious, or the pedantic. But it is a mixture of all these—a composite order of feminine fatuity, that produces the largest class of such novels, which we shall distinguish as the mind-and-millinery species. The heroine is usually an heiress, probably a peeress in her own right, with perhaps a vicious baronet, an amiable duke, and an irresistible younger son of a marquis as lovers in the foreground, a

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 69.

⁶⁹ Brenda Maddox, *George Eliot in Love* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010) p. 2.

⁷⁰ Taylor, op. cit., see p. 4 of illustrations (under photo of George Henry Lewes) pp. 112 – 13.

⁷¹ Buck, ed., op. cit.

clergyman and a poet sighing for her in the middle distance, and a crowd of undefined adorers dimly indicated beyond.⁷²

Eliot is describing what in our contemporary times are called ‘historical romance fiction’, one of the most popular genres of modern times. Late second-wave feminist critiques build on Eliot’s ideas by questioning women’s romance reading as a substitute for the lack of romance within marriage.⁷³

Eliot understood the importance of romance within marriage and thought education for women was essential in furthering relations between the sexes;

Let the whole field of reality be laid open to women as well as men then we shall have that marriage of minds which alone can blend all the hues of thought and feeling into one lovely rainbow of promise.⁷⁴

Although as a couple Eliot and Lewes were plagued by illness their relationship was quite idyllic, with Eliot recording this passage “in her journal in March 1866”,

We have so much happiness in our love and uninterrupted companionship that we must accept our miserable bodies as our share of mortal ill.⁷⁵

Simone de Beauvoir: anticipating the sexual revolution

Although the first important theorist of the second-wave, Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986) is included here as the bridge between the first and second waves. Her (in)famous relationship with Jean Paul Sartre is interesting for its problems, which prefigure the difficulties experienced by many women during the sexual revolution, foreshadowing the

⁷² George Eliot, “Silly Novels by Lady Novelists,” The Westminster Review 66 (old series); 10 (new series) (1856): p. 442-62.

⁷³ See chapter 2.

⁷⁴ George Eliot: A Scandalous Life, dir. Mary Downes, BBC/Opus Arts co-production, 2002.

⁷⁵ Maddox, op. cit., p. 2.

dramatic changes wrought during this period. The liberation to have sex outside marriage and commitment became a ‘catch 22’ that left love out of the equation and many women wondering if it was possible to have liberation *and* love.

Apart from her major contribution to feminist theory, Beauvoir is important for her experimental and controversial relationship with existentialist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre, and their commitment to finding revolutionary solutions based on sexual freedom. Her famous quote that ‘one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman’ was the dominant call to women in *The Second Sex*, paving the way for the political temper and theoretical direction of the second-wave. Like Meisal-Hess and Kollontái before her, Beauvoir thought socialism fundamental to women’s liberation, but changed her view later in life based on observations that “even in the most revolutionary leftist societies”⁷⁶ sexual inequalities persisted. Her book was a major foundation of second-wave feminism with its critique of woman as ‘the other’; that by virtue of their comparison with men, women are deemed inferior and lacking as non-males.

Rejecting essentialist philosophies promoting uniquely feminine characteristics, Beauvoir encouraged women to embrace the freedoms of men. However, her discussion of female biology with its focus on women’s physiological problems reads as a repudiation of women based on their biology, inadvertently reinforcing males as the preferred norm, undermining her stance on essentialism. Indeed, according to the late

⁷⁶ Lisa Tuttle, Encyclopedia of Feminism (London: Arrow Books Limited, 1987) p. 33.

historian Hazel Rowley in her biography of the couple in *Tete-a-Tete*, both Beauvoir and Sartre “were visibly repelled by pregnant women.”⁷⁷ Sartre and Beauvoir’s relationship was famous at the time for its subversive sexual politics. However, Rowley details a rather grim picture of a couple locked in a contract designed to provide sexual freedom, but entailing commitments to each other just as fraught as any legal or de facto marriage.

Beauvoir was twenty when she met Sartre, her senior by three years. According to Rowley, Beauvoir was an insecure woman from a sheltered, bourgeois family, who dreamt of becoming a writer as well as a wife and mother.⁷⁸ Like Beauvoir, Sartre too came from a bourgeois French family. Following his father’s death when he was just a baby, Sartre’s twenty-four-year-old mother took him to live with her parents and she struggled financially. Rowley puts a plausible argument for the unusual relationship between him and Beauvoir. Sartre’s mother doted on him, they shared a room and spent most of their time together. When Sartre was eleven, she re-married and he felt rejected, something that plagued him all his life. Was the early pattern with his mother the psychological formation of the ‘pact’ that he would later establish with Beauvoir? It seems he wanted the emotional security and dependency of a mother substitute while he experienced maternal separation through relationships with other women.

Beauvoir and Sartre had an ‘open relationship’ which nevertheless came with its own set of rules that were no less binding than conventional relationships. As Rowley

⁷⁷ Hazel Rowley, *Tete-a-Tete: Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005) p. 30.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

argues, at the time of their meeting, Sartre was firmly convinced he was a genius and would be famous; he had decided never to marry, and when he met Beauvoir he had the next four years of his life mapped out, two of which he expected to spend apart from her.⁷⁹

Sartre needed his liberty, but he also wanted Beauvoir to embrace hers. This was not a man who was going to urge her to comply with social conventions. ... what he proposed was a “two-year lease”.⁸⁰

In contrast, Beauvoir dreamt of a romantic “Grand Amour”, of adventures with Sartre beside her.⁸¹ She dreaded being alone but hid her fears knowing Sartre would think her weak.⁸² While the path being forged must have seemed unique for its time, the gender politics of their relationship were conventional and remained largely unchallenged; Sartre initiated while Beauvoir accommodated.

Rowley maintains Sartre was committed to living as an existentialist which meant denouncing all idea of essential personality or character; in the world of existentialism, individuals are nothing more than the sum of their actions. Individuals would be judged by what they did and that meant exposing their deeds to public scrutiny and telling the truth. Despite his existential beliefs, Sartre had very romantic notions about their relationship:

Sartre made it clear from the beginning that monogamy did not interest him. He liked women (far more than men, he always said), and he did not intend to stop having affairs at the age of twenty-three. Nor should Beauvoir, he said. The love they had for each other was “essential,” and primary. They were “two of a kind,” each other’s double, and their relationship would surely last for life. But they should not deprive themselves of what he

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 27.

⁸⁰ Ibid., pp. 26 – 27.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

called “contingent” affairs, meaning secondary and more arbitrary.⁸³

Existentialist philosophy formed the basis of Sartre and Beauvoir’s “pact”.⁸⁴ But their inter-personal honesty did not extend to their other lovers who, Rowley argues, would have to discover for themselves that they came second to Beauvoir and Sartre, whose love for each other was supreme.⁸⁵ It would seem that their pact acted as insurance against the possibility that either Sartre or Beauvoir might develop a special connection with someone else. As such, their relationship cannot quite be construed as the complete freedom to love that they espoused; *their* ‘freedom’ came at the expense of the freedom and happiness of others.

Sartre felt strongly that love was not about possession. To him, a more generous kind of love meant loving the other person as a free being capable of leaving, but this seemed to refer to his freedom, not Beauvoir’s. When she raised the thorny question of jealousy Rowley reports, Sartre said that if they told each other everything, they would never feel excluded from each other’s lives. They should have no secrets from each other. In their love affairs, doubts, insecurities, and obsessions, they should aim for complete openness; he called it “transparency.”⁸⁶ However, this transparency meant only suffering for Beauvoir who had to listen to Sartre express his feelings for Olga Kosakiewicz.

Olga was a lonely, isolated student of Beauvoir’s whom she befriended. She and

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. x.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 28.

Beauvoir were lovers occasionally but Olga completely rejected Sartre as a lover. In response, he “experienced feelings of alarm, frenzy, and ecstasy,” all of which were confided to Beauvoir; for her, “[t]he agony which this produced in me went far beyond mere jealousy.”⁸⁷ Sartre became obsessed in his efforts to replace Beauvoir in Olga’s life. Olga, however, would have none of him. This painful situation went on for two years says Rowley—perhaps providing the ‘love triangle’ narrative backbone of Sartre’s most famous play *No Exit*, in which he declares “L'enfer, c'est les autres [Hell is other people].”⁸⁸ At times “Sartre seemed a complete stranger” causing Beauvoir to question what they were doing. She wrote, “[a]t times, I asked myself whether the whole of my happiness did not rest upon a gigantic lie.”⁸⁹ They were often unspeakably cruel to one another;⁹⁰ Sartre has been described as a “monster” and “manic seducer” and the two, as “a pair of sexual predators and expert liars”.⁹¹

While Beauvoir rejected the traditional female role of marriage and children that was the norm for her time, her relationship with Sartre appeared to have all the hallmarks of a dysfunctional marriage. She argued marriage that was “supposed to socialize eroticism, succeeds only in killing it.”⁹² Beauvoir argues eroticism can only survive in an environment of unpredictability, of passion ignited by uncertainty.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 62.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid., pp. 62 – 63.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ John Freeman, “At Home in the Lives of Others,” *The Weekend Australian* 26-26 May 2007.

⁹² Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H.M. Parshley, 1983 ed. (Middlesex, England: Penguin, 1949) p. 219.

The fact is that eroticism implies a claim of the instant against time, of the individual against the group; it affirms separation against communication; it is rebellion against all regulation; it contains a principle hostile to society.⁹³

But is this more accurately a description of lust: a particular masculinised view of eroticism, the result of the historical masculinisation of sexual culture “that positioned men’s bodies as ‘testosteronised’, representing men’s sexuality as hopelessly ‘hydraulic’ ... that once aroused, men were at the mercy of their biology”?⁹⁴ This testosterone driven view of male sexuality is epitomised by representations of male dominated quick frenzied sex that debase and objectify women in so much fiction and real life. It certainly does not accord with many women’s experience of eroticism which increases overtime with trust and truthful communication; as Renate Stendhal argues in *Love’s Learning Place*, truth is an aphrodisiac.⁹⁵ Indeed, what of the eroticism of deep long knowing and connection, of psychological closeness and intimate knowledge of one’s own and a lover’s body? This is Adrienne Richs’ and Audrey Lordes’ concept of women’s eroticism.⁹⁶

Beauvoir’s description of eroticism, with the claim of “separation against communication” is antithetical to love; surely eroticism *is* the sexualised saying and doing of love. But her statement implies she valued attraction and erotic love as desirable aspects of adult sexual relations but viewed this as only possible outside marriage with the freedom to choose. However, Rowley’s account of Beauvoir’s relationship with Sartre suggests her freedom was illusory as their “pact” brought them both great suffering.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Susan Magarey, *Passions of the First Wave Feminists* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2001) pp. 90 - 91.

⁹⁵ Renate Stendhal, *Love’s Learning Place: Truth as Aphrodisiac in women’ long-term relationships* (Boulder,CO:EdgeWork, 2002).

⁹⁶ The work of Adrienne Rich and Audrey Lorde are discussed in chapter 2.

Perhaps the relationship between Beauvoir and Sartre can be summarised by a memorial plaque erected where they once lived, inscribed as follows:

Under Sartre's name is a quotation from a letter he wrote to Beauvoir: "There is one thing that hasn't changed and cannot change: that is that no matter what happens and what I become, I will become it with you." Under Beauvoir's name there's a passage from her memoirs: "I was cheating when I used to say that we were only one person. Between two individuals, harmony is never a given; it must be constantly conquered."⁹⁷

Sartre's romanticism stands in sharp contrast with Beauvoir's confession of complicity in what she called a "gigantic lie" and her pragmatism about the work of love.

Sartre and Beauvoir's application of Existentialism to their relationship was a brave experiment in casting of the crippling constraints of bourgeois marriage and culture, but caused great suffering and came with its own pitfalls. As a way of life, it fails to account for those women and men wanting long-term monogamous commitment in order to raise children. Is a lasting commitment inconsistent with an enduring sexual passion based on compatibility and companionship, founded on mutual love and respect? If the love lives of Wollstonecraft, Taylor, Eliot and Sand illustrate anything, it is the possibility of lasting monogamous erotic love between women and men, with a major determining factor being the pro-feminist attitude of the man involved.

Conclusion

In broad terms, early first-wave theories of romantic love begin with a critique of male unrestrained sexuality and women's susceptibility to men's charms in luring them into

⁹⁷ Rowley, op. cit., p. 353.

marriage. Marriage itself is viewed as a necessary social institution for raising children, central to which is women's responsibility as wives and mothers. As the first-wave continued, theorisation developed with more complex accounts of the structural inequalities within marriage, the subordination of women as wives, and suggestions for reforming matters.

The unrestrained, erratic and unpredictable characterisation of the sexual passion associated with romantic love and its consequences running through early critiques develop into two core theoretical strands. Those who believe marriage is necessary for raising children and the betterment of society—Astell, Wollstonecraft, Taylor and Mills—take the view that the passionate 'nature' of romantic love is incompatible with marriage, advocating rational love and sexual restraint. For others marriage is figured as sexual and domestic slavery—Sand, Eliot and Beauvoir—and they flout social convention in pursuit of passionate sexual/affective love with men based on egalitarian principles. These two positions address the social and structural barriers to women's freedom.

What became clear in reading the personal accounts of these early feminists' love lives is the positive impact a man's pro-feminist attitudes has on the success or otherwise of a union; that his acceptance of his partner's equal status carries significant weight, regardless of the surrounding culture of misogyny. In the following chapter I argue that feminist interest and engagement with romantic love increases after significant structural changes bring economic independence for women. In the second-wave and beyond, 'real' love is characterised in ways that both resonate with and depart from first-wave accounts.

CHAPTER 2

The Feminist Politics of Romantic Love

As we have seen, romantic love figured as a source of conflict and debate for early feminists, both as a lived experience and as a phenomenon articulated to a range of gendered problems, most crucially women's welfare. In the vast literature of first and early second-wave feminism, romantic love is cast in many and various ways with its chief role as the villain of the piece. This is a field in which ambiguities and paradoxes thrive: on the one hand, feminism is committed to improving women's lives, which surely includes pleasurable intimacy. On the other hand, where such pleasure is implicated in subordinating practices, or mystifications working against women's interests, these must be deconstructed and criticised.

However, in most, if not all of first and second-wave accounts, romantic love itself remains largely unexamined. The purported effects of romantic love—as heteronormativity, coercion, sexual violence, consolation, or delusion—are recounted in some detail, but how romantic love is constituted is less thoroughly defined or explored. In early feminist debates, it is invariably critiqued as a catalyst for or accomplice in various forms of women's subordination, but its composition, operations, and meanings are inadequately explained. This is particularly so regarding 'falling in love' which, despite

being viewed as the common signifier of romantic love, often merits nothing more than a peripheral reference. Given the centrality of falling in love as both narrative and experience in contemporary culture and relationship formation, it is perhaps surprising that feminism has not produced more influential theories of the politics and power of falling in love.

Feminist theorisation of ‘falling in love’ does not emerge until the 1990s¹ when some feminists acknowledge the power of falling in love—even for themselves. But while many critiques argue that romantic love is socially constructed through narrative and ideology, what constitutes falling in love is treated as a given, rather than scrutinised. The validity of falling in love then is assumed rather than challenged and interrogated. One effect of this is that romantic love is figured as a social construction, but falling in love is assumed as a ‘real’ embodied experience, tending to naturalise its psycho-emotional erotics. This gap or inconsistency in feminist knowledge is addressed through a historical and historiographical methodology in this study. I argue that—like romantic love—falling in love is a social construction that can be traced to early history and literary criticism of courtly love.

This chapter makes a vital distinction between the impulsiveness and irrepressibility of falling in love that our ‘erotic selves’ will supposedly magically sustain, and the purposeful intention and commitment required to accomplish long-term sexual/affective love. Two feminist voices in the 1980s—Adrienne Rich and Audre

¹ Notably in the work of Stevi Jackson to be discussed later in this chapter.

Lorde—shone a new light on the subject of the erotic, moving beyond its classification as sexual love to a psychic and physical power constituted within the workings of the body; not only a power to love but an energy available for the political in guiding a woman's life. Richs' book is a vital evocation to women to honour their bodies and their power: "The repossession by women of our bodies" she argues, "will bring far more essential change to human society than the seizing of the means of production by workers."² Lorde spoke about the violation and exploitation of women that made such a "repossession" urgent; that in our highly sexualised and pornographic culture, women's erotic has been debased, "misnamed by men and used against women ... made into the confused, the trivial, the psychotic, the plasticized sensation."³ Their message remains relevant for women living in a culture that simultaneously degrades them through pornography and elevates them (initially) through romantic love.

The phenomenon of romantic love shows no indication of declining in the foreseeable future which for feminism, makes its theorisation a matter of concern. Regardless of the sexual freedom and alternative types of intimate relations available to modern women and men, romantic love remains a preference for many in Western culture. As the entry point of romantic love, falling in love has attained the status of a rite of passage, it is the gold standard for entry into long-term sexual/affective relationships. Indeed, romantic love has become an institution as powerful as marriage to which many

² Adrienne Rich, Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution (New York: Norton, 1976) p. 285.

³ Audre Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power," Sister Outsider (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 2007) p. 54.

couples want membership. In fact, romantic love *itself*, seems to have become the ‘object of desire’. As Mexican poet and writer Octavio Paz points out, “[d]esire is greater than love but the desire of love is the most powerful of desires”.⁴ This desire has been enacted in literature, film, poetry and music, and in more recent times, reality television programs, as outlined in the introduction.

In this chapter then, I survey and discuss romantic love, and falling in love as it appears, usually peripherally, in feminist writings from the second-wave (roughly, from the 1960s to the 1990s). This is no simple task, given the quantity and variety of the second-wave resurgence. Despite this proliferation and variation in feminist texts, romantic love is almost inevitably linked, at least in the beginning, to various aspects of women’s subordination, in marked contrast to their status in courtly lyric. It is not until women’s socio-political and economic independence increases, along with their interest in romance, that feminism begins to reimagine romantic love. In keeping with the historical context of this thesis, this chapter grounds analysis in the history of gender politics and feminist responses during the second-wave and beyond for their relevance in driving feminist debates about romantic love.

No romantic love in the politics of subordination

In the face of structural problems maintaining women’s inequality, and dissatisfaction with heterosexual relationships, the major thinkers and theorists of the 1960s and 1970s,

⁴ Octavio Paz 1991a cited in Maria Esther Maciel, “The Lesson of Fire: Notes on Love and Eroticism in Octavio Paz’s ‘The Double Flame’,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 15.34 (1998): p. 35.

Friedan, Greer, Millet, Firestone, and Comer rebuke romantic love. The central feminist imperative of challenging male hegemony and power that perpetuates men's abuse of women took precedence. All these theorists mention falling in love, some in passing as a part of romantic love, others as a somewhat normal life event, but none deconstructs falling in love as a social construction. Feminist critiques during this time are more concerned with changing patriarchal institutions that maintain women's subordination and inequality, particularly marriage. Romantic love is the incentive luring women into abusive unions and domestic slavery, summed up in the popular political slogan at that time; 'you start out sinking into his arms and end up with your arms in his sink'.⁵

My analysis begins with the political context of the early second-wave when structural inequalities worked against women's freedom, and romantic love in feminist critiques was largely condemned. In the angst-ridden politics of the sexual revolution, a generation of women hoped their sexual freedom would ultimately lead to satisfying unions based on romantic love, but many were disappointed. Women called for female equality and pushed for a change in male consciousness and behaviour. Indeed, in *Communion: The Female Search for Love* bell hooks argues that men's refusal or inability to love women was the catalyst for the second-wave of feminism:

Feminism called on men to reclaim their full humanity, to get in touch with their emotions, to speak their feelings, to let themselves love and be loved. Everyone forgets that the real force behind the feminist movement was individual women's disappointment with men.

⁵ Jo Van Every wrote an article with this title which is published in *Sexualizing the Social* by Lisa Adkins and Vicki Merchant, Macmillan, 1996. Van Every says the quote was printed on a tea towel produced by the feminist magazine 'Spare Rib'. <http://jovanevery.ca/on-hearing-of-the-death-of-mary-mcintosh/> accessed 06.02.2016.

Even though equal pay for equal work and reproductive rights soon took center stage, the rage that had welled up began in male-female relationships.⁶

Despite the hope of improved gender relations premised on women's sexual liberation, patriarchal masculinity continued to dominate—particularly in the bedroom, according to hooks. As awareness of the incidence of domestic and sexual violence increased, many women were confronted with the painful reality of men's lack of care. Men's betrayal politicised and united women, carving a schism through free-love that for many gave way to the radical politics of not "sleeping with the enemy".⁷

Betty Friedan gave voice to "the problem with no name" for the suburban housewife and mother in post-World War II America.⁸ In *The Feminine Mystique*, Friedan argued that the dream of marrying for romantic love was just a lure for subordinating oneself to the role of supportive wife and mother. This idealised image of the 1950s in America, (and similar places) perpetuated the ideology of romantic love. Friedan articulated the frustrations and emptiness of a generation of women who found no satisfaction in their limited role and struggled in silence with the guilt it produced, many turning to addictive substances for relief. She argued that the economics of capitalism depended on the exploitation of women's free labour which prevented them from reaching their full potential.

In her 1970 best-selling feminist classic *The Female Eunuch*, Germaine Greer

⁶ hooks, op. cit., p. 180.

⁷ Ibid., p. 41.

⁸ Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1963).

characterised romantic love as an artifice, a cultural veneer of ritual and custom masking the empty pomp and ceremony of male sexual display and female capitulation.⁹ Greer argued that women “had become domesticated animals, their sexuality ... just a reflection of male sexuality”, they were “insipid castrated people” cut off from their own vital energy and sexual power.¹⁰ Her biting satire characterises romantic love in the most traditional terms.

Perhaps they will not fall in love all at once but feel a tenderness growing until one day POW! that amazing kiss. ... The first kiss ideally signals rapture, exchange of hearts, and imminent marriage. Otherwise it is a kiss that lies. ... The follow-through would have to be the constant manifestation of tenderness, flattery and susceptibility by the man together with chivalry and gallantry in all situations. The hero of romance knows how to treat women. Flowers, little gifts, love letters, maybe poems to her eyes and hair, candlelit meals on moonlit terraces and muted strings. ... Mystery, magic, champagne, ceremony, tenderness, excitement, adoration, reverence – women never have enough of it.¹¹

While mocking the ‘psycho-emotional erotics of falling in love’ Greer suggests that it amounts to false consciousness, but perhaps reinforces its cultural power by not deconstructing it. Also, Greer’s reference to “chivalry and gallantry” perpetuates a misreading of ‘chivalry’. Chivalry was, in fact, a masculinist military culture wrongly, in my view, associated with romantic love from the medieval period.¹²

Kate Millet’s 1971 exegesis of male-centred/male-dominated, ‘malestream’ literature in *Sexual Politics* was revolutionary for how it showed the effect of literature in shaping sexual relations;¹³ an insight of major relevance to this study. She exposed the

⁹ Germaine Greer, *The Female Eunuch* (London: Paladin, 1972).

¹⁰ *Close To The Bone: an interview with Germaine Greer for series 'Close Up' by British Film Institute and Polygram International Television*, dir. Louise Wardle, 1999.

¹¹ Greer, *The Female Eunuch*, pp. 172 – 173.

¹² Chivalry is subjected to a feminist deconstruction in chapter 4.

¹³ The role of medieval romance literature is key in theorising romantic love and the emotions of falling in

pervasive sexism and misogyny in the works of authors like D. H. Lawrence, Henry Miller, Norman Mailer and Jean Genet, and “the ubiquity of an imagery of power and (frequently violent, even sadistic) domination in male writing about sex”.¹⁴ Millet disputes the widely accepted notion that romantic love has had a “soften[ing]” effect on Western patriarchy, showing instead how romantic love has been used to both mollify and conceal the subordinate status of women, and limit their sexual freedom.¹⁵

The concept of romantic love affords a means of emotional manipulation which the male is free to exploit, since love is the only circumstance in which the female is (ideologically) pardoned for sexual activity. And convictions of romantic love are convenient to both parties since this is often the only condition in which the female can overcome the far more powerful conditioning she has received toward sexual inhibition. Romantic love also obscures the realities of female status and the burden of economic dependency.¹⁶

Thanks to thinkers like Millet, the notion that love is the only legitimate arena for women to express their sexuality sounds anachronistic today.

Like Friedan and Greer, Millet’s analyses of romantic love is grounded in gender and sexual politics. But while all three emphasise how men use romantic love as a vehicle for manipulating and controlling women, they leave heterosexuality unproblematised. And like many others, while they criticise the traditional patriarchal ideology of romantic love and its effects on women, they do not provide a historical deconstruction of romantic love and its ideology to offer an alternate conceptualisation of how it might otherwise be experienced. However, while Greer’s and Millet’s analyses suggest that women’s economic independence and sexual freedom would perhaps lead to healthier relationships

love.

¹⁴ Kate Millet, *Sexual Politics* (London: Abacus, 1971) p. 36.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 36 – 37.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

with men, Shulamith Firestone is less optimistic.

Firestone's radical feminist analysis in *The Dialectic of Sex*, builds on Freidan's work by naming the mechanism of women's historical oppression as a "sex class"¹⁷ system in which men exploit women's emotional and domestic work as wives and mothers, leaving men free to create culture and society that supports their own interests. Firestone mocks falling in love but does not offer an analysis. She differentiates love from romance, which she describes as based on the "corrupted ... power context" of the sex class system.¹⁸ Romance, for Firestone, "is a cultural tool of male power" and how men continue to position women within this system whilst keeping them in ignorance of their true situation.¹⁹

We have seen that the psychological dependence of women upon men is created by continuing real economic and social oppression. However, in the modern world the economic and social bases of the oppression are no longer alone enough to maintain it. So the apparatus of romanticism is hauled in. (Looks like we'll have to help her out. Boys!)

*Romanticism develops in proportion to the liberation of women from their biology. As civilization advances and the biological bases of sex class crumble, male supremacy must shore itself up with artificial institutions, or exaggerations of previous institutions, ...*²⁰

Firestone's assertion in italics is contestable on (at least) two counts. Firstly, it is not supported by historical evidence, as romantic love is figured strongly in the Victorian era when women had almost no control over whom they married or their own reproductive lives. Secondly, women's continued interest in romantic love despite their increasing

¹⁷ Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (London: Paladin, 1972) p. 139.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid. Emphasis added.

economic independence and reproductive control suggests that factors other than those Firestone suggests are at play.²¹ Firestone's critique that romanticism is the male response to women's increased liberation from reproduction, and her technological solutions for achieving that liberation seem to offer no hope for genuine relations between the sexes. Indeed, if men's only response to women's liberation is to increase their use of power and deception this is an extremely bleak scenario.

In *Wedlocked Women*, the socialist feminist Lee Comer dismisses Firestone's account as unnecessarily grim, asking "Is it as bleak as that?"²² Although focused on the unequal sexual power within marriage, Comer is more moderate in her views setting her analysis in the context of women's needs in their everyday lives, and to some extent predicting the return to love in the 90s. She contrasts marriage for love with historically contractual feudal marriage arranged on the basis of patrimony and social status. Comer describes romantic love as "unpermitted love"²³ because historically it has transgressed the conventions of feudal and sex class systems, the very mechanisms of power by which patriarchy perpetuates the subordination of women. But in our third millennium Western world, romantic love has become a legitimate reason to marry—indeed, it has become *the*

²¹ Firestone advocates separatism and same-sex relations as a strategy in breaking habituated behaviours. Eventually, she reasoned, traditional sex-role based marriage would die out "allowing love to flow unimpeded" page 216. However, Firestone's solution depended on women being freed from reproduction through the use of artificial means, a disturbing proposition for many. This proposed solution did not take into account that such 'artificial means' would no doubt become a 'for profit' business run by white professional men who would exclude women. Women risked not only losing contact with their children, but also the power that is (arguably) inherent in their reproductive capacity relative to men.

²² Lee Comer, *Wedlocked Women* (Leeds: Feminist Books, 1974) p. 222.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 221.

legitimate reason to marry.

Comer states that if we have largely accomplished the ‘ideal’ of marrying for love, we have not as yet

succeeded in eliminating passion. Because it cannot co-exist with the ideal it is either ruled out or vicariously experienced through plays, films, novels or private fantasy. Why else is the unhappy marriage or the doomed relationship of more interest than the happy, love-matched marriage?²⁴

Echoing first-wave critiques, Comer questions whether sexual passion—which in the male is allegedly uncontrollable—is compatible with the long-term nature of marriage. But is this concept of uncontrollable passion based on the legacy of courtly love, with its flawed assumptions and masculinised ideas about desire, sex and love? As I will argue throughout this study, the notion of romantic passion itself is a construction from the medieval period that became part of the ideology of romantic love and, as such, it can be challenged and changed.²⁵

However, in highlighting this issue, Comer brings us full circle through more than four hundred years of feminism that does not question or deconstruct the basis or origins of these ideas. From Astell and Wollstonecraft down to present day feminist texts, the perennial question of the troubled relationship between heterosexuality, love and marriage remains as perplexing as ever. Unlike many theorists though, Comer offers a glimpse of hope about the possibility of romantic love. Those couples, she says, who remain ‘in love’

²⁴ Ibid., p, 222.

²⁵ How emotions from the medieval period were interpreted is crucial and begins in the following chapter.

with one another, and can navigate a long-term relationship may be relatively few but display “a happiness which touches all those with whom they have contact.”²⁶

During the 1960s and 1970s women’s interest in romantic love is seen as a compulsion and feminism turned away from love. This period is marked by a proliferation of feminist theories addressing the structural barriers to women’s emancipation, with romantic love seen as an ideological weapon of patriarchy keeping women in their place as the domestic, reproductive, and sexual labour helping to maintain those barriers. As hooks argues, what followed the sexual revolution was the stifling of an open debate about love, because

it was easier for women to address economic concerns than it was for them to address the issue of love. We did not have a language to talk about the reality that love did not prevail in our relationships with men. ... Our heartache came from facing the reality that if men were not willing to holistically embrace feminist revolution, then they would not be in an emotional place where they could offer us love. There can be no love without justice.²⁷

Romantic love is theorised as a political tool, but its construction along with that of falling in love is not questioned. Instead, loves’ historical, contemporary and fictional representations are accepted, more or less, as self-evident. Until as recently as the 1990s, none of the feminist theorists from Astell and Wollstonecraft onwards questioned or interrogated the validity of falling in love and its ‘psycho-emotional erotics’.

Women’s erotic as power

During the early 1980s, two theorists brought refreshing insights to feminist debates about

²⁶ Comer, op. cit.

²⁷ hooks, op. cit., p. 65.

gender relations. Rich and Lorde, both radical lesbian feminists, writers and poets, expanded and deepened feminist knowledge about heterosexuality. Challenging patriarchal concepts of the erotic was central to their work, extending the erotic into the realm of metaphysics. Each conceptualised the erotic, not just as sexual love but as a form of personal corporeal knowledge with the power to inform women about themselves, emphasising the social and political power women might exercise in reclaiming their bodies.

In her landmark essay on “Compulsory Heterosexuality” first published in 1981, Rich shifted feminist debate by drawing attention to the normativity of heterosexuality that reinforces patriarchal oppression, and its role in channelling women into marriage. Rich argued that the apparent naturalness of heterosexuality creates a barrier for women in exploring alternative sexualities and relationships with each other. She claimed the “idealization of heterosexual romance and marriage” has been a form of compulsion resting on the promise of erotic pleasure and fulfilment for women, that for the vast majority, fails to materialise.²⁸ Rich describes as passion-love, “the romantic love-cult in the West” that she says evolved from “the courtly love tradition”.²⁹ The narrative origins of this passion-love are examined in the following chapters.

In her essay “Uses Of The Erotic: The Erotic As Power” first published in 1984,

²⁸ Adrienne Rich, Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence (London: Onlywomen Press Ltd., 1981) p. 12.

²⁹ Rich, Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution p. 159.

Lorde's concept of the erotic as "a measure between the beginnings of our sense of self and the chaos of our strongest feelings" places it in a different field from the mechanics of sexuality, or even sexual love.³⁰ This creates a productive disconnect from the hackneyed, ritualised conventions of romantic love, bringing women and love back to the organic processes of the body, mind and spirit, which Lorde describes as "the nurturer or nursemaid of all our deepest knowledge."³¹ For Lorde, the erotic is the power that fuels deep meaningful engagement with others, beyond mere sensation, into "[t]he sharing of joy".³²

Meanwhile, the 1980s saw significant changes in feminist attitudes, and a less judgemental appraisal of women's interest in romantic love. This period appears as a theoretical bridge from the hostile approach of the early second-wave, through to a more critical engagement with women's reading and viewing of romance, preparing the ground for the 1990s and beyond.

Reading and viewing the romance: 'chick flick' culture

During the 1980s attention turned to understanding women's apparent obsession with romantic love through ethnographic studies into women's romance reading. Much feminist theorisation in the early second-wave positioned romantic love as something of a decoy, or a beacon of false consciousness by which women are simultaneously consoled

³⁰ Ibid., p. 56.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

and promised the impossible. It quickly became conflated with a kind of stupidity, by which women, for example, could be positioned as cultural dupes—too blinkered, too easily fooled—unable to recognise their own exploitation. The idea of false consciousness was later rejected by many feminist thinkers as disempowering.

A new approach was needed to understand the ongoing appeal of romantic love for women and some feminists turned their attention to romance's cultural products. This proved beneficial for feminist (re)engagement with romantic love from the perspective of women's expressed subjective sexual/affective experience in their everyday lives. However, references to falling in love are, again, peripheral: falling in love is only mentioned in the context of romantic love's conventions. There is no systematic investigation into the emotions of falling in love, or its meaning as the signifier and/or pinnacle of romantic love.

In the flurry of feminist and sociological interest in romance that emerged in the 1980s three contributions stand out as particularly influential; Tania Modleski, Carol Thurston and Janice Radway. In *Loving with a Vengeance* (1982) Tania Modleski argues romance has been treated as a lesser feminine activity devalued by the (gendered) dichotomy between high art and mass-produced popular culture. Through a feminist critique of psychoanalysis and Marxist criticism, Modleski tries to understand the complex meanings popular romance novels and TV soap operas have in relation to the everyday needs and wants of women. Modleski's work is important not least for its non-judgemental approach. She wanted to "avoid expressing either hostility or ridicule, to get beneath the embarrassment" common in feminist criticism of this subject:

Mass art not only contains contradictions, it also functions in a highly contradictory manner: while appearing to be merely escapist, such art simultaneously challenges and reaffirms traditional values, behaviour and attitudes.³³

Her findings have parallels in recent feminist studies of courtly love that challenge earlier readings in ways that affect its semantics.³⁴

Expanding on Modleski's work, cultural anthropologist and feminist Janice Radway conducted a study seeking to identify the enduring appeal of popular romantic fiction and its meanings for women.³⁵ In *Reading the Romance*, first published in 1984, Radway argues there are multiple and contradictory explanations underlying women's romance-reading, suggesting that literary scholars' appraisals of popular romantic fiction do not square with lay women readers' experience. Far from being the passive unthinking consumers controlled by popular cultural romantic ideologies literary critics imagined them to be, Radway found that many women readers actively extract value and significance directly related to the dissatisfactions of their daily gendered lives.

Romance reading's potential to subvert traditional concepts of gender was a finding in the work of writer Carol Thurston in *The Romance Revolution* (1987). Based on her extensive qualitative study of American women readers and romance literature covering the period 1960 – 1980, Thurston identified a split in popular romance genre into two basic types—"the sweet romance and the erotic romance".³⁶ She points out that the

³³ Tania Modleski, *Loving with a Vengeance: Mass-Produced Fantasies for Women* (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1982) pp. 14 and 112.

³⁴ This discussion is taken up in chapter 4.

³⁵ Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1984).

³⁶ Carol Thurston, *The Romance Revolution: Erotic Novels for Women and the Quest for a New Sexual*

heroine of the erotic novel is strong, self-confident and independent, and rejects both the submissive feminine and the macho masculine stereotypes, admiring “gentleness and concern for others” in prospective partners.³⁷ The timing of this split—1972—suggests the sexual revolution may have impacted on representations of women’s sexual subjectivity in literature.

Radway suggests the potential value of reading romance may not be realised if it is not articulated and shared with other women as a ‘consciousness raising’ exercise. The benefits of self-aware romance-reading was the basis of an educational research program for women in the UK, conducted in the late 1990s by Christine Jarvis. In *Love Changes Everything: The Transformative Potential of Popular Romance Fiction*, Jarvis reports that the

[w]omen participants identified the pervasive and potentially constraining influence of romantic discourses in the cultural products they regularly encountered and noted how aspects of their own lives were constructed in terms of these discourses. They developed strategies for imagining alternatives to the privileging of monogamous heterosexuality characteristic of popular romance, considered the structural factors contributing to the interplay of power within romantic relationships and reported changes in their personal and social lives resulting from their changed perspectives.³⁸

Romance-reading is a complex activity that cannot be classified as either essentially conservative or nascently oppositional according to Radway, as no “single conclusive statement about the meaning and effect of the romance” is possible: interpretation of texts depends on the context of individual lives, the meaning extracted from the texts and how

Identity (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987) p. 209.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

³⁸ Christine Jarvis, “Love changes everything: the transformative potential of popular romantic fiction,” *Studies in the Education of Adults* 31.2 (1999): p. 109.

it is used.³⁹

However, as Thurston argues, the transformative potential of the sweet/erotic split in romance literature showing alternative gender constructions for women, are unlikely to be realised without women's economic independence providing the means to romantic possibilities. As Thurston explains,

[i]n the final analysis the level of caution and circumspection required of a woman in her relationships with a man, appears to operate in direct proportion to the socio-political emancipation of women, with their level of education and financial independence meaning they have the opportunity to engage in a relationship based on romantic love.⁴⁰

Just what romantic love is remains open to further speculation and investigation which is the subject matter of the following chapters.

The combined work of Modleski, Thurston and Radway suggests that for some time women have been contributing to the shape and direction of romantic narratives and interpreting their meanings. Their research indicates that a progressive element in romance reading is possible if the reader is self-reflective. Women's consumption of romance culture can be both entertaining and educational; but is unlikely to be associated with significant social change without women's economic independence. What is particularly interesting about this is that the self-reflective and educational elements of romance reading were also central to the purpose of medieval romance literature; and this similarity will be explored over the following chapters.

³⁹ Radway, *op. cit.*, p. 209. This observation has resonances with courtly lyric and is discussed in the following chapter.

⁴⁰ Thurston, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

The legal, social and economic reforms of the 1970s and 1980s provided the conditions for women's greater economic independence and sexual freedom into the 1990s and beyond. At the same time, feminist engagement with theorising romantic love continued and even increased. In the wake of ethnographic studies about women's romance reading and watching, and their continuing fascination with romantic relationships, feminist discourse on the subject took a new direction—from questioning and criticising romantic love, to acknowledging the importance of love in everyday life. Feminism began to theorise the characterisation of romantic love and its emotions to account for its enduring attractions.

The hypnotics of 'falling in love'

Third-wave feminism has begun to reimagine romantic love. At least some women have started to benefit from the struggle to free themselves from the effects of male domination, but there seems to have been no decline in women's interest or investment in romantic love. Perhaps in response to the continuing popularity of narratives that seemed in many ways to be at odds with feminist sensibilities, feminist attitudes about this subject begin to change. Jackie Stacey and Lynne Pearce reflected the mood at the beginning of the 1990s when, in the context of increasing gender equality, they asked “how does romantic love, an emotional configuration that most of us experience as a hot confusion of sickness and delight, continue to do so well?”⁴¹ From the 1990s onwards there is a concern that

⁴¹ Stacey and Pearce, *op. cit.*, p. 12. Addressing this question begins in the following chapter.

love, as a legitimate subject for feminist examination, has largely been ignored during the sexual politics of the second-wave.⁴² Theorisation turns to questioning what romantic love *is*, and in particular, the emotions of falling in love.

From the 1990s, the tensions between the pleasures of romantic love as a lived experience and its dangers for women are most clearly articulated. In *The Heart of the Matter: Feminists Revisit Romance*, Jackie Stacey and Lynne Pearce point out how our human need for connection and intimacy has been left out of feminist discourse on romantic love.⁴³ They argue that feminists are not immune to the “extraordinary power and seduction of romantic discourse” with some admitting to falling in love and enjoying it.⁴⁴ In the same volume, Stevi Jackson argues the problem with second-wave debates is that the value and meaning of love in our lives has been excluded in feminist discourse on romance and should be restored as a subject for critical analysis.⁴⁵ Stacey and Pearce argue that the power of romance discourse does not mean “it cannot be challenged or reinvented but that repudiation is untenable.”⁴⁶

The general consensus of contributors to Stacey and Pearce’s edited collection is that romantic love is firstly, and most importantly, a narrative.⁴⁷ Romance’s longevity and enduring power as a narrative is founded on its fictionality and textuality providing the

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 179.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 13.

⁴⁵ Stevi Jackson, “Women and Heterosexual Love: Complicity, Resistance and Change,” *Romance Revisited*, ed. Lynne Pearce and Jackie Stacey (New York: New York University Press, 1995) p. 50.

⁴⁶ Stacey and Pearce, op. cit., p. 14.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 15.

means for conventional narratives of love to be re-casted.⁴⁸ Narrativity gives romance the flexibility and scope for its many incarnations and adaptive re-writings, encompassing diverse stories across time, race, ethnicity, class, gender and sexuality. Accordingly, Stacey and Pearce maintain, there is no “*single* (foundational) romantic love story”.⁴⁹ And Sue Vice maintains there is, perhaps, only one certainty—namely, that, romance is “always already written”,⁵⁰ prompting us to ask if there was ever a “classic romance”.⁵¹ This leaves us to question what have been the effects of what we think of as the ‘classic romance’—its history, shape and influence, crucial questions pursued in this thesis.

However, regardless of there being no single foundational narrative, there *is* a core theme fundamental to all romantic love narratives—ubiquitous in contemporary romance culture—and that is the idea of ‘falling in love’. As Jackson observes:

Romantic love hinges on the idea of ‘falling in love’, and on this ‘fall’ as a means for establishing an intimate, deep relationship. Yet being ‘in love’ is also seen as radically different from other forms of love – mysterious, inexplicable, irrational, uncontrollable, compelling and ecstatic.⁵²

Despite its elusive character, falling in love remains imbued with an erotic power to eclipse the mundane in pursuit of the fairy-tale happily ever after. Even in our earliest exposure to the romance, the transformative power of the erotic is never far below the surface; from the gentle prince’s—gentle referencing the urbanity of well-bred aristocracy and the reconstructed male⁵³—kiss that awakens the sleeping beauty, to the kiss that

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 14.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 37.

⁵⁰ Sue Vice cited in Stacey and Pearce, p. 12.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 14.

⁵² Jackson, “Women and Heterosexual Love: Complicity, Resistance and Change,” p. 53.

⁵³ The influence of royal and aristocratic urbanity on romance is interrogated in chapters 5, 6 and 7.

transforms a frog into a prince, the magical power of heterosexual attraction and its chemistry pervades romance culture. As we have been taught from early childhood and beyond, this is no ordinary experience. Imbued with the magical, the otherworldly, and the transformative, this is a fantastical composite historically marked since medieval times as a ‘special’ kind of ‘true’ love, mysterious and unfathomable.

Indeed, how can we *not* be excited, “by the prior power”⁵⁴ of falling in love? Strongly mediated through cultural products, falling in love in Western culture is inscribed with an embodied passion that constructs a romantic erotic ontology. This always prior, magical power, with its hallmark of ‘true’ love and fated soulmates, masks and reflects gendered power at the most crucial and strategic moment of relationship formation, camouflaging the inequalities of gender that so often surface once the honeymoon is over. But rather than challenging the validity of falling in love’s psycho-emotional erotics, many feminist critiques lend verisimilitude to the magical power of its embodied experience, reinforcing the mystification of this love.

Those feminists who have addressed what ‘falling in love’ means have characterised it in a number of similar and related ways. In this and the following paragraph, direct quotes from various authors are used to demonstrate the singularity of thought and sentiment about romantic love and its replication across disciplines. The German feminist Frigga Haug describes romantic love in mystical terms “as a means of

⁵⁴ Judith Butler, Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative (London: Routledge, 1997) p. 2.

retrieving the buried and forgotten stirrings of the soul ... a dramatic, deeply felt inner transformation, as something that lifts us above the mundane world”.⁵⁵ The late psychoanalyst and feminist critic E. S. Person reinforces the magical fated and instantaneous quality of falling in love in *Love and Fateful Encounters*, first published in 1989:

Love comes when it does. Rather than *willing* it, we are *struck* by it as though by lightning. Lovers experience love as completely spontaneous, autonomous, independent of need—a gift, a feeling altogether inspired by the virtues of the beloved, not by any internal quest or need ...⁵⁶

Person modifies this statement somewhat by saying, “[I]ove arises from within ourselves as an imaginative act”⁵⁷ suggesting that it is not entirely outside us, but may also be agential. Like Haug, Person endorses romantic love’s passion as potentially transformational, a recurring theme from courtly love repeated in fairy-tale and romance culture.⁵⁸ Wendy Langford takes issue with the effects of romantic love and its viability in her 1999 *Revolutions of the Heart*, but does not challenge the experience of falling in love itself which she describes as “a mysterious ... powerful force” that cannot be democratized because its “dangerous passions” put it beyond the control of reason.⁵⁹ In her 2012 sociological investigation into *Why Love Hurts*, Eva Illouz argues the political

⁵⁵ Haug, F. et al (1987) *Female Sexualization*, London: Verso cited in Jackson, “Women and Heterosexual Love: Complicity, Resistance and Change,” p. 53.

⁵⁶ Ethel Spector Person, *Love and Fateful Encounters: The Power of Romantic Passion* (London: Bloomsbury, 1989) p. 31.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ However, as I will argue in chapter 5, courtly love’s transformational effects came from the didactic and civilizing purposes courtliness.

⁵⁹ Wendy Langford, *Revolutions of the Heart: Gender, power and the delusions of love* (London: Routledge, 1999) pp. 18 - 21.

struggle for women's rights and sexual liberation has affected intimacy because men have been made to acknowledge the inequalities women live under which has in turn, "stripped love of the rituals of deference and mystical aura in which it had hitherto been shrouded."⁶⁰ These feminist accounts do not challenge the magical psycho-emotional erotics of falling in love, or deviate very far from theorists of other disciplines who describe it in similar terms.

Descriptions of falling in love are strangely consistent across a number of disciplinary boundaries. Falling in love is described as a "mysterious" and "irrational experience" by behavioural scientists Peter J. Marston, Michael L. Hecht and Tia Robers in their 1987 book *True Love Ways*. Falling in love, they say, involves "an almost magical emancipatory capacity to transcend the very limitations of one's human existence."⁶¹ The historian Marilyn Yalom, in her 2001 *A History of the Wife* describes romantic love as "that intoxicating mix of sex and sentiment that most adults have experienced and no one can define."⁶² The philosopher Robert C. Solomon says romantic "[l]ove is the most exhilarating—and sometimes the most excruciating and destructive—experience that most of us have ever had, or will ever have."⁶³ Paz defines romantic love as "[a] mysterious passionate attraction for a single person".⁶⁴ These constructions of romantic

⁶⁰ Eva Illouz, *Why Love Hurts: A Sociological Explanation* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2012) p. 9.

⁶¹ Peter J. Marston, Michael L. Hecht and Tia Robers, "True Love Ways: The Subjective Experience and Communication of Romantic Love," *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* 4 (1987): pp. 387 - 88.

⁶² Marilyn Yalom, *A History of the Wife* (London: Pandora Press, 2001) p. xii.

⁶³ Robert C Solomon, *About Love: Reinventing Romance For Our Times* (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing, 2006) pp. 1 - 2.

⁶⁴ Octavio Paz 1993, p. 35 cited in Maciel: p. 399. In her article on Paz, Maciel argues that he "continues the lyrical current ... which originated in the theory/practice of courtly love in Provencal poetry, that traversed the Romantic movement and rose again in the 20th century, in new guise, with Surrealism" (p. 399).

love perpetuate its mystification, and the power of erotic attraction, as a transformational force able to determine success or failure. This reinforces its links with destiny and powerlessness while obscuring its agency and performativity.

Emotions as constructions of sociality

Stevi Jackson is the first feminist to theorise the emotions of falling and being in love as a social construction. Beginning with her 1993 article “Even Sociologists Fall in Love”, Jackson has consistently argued that emotions are not pre-social essences, but socially and linguistically constructed and mediated. This is supported by theorists from related and different disciplines. In *The Managed Heart*, sociologist Arlie Hochschild argues that by “managing feeling we contribute” to the social construction of emotion.⁶⁵ The anthropologist Michelle Rosaldo points out in *Towards an Anthropology of Self and Feeling* that feelings are created through social processors and “are not substances to be felt in our blood”.⁶⁶ Historian William Reddy argues in *The Navigation of Feeling* that emotions “are not biologically based or genetically programmed” but come under the influence of culture.⁶⁷ And sociologist Carol Smart maintains in *Personal Life* that love is “something one ‘does’ and ‘feels’ with others rather than a pre-existing emotion that one

⁶⁵ Arlie Russel Hochschild, *The Managed Heart* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1983) p. 18.

⁶⁶ Michelle Rosaldo, “Towards an Anthropology of Self and Feeling,” *Culture Theory: Essays on Mind, Self and Emotion*, eds. Richard A. Shweder and Robert A. LeVine (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984) p. 143.

⁶⁷ William M. Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) p. 34.

‘has’”.⁶⁸

Consistent with the gist of these accounts and the ‘linguistic turn’ they reflect, Jackson maintains “subjectivity is discursively constructed”, and that romantic love is a social construction which nonetheless remains powerful. Whether or not those who experience it consider their consciousness ‘raised’, and despite historical feminist warnings against it, Jackson notes romance remains seductive for women, and that “even sociologists fall in love”.⁶⁹ In her 1995 work, Jackson distinguishes between women’s pleasure in romantic love as a valid experience, and its ideology which she sees as harmful to women.⁷⁰

It is not necessary to deny the pleasures of romance or the euphoria of falling in love in order to be sceptical about romantic ideals and wary of their consequences. It is possible to recognise that love is a site of women’s complicity in patriarchal relations while still noting that it can also be a site of resistance.⁷¹

However, I suggest the emotional “euphoria” of falling in love is central to those “romantic ideals” because of its association with the chemistry of attraction and ‘true’ fated love. While cautioning women about romantic ideals, Jackson’s proposal that the euphoria of falling in love can still be enjoyed, seems to suggest it is not part of romantic love’s social construction, and therefore, unproblematic. Women are thus invited to enjoy falling in love ‘knowingly’ or ‘ironically’. The limits of such a strategy seem obvious; it appears to naturalise the emotions of falling in love, undermining the argument that those

⁶⁸ Carol Smart (2000, p. 59) cited in Jackson, “Love, Social Change, and Everyday Heterosexuality,” p. 37.

⁶⁹ Jackson, “Even Sociologists Fall in Love: An Exploration in the Sociology of Emotions,” p. 217.

⁷⁰ Jackson, “Women and Heterosexual Love: Complicity, Resistance and Change,” p. 50.

⁷¹ Ibid.

emotions are socially and discursively mediated.

Jackson acknowledges the power of emotional representation in romantic fiction, and argues for an analysis of love in her 1995 chapter “Women and Heterosexual Love”.⁷² Almost twenty years later, in “Love, Social Change, and Everyday Heterosexuality”, Jackson gives a thorough account of the literature on the “sociality of love” and its “cultural variability”, questioning how romantic love may be different from other forms of love.⁷³ However, her methodology, as with other feminist analysis of romantic love, is non-historical. By that I mean, explanations for the emotions of romantic love are confined to relatively recent contemporary times; a longer view is needed. Both of Jackson’s works just mentioned are situated firmly in the late twentieth century: the first is a sociological investigation with an emphasis on psychoanalytic and Lacanian accounts of desire which she rejects for, among other shortcomings, failing to differentiate the many forms of love;⁷⁴ the second is an extensive analysis of post-modern theories of love’s social construction.⁷⁵

Jackson’s emphasis on examining the social and discursive construction of falling in love loses momentum in successive feminist works that, once again, focus on the effects

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Jackson, “Love, Social Change, and Everyday Heterosexuality,” pp. 34 – 41.

⁷⁴ Jackson, “Even Sociologists Fall in Love: An Exploration in the Sociology of Emotions,” p. 209.

⁷⁵ In *Women, Love, and Power*, Elaine Hoffman Baruch too takes a psychoanalytical approach despite what she describes as the intimate connection between literature and social reality, going back to the troubadours and courtly love. Wendy Langford also takes a psychoanalytic approach in *Revolutions of the Heart*, setting it apart from the fictional and discursive influences of history, language and representation of emotions in literature.

of romantic love for women rather than on how it is constituted. In *Love: An Unromantic Discussion*, Mary Evans advocates that the “romanticized and commercialized forms” of love should be rejected by rethinking love as centred on care and commitment.⁷⁶ But this recasting is unlikely to succeed as long as falling in love as a naturalised embodied experience as it is currently defined—along with everything that goes with it—is an experience that most women (and increasingly, men) welcome and even treasure. In *Autonomy, Gender, Politics*, Marilyn Friedman identifies the merger of coupledness as a major problem, particularly for women with less rigid ego boundaries than men.⁷⁷ Both Evans and Friedman, as with many other theorists, focus on the effects of romantic love for women rather than how romantic love is constituted.

The power of love, or love as power?

This phrase suggests an either/or duality on the nature, versus the operation, of love, but draws attention to the deeper philosophical, ontological and political questions at the core of this thesis about how romantic love is constituted. Romantic love is not produced in the fervidness of physical attraction or chemistry, it is a cultural form with embodied effects that are socially and discursively constructed; a fictional narrative of a mysterious erotic love, powerful and transformative that supposedly begins in the spark of attraction and its chemistry.⁷⁸ This narrative perpetuates unrealistic expectations about the power of attraction and its association with erotic love. The nature of love, (erotic or any other type)

⁷⁶ Mary Evans, *Love. An Unromantic Discussion* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003) p. 143.

⁷⁷ Marilyn Friedman, *Gender, Autonomy, Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003) p. 5.

⁷⁸ The construction of this narrative is interrogated in the following chapter.

is indivisible from its operation, or how love is enacted and performed. Love has power, but it is only realised through its saying and doing; love is agential, and its rewards are the performative effects of its practice. As Butler puts it, love's "utterance is a wager we make, but it is also, bodily, a wager we become."⁷⁹ The more we practice love, the more loving we may become, with affects that are felt in the body.

Langford captures the feminist conundrum at the heart of romantic love with her key question: "[h]ow can a mysterious power which determines our lives be made a power which we determine?"⁸⁰ Can feminism transform the mysterious power of 'falling in love' into an agential human power *to* love? What became clear from my reading across the spectrum of feminist texts is that an oppositional politics to romantic love is difficult to sustain, so long as we wish simultaneously to acknowledge the mysterious powers of falling in love as a preferred form of sexual/affective experience. Viewing the psycho-emotional erotics of falling in love as somehow separate from the ideology of romantic love is untenable, since that ideology is deeply embedded in the different 'magical' embodied experience of love compared to other forms, such as companionate long-term love, parental love, or even friendship.

Indeed, the difficulties of separating the emotions of the lived experience from the beliefs and thinking about romantic love—its ideology—is supported by the latest research from the behavioural and neurosciences. Neuroscientific research indicates that

⁷⁹ Judith Butler, "Response: Performance Reflections on Love and Commitment," Women's Studies Quarterly: Project Muse 39.1 and 2 (2011): p. 237.

⁸⁰ Langford, p. 21.

the previous distinction between thinking and feeling has broken-down and been refigured; thought and affect are now considered, in their function, to act as a unity, they are mutually consistent, interdependent and interactive.⁸¹ This suggests the emotions of falling in love cannot be extracted from the thought processes anchored in romantic love's ideology; thinking and feeling are undifferentiated, they impact on each other. Given romantic love began as a fictional narrative, interrogating the roots of its historical fictionalization can help refigure its ideology for contemporary times, through a reconceptualization of romantic love as performative.

In her 2014 chapter on "Love Studies", Jónasdóttir asks: "What is to be said and done from feminist points of view about postmodern revitalizing of pre-modern ideas of passionate love?"⁸² With its narrative seeds in medieval romance literature, the construction of falling in love's mysterious power has a long fictional history and influence on western culture. As Jónasdóttir and Ferguson point out, most of our knowledge about love has come from studies into literature, and other forms of the arts such as plays, novels, films, music and poetry.⁸³ These forms of art have historically, been constitutive of romance culture, having a more substantial influence on how romantic love is perceived and experienced, than the lived experience itself. In addition, until quite recently in history, most of our romantic cultural products have been the work of men.

⁸¹ Norman Doidge MD, The Brain That Changes Itself: stories of personal triumph from the frontiers of brain science, Revised ed. (Melbourne: Scribe, 2010).

⁸² Anna G. Jónasdóttir, "Love Studies: A (Re)New(ed) Field of Knowledge Interests," Love: A Question for Feminism in the Twenty-First Century (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2014) p. 24.

⁸³ Anna G. Jónasdóttir and Ann Ferguson, eds., Love: A Question for Feminism in the Twenty-First Century (New York, London: Routledge, 2014) p. 1.

While feminist accounts of reading or otherwise consuming the cultural products of romance have been important and influential, moving beyond literary and other romantic artefacts is crucial for feminist epistemology. This study interrogates romantic love's narrative from the pre-modern period: focussing on how affect was constructed and communicated through discourse and practice; how affect was later interpreted by historians and literary critics; and how the passionate affect of romantic love became institutionalised through the legacy of courtly love's mystique. As such, this thesis contributes to the new field of 'Love Studies'.

In their recent publication on the topic of love, Jónasdóttir and Ferguson (along with other contributors to their book), outline the new field of 'Love Studies', foregrounding the importance of love as a subject of feminist epistemology. Jónasdóttir and Ferguson argue for a return to "the strand of materialist feminism, which both includes and goes beyond the study of discourses" without forgoing the benefits of poststructuralism.⁸⁴ This is consistent with the methodology used in this study. In addition they argue:

It is male power in the ongoing production and exchange of love as a material energy in love and caring *practices*, not simply *ideological beliefs or discourses* on love, gender or sexuality, habits or physical coercion, that must be analysed to understand both the persistence of, and resistance to, male domination when it arises.⁸⁵

The focus on material practices is much needed. However, in the case of romantic love, its material practices are shaped by its ideology, and there remain significant questions for

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 6.

feminism as to how it is constituted. Theorising romantic love and falling in love requires a rethinking of the inter-relationship between history, literature, and discourse on our material practices and their combined effects on our bodies and lived experiences.

The model of love advocated by Jónasdóttir and Ferguson focuses on humans acting “intentionally”.⁸⁶ This model is undermined in the current narrative of falling in love as mysterious and uncontrollable. Subverting the a priori, naturalised erotic power of falling in love (with its “mysterious, inexplicable, irrational, uncontrollable, compelling and ecstatic” narrative), seems a political imperative in reconceptualising ‘romantic’ love as one of human power and agency. In her chapter “Feminist Love Politics”, Ferguson argues feminists should examine and question “oppressive types of love” like romantic love with its “hierarchies of power”.⁸⁷ My contention is that romantic love’s hierarchy of power begins with the ideological weight of falling in love, which is oppressive in its creation of unrealistic expectations concerning romances’ idealised erotics at the point of relationship formation and the ideology of coupledness.

The materialist approach of this research is extended into our internality, and the relationship between the external social world and the internal world of human matter; consistent with Jónasdóttir’s and Ferguson’s formulation of love as one of “social and bio-material human power”.⁸⁸ According to neuroscience, the inter-relationship between these

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ann Ferguson, “Feminist Love Politics: Romance, Care, and Solidarity,” Love: A Question for Feminism in the Twenty-First Century, eds. Anna G. Jónasdóttir and Ann Ferguson (New York: Routledge, 2014) pp. 260 - 61.

⁸⁸ Jónasdóttir and Ferguson, eds., op. cit., p. 5.

two environments has effects on the material substance of our brains, shaping our neural-pathways through the reiteration of culture and learning. If we can unlearn the ideology of falling in love and how it is supposed to make us feel, then we can potentially come home to a different reality consistent with the personal and individual experience of our own bodies and what our erotics tell us.

The materialist approach of Rich and Lorde from the 1980s thus remains relevant to third-wave criticism. Both focussed on the knowledge embedded in the erotic materiality of women's bodies, bypassing the usual definition of 'sexualized love' to an agential connection with their sexual/affective subjectivity. Both viewed sexual and erotic power as a life-force for guiding women's action and decision making by reclaiming the energy inherent in their female physicality. As Rich articulates so eloquently here:

There is for the first time today a possibility of converting our physicality into both knowledge and power.

From brain to clitoris through vagina to uterus, from tongue to nipples to clitoris, from fingertips to clitoris to brain, from nipples to brain and into the uterus, we are strung with invisible messages of an urgency and restlessness which indeed, cannot be appeased, and of a cognitive potentiality that we are only beginning to guess at. We are neither "inner" nor "outer" constructed; our skin is alive with signals; our lives and our deaths are inseparable from the release or blockage of our thinking bodies.⁸⁹

Rich's wisdom that we are constructed as neither 'inner' nor 'outer' is prophetic in view of the latest research from the neurosciences on the inextricable interconnections between the "social and bio-material" environments.

As I will argue, history, literature and discourse have been integral in the

⁸⁹ Rich, Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution p. 284.

construction of romantic love's ideology with performative effects on both our external and internal worlds. Given the cultural saturation and naturalisation of falling in love and the erotic power inscribed in the chemistry of attraction, deconstructing its psycho-emotional erotics seems paramount in subverting its current 'malestream' ideology and politics, moving from the uncontrollable power of love, to reconceptualising romantic love as performative.

Conclusion

Feminist conceptualisations of romantic love are complex and interdisciplinary. In this chapter I have surveyed several important approaches to feminist understandings and theorisations of romantic love. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s in the political context of women's longstanding lack of power and economic freedom, the purported *effects* of romantic love on the lives of women took precedence over what *constitutes* romantic love. Complicating matters, the social and political gains of the second-wave that resulted in women's increased economic independence did not result in the 'withering away' of romantic love that was predicted. In response, early third-wave feminism put love back on the feminist agenda and began to reimagine romantic love.

New directions in the third-wave gave rise to ethnographic studies that investigated women's consumption of romantic cultural artefacts and its meaning in their everyday lived experience. A positive contribution came with the 'linguistic turn', when theorisation looked to romantic love's social and discursive construction, arguing that the emotions of falling in love are not pre-social. This criticism proposed that the experience

of falling in love could be enjoyed while also being wary of romantic love's ideology. However, this does not give due consideration to falling in love as part of romantic love's ideology, in which case its historical construction must be interrogated. In view of romantic love's continuing cultural importance, a deconstruction of this specific type of love and its particular emotional configuration will perhaps contribute to subverting its reputation for mystery and ineffability.

Shifting from theorising the uncontrollable emotional power and euphoria of falling in love, to understanding embodied love as one of agency and human power has political potential for altering how women (and men) perceive and practice romantic love. In this endeavour, one potentially fruitful approach may lie in romantic love's history and historiography, on the one hand, and in feminist theorisations of 'performativity' on the other. The following chapter presents a general overview and discussion of literary, linguistic and performativity theories applied to romantic love and falling in love, while signposting links to the genealogical material in chapters 4 through 8.

CHAPTER 3

Romancing the Performative

In addressing the question of what constitutes romantic love as we understand it in contemporary Western romance culture, a genealogy of its historical descent is imperative. There is general agreement across disciplines that romantic love has its roots in courtly love from the medieval period. With that agreement as a starting point, this study demonstrates how the mystique of courtly love was invented and romanticised, and how its cultural power has endured through the (re)iteration of romance fiction, and historical and literary intertextuality. This (re)iteration has portrayed ‘falling in love’ as a naturalised, embodied experience of a particular psycho-emotional and erotic quality associated with the power of attraction, commonly viewed as a signifier of ‘true’ love.

The reiteration of the ideology of romantic love through its fictionalisation and intertextuality raises fundamental ethical, epistemological and philosophical questions about the nature of love, of how it is constituted and maintained. This chapter proposes that insights drawn from the philosophy of linguistics and performativity alongside a genealogical approach may be useful in the new field of ‘Love Studies’. Its application in this research suggests a theoretical basis for women’s long-standing argument—evident in ethnographic and other studies—that love is something we do, coupled with their

assertion that men do not engage as much as they ought to in the work of love.¹ Understanding romantic love in this way allows for its reconceptualization as a purposeful practice with desired effects. It also has potential in subverting the ‘magical’ and unrealistic discourse of falling in love as a naturalised, innate and fated event, moving from its magic erotics to human power and agency.

Romantic love’s genealogy

Before moving onto the general discussion of linguistics and performativity, I offer a brief outline of romantic love’s genealogy that will unfold in the following five chapters. Throughout those five chapters, I examine three elements of the psycho-emotional erotics common to the narrative of ‘falling in love’ in Western contemporary romance culture. First, falling in love is often described as a unique ‘magical’, ‘mystical’ and enigmatic experience of sexual/affective love. Second, this love is often said to be founded on the chemistry of physical attraction. Third, ‘love chemistry’ is, in turn, understood to be indicative of ‘true’ love, vested with the power to transform those who experience it and, in particular, to exert a civilising effect on men. These three elements form the conceptual template of romantic love which has its roots in the *cansos*.

The *cansos* are the creation of troubadours frequenting the royal and aristocratic courts of Occitania, a centre of power with a highly sophisticated and relatively civil culture for that historical period. Through my reading of troubadour *cansos* or lyric,² I

¹ For instance, see Stacey and Pearce 1995, Hite 1987 and 2002, Summers 2003 and hooks 2002 and 2005.

² The terms *cansos* and lyric are used throughout and are interchangeable.

challenge the still prevalent construction of the *cansos* as referring to sexual/affective love. Apart from entertainment, lyric had a didactic and socio-political function at court. Rather than describing a passionate sexual love between women and men, the masculine submission and florid, emotional declarations of love found in the *cansos*, are consistent with two forms of public love at Occitan courts; the civilising love of courtliness in maintaining order and stability,³ and the flattering mode of ennobling love in maintaining the political power of the ruling elites,⁴ some of whom were aristocratic women. Early theorists of courtly love did not take into consideration the power of ‘seigneurial ladies’ or the culture of Occitania and the impacts of its favourable property laws for women. Similarly, the possibility that the troubadours were pledging their service and honouring noblewomen as lords is rarely considered.⁵

The interaction between courtliness and ennobling love became a dialogue invested with significance, constructing a special kind of passionate erotic love reiterated throughout history in romance literature. The combined discourses and practices of courtliness and ennobling love were substantial themes of lyric that created a powerful erotic subjectivity and ontology of a special ‘magical’ kind of love. This mystique was later appropriated for romance and became the ideological cornerstone of romantic love.

³ Courtliness and its politics is examined in chapter 6.

⁴ Ennobling love and its politics is examined in chapter 8.

⁵ The culture of Occitania and the power of its noblewomen is examined in chapter 7.

Slipping between art and reality

As Ferguson and Jónasdóttir point out, most of our knowledge about love has come from the “arts, in novels, drama, music, and film,” areas that have been the focus of a great deal of academic attention compared to the study of love.⁶ As Baldwin so aptly put it: “In matters of love, life has often sought to imitate art.”⁷ A principle example of this is what is referred to as medieval romance literature which was didactic in its original purpose as we will see over the following chapters. The influence of the *cansos* on Western poetry and romance literature, and how romantic love is perceived and practiced in contemporary culture today, is inestimable. Again and again, we see the interaction between art and reality, between fiction and lived experience played out across time. Medieval discourses and practices of everyday life were creative sources for the invention of lyric. Lyric’s appropriation for romance and its (re)iteration in fictionalised form and everyday life has been critical in the construction and naturalisation of the psycho-emotional erotics of falling in love.

The interaction between the arts and lived experience is made clear in literary theory. In *Speech Acts and Literary Theory* (1990) Sandra Petrey maintains that language and its function in everyday use has been important in developing “guiding principles for apprehending the nature and function of the literary text.”⁸ But this interaction also works in the other direction, from art to life, by transferring ideas and meaning evoked by words

⁶ Jónasdóttir and Ferguson, eds., op. cit., p. 1.

⁷ John W. Baldwin, *Aristocratic Life in Medieval France: The Romances of Jean Renart and Gerbert de Montreuil, 1190-1230* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000) p. 265, cited in Turner, op. cit., p. 198.

⁸ Sandy Petrey, *Speech Acts and Literary Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1990) p. 3.

from literature, to sociality. This is apparent in how the interpretation of lyric by early critics influenced its amorous sexual/affective construction, as the historiography of this interpretation shows in chapter 4. As Petrey further argues, “literature functions within the social environment where it is *inevitably experienced*”,⁹ and early critics came under the influence of Romanticism. Writing around 1690, in the heady days of the new Romanticism spreading throughout Europe, early critics interpreted the civility and respectful practices of courtliness towards noblewomen, and the florid language of ennobling love as having erotic meaning.¹⁰

In the merging of art and life, early scholars’ interpretation of lyric was fundamental in the construction of its meaning through what is known as the “autobiographical assumption”. In the tradition of Continental criticism, early scholars assumed that the passionate, emotional themes and sensual, erotic language of the *cansos* was indicative of adulterous love between troubadours and noblewomen. It is only quite recently as Kay points out, that “the mainstream of Continental criticism had completely reversed the centuries-long tradition of autobiographical reading, and deservedly so.”¹¹ But despite the demise of the autobiographical assumption in academia, its historical impact on romance culture made a lasting impression that continues in contemporary life. Prior to its demise, the autobiographical assumption was pivotal in creating courtly love’s

⁹ Ibid. Emphasis added.

¹⁰ Eichner, ed., p. 5. The adjective ‘romantic’ was first used in 1650 as a derivation of the noun ‘romance’; the two were considered ‘synonymous’ at the time.

¹¹ Kay, op. cit., p. 3.

mystique, which evolved to become the ideology of romantic love and falling in love.¹²

Early scholars had insufficient historical knowledge necessary in interpreting lyric. As Petrey (also Flori and Cheyette) maintains “all linguistic artefacts, including those that count as literary, must be understood in relation to the sociohistorical context of their production *and reception*.”¹³ The sociopolitical world of royal and aristocratic courts of Occitania, the social status and lordly power of its noblewomen, and the conventions of courtliness and ennobling love were the cultural field of production within which the *cansos* were constructed and performed. This sociohistorical context of production and the historiography of its reception by early critics, are fundamental in understanding the construction of romantic love and falling in love, and how it is performed today.

Courtly culture exemplifies, retrospectively, what Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick describe in *Performativity and Performance* (1995) as “the oblique intersection between performativity and the loose cluster of theatrical practices, relations, and traditions known as performance.”¹⁴ Parker and Sedgwick explain the difference in concepts of performativity between two major theorists of linguistic philosophy, J. L. Austin and Derrida.

Where Austin ... seemed intent on separating the actor's citational practices from ordinary speech-act performances, Derrida regarded both as structured by a generalized iterability,

¹² This mystique and its consequences is the subject of chapter 4.

¹³ Petrey, *op. cit.*, p. 3. Emphasis added.

¹⁴ Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, eds., *Performativity and Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1995) p. 1.

a pervasive theatricality common to stage and world alike.¹⁵

Derrida's "pervasive theatricality" is pertinent to courtly lyric given its songs and poems were performed for an audience where the court *was* the stage. Lyric had a performative function of impressing the civilising effects of courtliness and ennobling love upon this courtly stage. There was little differentiation between its actors and its spectators, both were collaborators in the courtly spectacle of pomp, ritual and ceremony where the boundaries between stage and everyday life were blurred.

Medieval history is pervaded by a perceived generalised theatricality and romanticism. Indeed, the very idea of medieval history is crucial to the verisimilitude of romance and its historicity. In Lisa Fletcher's study *Historical Romance Fiction*, which she defines as "the weightiest subgenre of heterosexual romance",¹⁶ she finds no easy distinction between high and low romance literature arguing that they have "underlying similarities ... in the way they *use* an idea of 'history'".¹⁷ The use of history is important according to Beer's analysis of the romance, where she argues "[r]omance invokes the past or socially remote".¹⁸ In *The Historical Romance* Helen Hughes points out that the juxtaposing of remoteness with closeness facilitates identification, lending "an impression of verisimilitude, despite the unlikelihood of much of the action."¹⁹ Beer maintains that despite romance often being "set in an aristocratic and idealized world", readers are able

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 4.

¹⁶ Lisa Fletcher, Historical Romance Fiction: heterosexuality and performativity (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2008) p.1.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 7.

¹⁸ Gillian Beer, The Romance (London: Methuen, 1970) p. 2.

¹⁹ Helen Hughes, The Historical Romance (New York: Routledge, 1993) p. 2.

to identify as subjects of its stories.²⁰

Its remote sources are domesticated and brought close to present experience primarily because they are peopled with figures *whose emotions* and relationships are *directly registered and described with profuse sensual detail*.²¹

The “profuse sensual detail” used to represent the emotions of intimate relations is, I contend, a legacy from the corporeal metaphors and erotic power of ennobling love’s linguistics in lyric that appeared to naturalise, and dramatised, the emotions of falling in love.

The intertwining of art and life, of literature and lived experience are key elements in the historical, social and cultural construction of emotion. When it comes to the emotions of falling in love, the medieval period and its romance literature are fundamental, and is evident in the historiography of courtly love discussed at various points in chapters 4 through 8. But we not only identify as subjects of historical romance stories through the process of consuming romantic artefacts, we also become subjects of romances’ ideology through the power of language and its ontological effects.

The performative power of words

Language is not simply a means through which we express ourselves and communicate with others. From the moment we first hear our own name, and then recognise it as identifying us, words not only describe but define who we are; indeed, they enter the very

²⁰ Beer, op. cit., p.2.

²¹ Ibid. Emphasis added.

substance of our internality forming our subjectivity, becoming inseparable from our constituted being. The words “I love you”, their meaning, and how they are used, are formative to the construction of romantic emotion and ontology. However, any isolated utterance is not enough to constitute a performative; for that it must be part of a symbolic order which in this case is the ideology of romantic love. The performative utterance “I love you” and many other ‘love’ words and actions, take their romantic ontological power from the historical weight of medieval conventions—together with their historical interpretations—in the construction of the falling in love narrative.

How we use language is the focus of linguistic philosophy.²² As a branch of analytic philosophy, it is concerned with solving a range of philosophical problems but with an emphasis on the function and utility of language rather than its descriptive features. In *How To Do Things With Words* first published in 1962, grammarian and philosopher J. L. Austin argues that words do not simply describe communications or phenomenon but accomplish things.²³ Petrey states that Austin’s theory “shifts attention from what language *is* to what it *does* and sees a *social process* where other linguistic philosophies see a *formal structure*.”²⁴

Austin argues that language can be used to do things, *if* it is embedded in recognised social practices, which results in what he calls a “total speech situation”: that

²² Blackburn, op. cit., p. 212.

²³ J. L. Austin, How To Do Things With Words, ed. F. O. & Sbisá Ourmson, Marina, 1975 ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962).

²⁴ Petrey, op. cit., p. 3.

is, by the use of certain words, spoken in the correct situation to the right person, and witnessed by people who understand its social significance, words can be used to do what they say in the moment of saying; thus they are performative.²⁵ Austin formulated six rules essential to a ‘total speech situation’:

- (A. 1) There must exist an accepted conventional procedure having a certain conventional effect, that procedure to include the uttering of certain words by certain persons in certain circumstances, and further,
- (A. 2) the particular persons and circumstances in a given case must be appropriate for the invocation of the particular procedure invoked.
- (B. 1) The procedure must be executed by all participants both correctly and
- (B. 2) completely.
- (I. 1) Where, as often, the procedure is designed for use by persons having *certain thoughts or feelings*, or for the inauguration of certain consequential conduct on the part of any participant, then a person participating in or so invoking the procedure must in fact have those thoughts or feelings, and the participants must intend so to conduct themselves, and further
- (I. 2) must actually so conduct themselves subsequently.²⁶

The defining feature of all performatives is the uttering of words in conjunction with certain actions that invoke a convention recognised by a social group as ‘doing’ or performing something. Words alone do not constitute a performative utterance, unless “the uttering of the sentence is, or is a part of, the doing of an action, which again would not *normally* be described as, or as ‘just’, saying something.”²⁷

A prime example of a performative utterance is “I do” at a wedding ceremony. But the utterance, in itself, is not sufficient to constitute marriage, even though the ‘couple’ and all those in attendance would consider them ‘married’. In order for “I do” to formalise and constitute a marriage it requires the historical conventions, its social, religious and

²⁵ Austin, op. cit.

²⁶ Ibid., pp. 14 – 15. Emphasis added.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 5.

legal customs that provide its legitimacy as an institution. “I do” carries the performative power essential to establishing the socio-legal status of marriage while also setting the parameters of what we collectively understand marriage to be, by drawing on its historical conventions. Historical conventions are necessary to distinguish performatives from other ways of doing the same thing; for example, cohabitation instead of marriage.

The medieval courts of Occitania are a prime example of the use of language to perform things as an accepted part of social discourse and the practices of daily life. The language of civility to show respect and love was embedded in the practices of courtliness, and the corporeal linguistics of ennobling love discourse had the power to ennoble the aristocracy and enhance their status; both fulfil the requirements of Austin’s rules for a ‘total speech situation’. Early scholars misinterpreted the language of both courtliness and ennobling love because they did not understand those medieval courtly discourses and practices and how they were used to perform certain functions.

Properly executed, Austin’s six rules constitute what he calls “illocutionary speech acts” ... “that, in saying, do what they say, and do it in the moment of that saying.”²⁸ Fletcher has argued that the speech act “I love you” is necessary to historical romance genre which relies on its “force and familiarity” to the telling of each and every romance.²⁹ However, in the context of romantic love, “I love you” would be meaningless without the historical weight of romance conventions that provide its “force and

²⁸ Austin cited in Butler, Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative p. 3.

²⁹ Fletcher, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

familiarity”, and its performativity.

In order to argue that romantic love is performative, it is not enough to state that “I love you”, as a speech act, constitutes romantic love any more than declaring “I do” at a wedding ceremony constitutes a marriage. Marriage is not a thing, it must be governed and performed; so too romantic love is not a thing to fall into, it must have the life of love breathed into it, it must be lived and performed. Butler has argued that gender is constituted in similarly performative fashion. “Performativity is the vehicle through which ontological effects are established. Performativity is the discursive mode through which ontological effects are installed.”³⁰ It might be argued, after Butler, that one such ontological effect established through performative iteration is the emotional weight and resonances associated with ‘I love you’. Just as ‘I do’ is vital to signifying its social (legal and religious) legitimacy at a marriage ceremony, ‘I love you’ is vital to romance because it is essential to the psycho-emotional and erotic narrative of falling in love.

As an “illocutionary speech act”, “I love you” carries the performative power in contemporary romance culture to establish its psycho-emotional and erotic status as a ‘special’ kind of love, by drawing on its ideological construction which will be outlined in the historical genealogy in the following chapters. The linguistic pivot “I love you” in contemporary romance culture is situated within a discursive field with its roots in medieval discourses and practices that constructed courtly lyric, and which continue to

³⁰ Judith Butler, “Gender as Performance,” *A critical sense: interviews with intellectuals*, ed. P. Osborne (Routledge, 1996) pp. 111-12.

give such erotic force and performative power to romantic love. Or in other words, “I love you” would lack its social legitimacy and power without the cultural semiotics and semantics of the historical discourses and their historiographical interpretations that constructed the narrative field we understand as falling in love. The historical romantic discourse of falling in love, passed on through historiography, fictionalisation and intertextuality from the *cansos*, is fundamental to the intelligibility and maintenance of romances’ ideological hegemony.

The feeling subjects of ideology

An account of how we become ‘feeling’ subjects in romance’s ideology is presented by Louis Althusser in *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* (1971). Althusser maintains that the power of language to “interpellate” or “to hail” a person as a subject is constituted not only within the terms of language, but also within the terms of an ideology.³¹ Explaining the power of interpellation, Althusser uses the example of a policeman “hailing” a person in the street, “Hey, you there!” The person turns in response to being “hailed” and in so doing—by taking that action—the person acknowledges the hail and “becomes a *subject*” who recognizes themselves as a subject within the terms of an ideology: “The existence of ideology and the hailing or interpellation of individuals as subjects are one and the same thing.”³²

³¹ Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards an Investigation),” trans. Ben Brewster, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971) p. 174.

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 174 - 75.

Butler extends Althusser's subject formation through interpellation in *The Psychic Life of Power* (1997), by arguing how subjects are subordinated to ideological power, as an agent in that process: "'Subjection' signifies the process of becoming subordinated by power as well as the process of becoming a subject."³³ In a similar way, "I love you" and the psycho-emotional erotics of falling in love takes its power to interpellate an individual as a romantic subject from the ideology of romantic love and its Western historicity. The construction of a romantic subjectivity and ontology is constituted, at least in part, by an ideology effected through medieval discourses and practices promulgated through the interrelationship of historical romance fiction and its intertextuality, and their impacts on the lived experience.

The material, social and discursive legacy is indispensable to theorising how romance culture has been inscribed by the "force and familiarity" of not only the speech act "I love you", but the psycho-emotional erotics of falling in love. The totality of the lived experience we call romantic love had its roots in the whole economy of medieval courtly conduct, erotic language, bodies and imagery; the erotic linguistics that effected the chemistry of attraction, the visceral, and organic physicality we have come to interpret as falling in love, made 'real' through the stories we tell and the meaning we ascribe to it in our lives. Romantic love, it can be argued, is a discursive mode invested with the performative power to inscribe our romantic subjectivity and ontology; in Butler's terms, romantic love is the 'effect, not the cause of discourse'.

³³ Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1997) p. 2.

There is a further distinction about “illocutionary speech acts” relating to the efficacy of a performative, outlined in Austin’s rules B. 1, B. 2 and *I*. 1 and *I*. 2. In the sense that performative utterances are a doing to ‘effect’ something, “they do not ‘describe’ or ‘report’, or constate anything at all,” they cannot be found either “‘true’ or ‘false’”;³⁴ they may succeed or fail, or as Austin puts it, will be “*happy*” or “*unhappy*” which he calls “the doctrine of the *Infelicities*”.³⁵ Whether or not a performative succeeds depends on many things at the time of, and subsequent to, the utterance. For many things can and do go wrong with performatives where they are “not achieved” and instead “misfire”.³⁶

Austin’s “felicity” and how to achieve it, is pertinent to the performativity of romantic love. In *Cruel Optimism* Lauren Berlant says that our “investments” in and “projections onto” objects of desire “are less about them than about what cluster of desires and affects we can manage to keep magnetized to them.”³⁷ In this way she has “wondered whether all optimism is cruel because experience of the loss ... can be so breathtakingly bad”.³⁸ Disengaging from the ideology of romantic love has political potential for its subversion. Reimagining romantic love as performative moves away from the ‘magical’ fairy-tale discourse of a love, into which we uncontrollably fall, encumbered with unrealistic expectations and optimism about its erotic power. Instead, we can reconfigure

³⁴ Austin, op. cit., p. 5.

³⁵ Ibid., p.14.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Lauren Berlant, “Cruel Optimism,” *The Affect Theory Reader* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010) pp. 93 - 94.

³⁸ Ibid.

sexual/affective love as created and maintained through personal agency, in the saying and doing of loving things with the potential to produce erotic effects; perhaps putting happiness more in our own hands, rather than the whims of chemistry and fate.

Making it so: the 'long' moment of saying and doing

Does romantic love exist at all prior to its utterance, prior to its entry into language? Are we predisposed through the formative power of 'romantic' love words to feel and act in certain ways? Two people in the 'throes' of falling in love, surely have the experience of their own emotions as confirmation. Or do the cultural conventions of romantic love "precede and condition any decisions they might make about it," arousing and loving them "from the start, as it were, by its prior power"?³⁹ What is the point of saying "I love you"? Everything it seems in performing and sustaining romantic love. For "I love you" or any love words to carry performative power, they must be (re)iterated in both the particular/personal and the general/social over time. Without the utterance of "I love you", a romantic film, play or book loses its power and legitimacy as a love story; there is, I contend, a corollary in real life.

Austin argues that there is a crucial "contrast" between "only thinking something with actually saying it (out loud), in which context *saying it is doing something*."⁴⁰ When someone says 'I love you' is it a simple declaration of feeling or part of, and inseparable

³⁹ Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* p. 2.

⁴⁰ Austin, op. cit., p. 92. Emphasis added.

from, the act of (romantic) love itself? In *Excitable Speech* Butler explains how our constitution within the “terms” of language makes us vulnerable to its influence, which in her example, is hate speech.⁴¹ “If we are formed in language, then that formative power precedes and conditions any decision we might make about it, insulting us from the start, as it were, by its prior power.”⁴² This “formative power” of language gives it agency with the power to ‘act’, to elicit responses, which in the case of ‘hate speech’ is to injure. If ‘hate speech’ has the power to injure, does ‘love speech’ have the power to arouse and inflame love?

How is this conjunction between speaking and the body to be understood? Butler argues that “[t]he body is not only [speech’s] vehicle, but something is *bodied forth in the saying*.”⁴³ Using the love word in a ‘total speech situation’ has effects on our materiality as Butler elaborates:

Our body is not simply “over here” as a spatiotemporal given, but is itself given over, exposed, and “spoken” through the speech act that emerges either as sound, as text, or in some visual form. “The body” is not a substance, but a modality that registers the full expanse of our relations. As such, it is there in the words, spoken and written, even as it is not there, but here. In other words, the body is given and withdrawn at the moment in which we rely on language to convey our love to someone else.⁴⁴

Using the ‘love’ word—in a ‘total speech situation’—for the first time, usually signals that a decision has been made and that from its utterance henceforth, things will be—happily or unhappily—different. Regardless of duration or intensity, what had previously been the experience of sensate feeling, free-floating and nebulous, formless in the

⁴¹ Butler, op. cit.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Butler, “Response: Performance Reflections on Love and Commitment,” p. 237. Emphasis added.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

unspoken, has suddenly and irrevocably been tethered to the domain of convention, anchoring the sphere of love to pre-existing forms of significance with all the attendant optimism, expectations and vulnerabilities; all of which can be dashed in a few seconds, as “there is a chance that our speech act will be refused, and when and if it is, we are ourselves refused, and we feel that refusal in a bodily way.”⁴⁵

But if we are accepted, all the linguistic, literary and cultural associations, the collective historicity of romantic love can come into play with a bodily, erotic force that can be breathtaking: as Fletcher contends, “our personal experiences and stories of love cannot be disentangled from the generic fictions of romance which prevail in our culture.”⁴⁶ These “generic fictions of romance” take their shared meaning through language and sociality. Petrey makes it clear how the meaning of language and its performative power is derived “from the conventional precedures accepted by a definite collectivity.”⁴⁷ This “definite collectivity” reflects Austin’s social body in rule A. 1, upon which all performatives depend.

Words do things in a social setting, and Austin made sociality so prominent in Rule A.1 because it’s the foundation on which every other rule is erected. ... Before there can be performative language, there must exist a social body that recognizes and accepts the conventional procedure in which the language functions. For the language to function successfully, a social body must apprehend it in the same way.⁴⁸

Over time, the intersection between medieval romance literature, medieval history and literary criticism, and the interpreters, writers and consumers of romance, formed a “social

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Fletcher, op. cit., p. 45.

⁴⁷ Petrey, op. cit., p. 8.

⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 6 – 7.

body” accepting and producing the “conventional procedures” of romantic love; the conditions necessary for the whole cultural apparatus of romantic love to take effect through shared meaning.

However, the whole cultural apparatus of romantic love depends on its (re)iteration to maintain its enduring power. As Butler explains:

The illocutionary speech act performs its deed *at the moment* of the utterance, and yet to the extent that the moment is ritualized, it is never really a single moment. The “moment” in ritual is a condensed historicity: it exceeds itself in past and future directions, an effect of prior and future invocations that constitute and escape the instance of utterance.⁴⁹

Butler argues that gender is the reiteration of discourses and practices that produce hegemonic forms of ‘femininity’ and ‘masculinity’.⁵⁰ So too, ‘falling in love’ and ‘being in love’ is the reiteration of discourses and practices that produce hegemonic forms of romantic love in the West—along with its hegemonic forms of femininity and masculinity. But the performative utterance “I love you” along with other acts must be reiterated over time in order to keep producing its psycho-emotional and erotic effects.

If reiteration produces hegemonic forms of gender and romantic ontology, political subversion and change is possible through what Butler calls imperfect iteration.⁵¹ Patriarchal ideals of feminine and masculine romantic subjectivities have historically been anchored in medieval romance are associated with may work to through a lack of iteration

As a sexual/affective illocutionary speech act, “I love you” takes its meaning and

⁴⁹ Butler, Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative p. 3.

⁵⁰ Butler, Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity.

⁵¹ Ibid.

force from the conventional field of falling in love, which, like other performatives is maintained, and *only succeeds*, through reiteration in both the public and private spheres. This gives us clues as to why romantic love, that begins with such promise for so many, so often fails in real life. As Butler explains, utterances only

work to the extent that they are given in the form of a ritual, that is, repeated in time, and, hence, maintain a sphere of operation that is not restricted to the moment of the utterance itself.⁵²

“I love you” and many other romantic performatives, only carry the power to interpellate over time if they are “repeated *in time*” through the ritualised ‘saying’ and ‘doing’ of certain things, that, after an initial honeymoon period ceases for many, along with the psycho-emotional and physical closeness that elicits the ‘magical’ feelings of euphoria.

Falling in love in the West has for centuries been considered an occurrence of sexual chemistry and attraction, an innate, natural internal function of human biology. But the historical genealogy of romantic love and the theories of performativity and illocutionary speech acts suggest romantic love is the performative effect of the interaction between the “social and the bio-material”. The correspondence between speech and body is elaborated further by Butler;

We are still over here, waiting, separated from that person, and yet we have already left ourselves, have comported ourselves toward the other, have sent some sign of a corporeal and emotional disposition of love, which is also a modality of love and, hence, of the body itself. To say “I love you” is, through the strange logic of citationality and transitivity, to be located over here and over there, at risk of disappearing into anonymity or of being exposed in ways that sometimes seem impossible to bear. The utterance is a wager we make, but it is also, bodily, a wager we become.⁵³

⁵² Butler, op. cit.

⁵³ Butler, “Response: Performance Reflections on Love and Commitment,” p. 237.

Hence, a psycho-emotional erotic experience that we “anticipate” and have “expectation[s]” about “ends up producing the very phenomenon that it anticipates” as Butler puts it, “anticipation conjures the object.”⁵⁴

Falling in love is a stylised ritualisation of saying, doing, thinking/feeling that is produced and sustained through reiteration. As Nietzsche asserted, “there is no ‘being’ behind the doing, effecting, becoming; ‘the doer’ is merely a fiction added to the deed—the deed is everything.”⁵⁵ Butler gives a gendered corollary to this formulation: “There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; ... identity is performatively constituted by the very “expressions” that are said to be its results”.⁵⁶ I propose a romantic corollary: that there is no special magical/mystical ‘true’ love of chemistry’s attraction. Romantic love is performatively constituted by the saying and doing of loving things “that are said to be its results”, the psycho-emotional-erotics of ‘falling in love’ is a historical social construction.

Conclusion

Further to late second-wave feminist critiques arguing that the emotions of falling in love are not pre-social but socially and discursively constructed, this chapter has presented a brief and speculative overview of the theory of performativity and its antecedents, as an introduction to the historical and historiographical genealogy that follows. The psycho-

⁵⁴ Butler, Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity p. xv.

⁵⁵ Nietzsche 1887, p. 29 cited in Butler, Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative p. 45.

⁵⁶ Butler, op. cit., p. 25.

emotional *erotics* of falling in love are central to romantic love's ideology, which has been inculcated in Western romance culture through the historical reiteration of fictionality and intertextuality, in a complex and irreducible relationship between art and life. The philosophy of linguistics combined with the theory of performativity may provide an epistemological foundation for explicating the performative interaction between art and life, between the "social and bio-material" environments, in arguing romantic love is a performative human regenerative power and agency.

A crucial step in this endeavour is to consider what we know about romantic love, and how we came to know it, through a historical genealogy; the following five chapters is an interrogation of its history and historiography in medieval conventions and socio-political forms of love that, perversely, had almost nothing in common with sexual/affective love as we know it today.

CHAPTER 4

The Invention of Courtly Love's Mystique

Courtly love's mystique has, historically, been founded on the interdependence of three core repeating themes, first depicted in the *cansos*; 1) masculine submission, deference and devotion in love service¹ to 2) the feminine beauty and virtues of aristocratic women which supposedly 3) affected a special, magical kind of passionate but restrained love, previously unknown in history.² In the context of the brutality and misogyny of the middle ages, these three themes led early literary critics to assume the *cansos* depicted a unique metamorphizing kind of erotic love with the power to turn brutish men into courteous, submissive servants of noblewomen who they placed on a pedestal, elevating their status with unconditional, adoring love. As the noblewomen were married, the predominant view considered this love to be adulterous and in breach of medieval social customs adding to its mystique, as did its designation by the poets as *fin'amor*.

Such was the potency of these ideas for early scholars that courtly love gained a

¹ "Love service" is a term often used regarding 'courtly love' denoting acts of submission and deference in the service of, or to facilitate, the cultivation and progress of love. In the case of sexual/affective love, long presumed the subject of courtly lyric, suppression of desire (usually male desire) in service to love is essential to proving a man's virtue and worthiness for love.

² The many sources for these three themes will be discussed as the chapter unfolds.

reputation as an extraordinary, transformative and quasi-spiritual kind of erotic love. The troubadours' progressive and deferential treatment of women, viewed as the effect of the power of erotic love was central in creating courtly love's mystique. Over time it became the conceptual template of the falling in love narrative; in effect, courtly love's mystique became romantic love's ideology—via the *cansos*.³

However, that narrative was the product of assumptions made by early critics who studied literature in isolation from medieval social and political history. Those assumptions are examined here for their role in the development of a mystique that began with the controversial naming of “courtly love” in 1883 by prominent French medievalist Gaston Paris. Paris' introduction of the term and his interpretation of the *Lancelot* became the founding definition of courtly love and “a conventional part of the critical vocabulary of medieval studies”,⁴ regardless of conflicting opinions over the term and its meaning.⁵ Subsequently, it became popularised as an orthodoxy of medieval studies based on a number of popular assumptions which impacted on literary criticism of the love *cansos*.⁶ The adulterous love in the *Lancelot* was also considered the subject of the *cansos* but with one striking difference; the former was consummated, while the latter was not. The *cansos* depicted a passionate but restrained kind of love assumed to be adulterous because the aristocratic women to whom they were addressed, were married. This idea was given

³ When I use the term courtly lyric, it refers to the *cansos* on the topic of love.

⁴ F. X. Newman, ed., *The Meaning of Courtly Love* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1968) p. vi.

⁵ Theodore Silverstein, “Guenevere, or the Uses of Courtly Love,” *The Meaning of Courtly Love*, ed. F. X. Newman (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1968).

⁶ Newman, ed., *op. cit.*, p. vi.

credibility through the first-person subject position of the poets, thought to be autobiographical, as speaking of a social reality. Combined with the psycho-emotional and erotic linguistics of the *cansos* and the veneration of noblewomen, everything pointed to adulterous affairs of a captivating and transformational kind of passionate love.

This chapter presents a historiography of how the conceptual template of falling in love developed by examining how the *cansos* and courtly love have been perceived and parsed by literary and history critics, with attention to how falling in love has been studied—or ignored. The contribution made by feminist medievalists to medieval studies through their interpretation of gender, women's power and love has provided valuable new material to theorising courtly love which is discussed here. The historiographical material of early criticism offered here is limited to the period 1880-1960 that was instrumental in the invention of courtly love's mystique. The study is limited by the requirements of space and scope but also of language, as it necessarily derives from those critics writing in English, or those that are available in translation.

The love we call 'courtly'

Explaining the instigation or stimulus behind the love called 'courtly' has been at the core of much of its early theorisation due to its historically unique depictions of love and gender. Controversy continues over whether courtly love was a historical reality or exclusively a French literary tradition, with some rejecting it as a mere fabrication of

nineteenth-century academia.⁷ This section begins with a brief examination of courtly love's origins and then moves to a discussion of its meaning. Courtly love's meaning has historically been influenced by its nomenclature and "yet the meaning of the term has never been satisfactorily defined."⁸ Academic debate has continued unabated since the sixteenth century with as yet, no consensus.

Much early scholarship was devoted to the geo-cultural origins and literary sources of courtly lyric in trying to ascertain influences that might explain what was considered its unparalleled depictions of amorous love combined with respect and admiration for women—ideas that became a conceptual template tied to the name "courtly love". Historian Roger Boase argues interpretation of courtly love has been hampered because no single thesis of origin or meaning can encompass its diversity, as theorisation from one discipline necessarily excludes all others.⁹ At the end of his extensive comparative study of courtly love, Boase says,

Courtly Love was, we may conclude, a comprehensive cultural phenomenon: a literary movement, an ideology, an ethical system, a style of life, and an expression of the play element in culture, which arose in an aristocratic Christian environment exposed to Hispano-Arabic influences.¹⁰

However, despite alluding to courtliness through the term "courtly environment", and "a style of life" premised on a "new ideology ... [and] ethical system ... formulated by a

⁷ Roger Boase, *The Origin and Meaning of Courtly Love: A Critical Study of European Scholarship* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1977). Maurice Valency also argues *In Praise of Love* (1958) that it is impossible to know with any certainty "the objective relationships of men and women in the Middle Ages which might conceivably motivate the strain of love-poetry which the troubadours developed", p. 5.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 129 - 30.

recently ennobled class”,¹¹ neither Boase nor any of the scholars he examines, interrogate courtliness for its role in representations of masculine subjectivity and the positive treatment of women in courtly lyric.¹² Other studies since Boase give more weight to courtliness and will be discussed later in this chapter.

Scholars have traditionally viewed troubadour poetry as indebted to pre-existing literary traditions.¹³ But studies into the *cansos* most extensively theorised literary origins are inconclusive.¹⁴ In his 1995 article *Origins*, emeritus professor of French and German, Gerald A. Bond argues that

[a]s long as the belief in a true and single source for the complex phenomenon known today to literary historians as “troubadour lyric” and “courtly love” continues to be embraced, investigations of origins will remain necessarily unsatisfactory.¹⁵

Bond finds that scholars continue to be interested in three general types of textual sources: those from Arabic courtly culture in Spain, ancient and medieval Latin Literature and the cult of the Virgin Mary.¹⁶ However, Bond finds cause to cast doubt on these three textual sources, as single origins, arguing for more complexity in theorisation, not less.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

¹² See Boase for a rigorous and invaluable exegesis of European scholarship on courtly love. I do not attempt a synthesis of his work other than to address his conclusions. He classifies material into theories of origin and theories of meaning. Theories of origin have “seven sub-categories: (1) Hispano-Arabic, (2) Chivalric-Matriarchal, (3) Crypto-Cathar, (4) Neoplatonic, (5) Bernardine-Marianist, (6) Spring Folk Ritual, and (7) Feudal-Sociological. Theories of meaning are divided into five sub-categories: (1) Collective Fantasy, (2) Play Phenomenon, (3) Courtly Experience, (4) Stylistic Convention, and (5) Critical Fallacy.” These theories are listed in the Contents page of Boases’ book.

¹³ Kay, *op. cit.*

¹⁴ Gerald A. Bond, “Origins,” *A Handbook of the Troubadours*, eds. F.R.P. Akehurst and Jennifer R. Davis (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 238.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 242.

Sociological approaches to courtly love's origins have presented a challenge to textual theories—however, as Bond notes, these approaches do not undermine the validity of textual theories in their entirety.¹⁷ Bond argues research into the social factors has two branches, the courtly poet/lover and his amorous yearnings and the character and part of the lady: the former examines a number of reasons for masculine desire but they do not have “sufficient subtlety to explain the social phenomenon of courtly love lyric”; while the latter focusses on the matronage of aristocratic women by feminist scholars which Bond maintains has given a different perspective to the question.¹⁸ This present study examines these two branches of social factors in combination to address their representation in the *cansos*. The thread of courtliness from Boase and other studies is picked up and woven together with the study of ennobling love by C. Steven Jaeger and earlier scholars, to argue their combined influence in the construction of the *cansos* in this reading of ‘courtly love’.

Regardless of problems incurred through its nomenclature, academic disagreement over its historical literary origins and meaning, and whether courtly love was a reality or not, academic agreement about the influence of troubadour motif and lyricism on romance as a genre is unequivocal. Mario Equicola was the first to note the originality of troubadour sentiment towards the end of the fifteenth century.¹⁹ Then in 1693 the English critic Thomas Rymer, noted their significance to literature, describing the Provençal

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 243.

¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 245 – 46. Feminist analyses of “matronage” are examined in chapter 7.

¹⁹ Mario Equicola cited in Boase, op. cit., pp. 1 – 2.

troubadours as the forerunners of all European contemporary poetry.²⁰ According to Boase at the beginning of the nineteenth century the troubadours were declared “the initiators of ‘le goût modern’ [the modern taste] and the harbinger of Romanticism.”²¹ Kay is in agreement with Boase arguing they remain relevant to contemporary romance culture:

As love comes back into fashion ... troubadour lyrics continue to be read, and have probably been more influential in European literature than any other body of poetry, since they set the model for first-person love poetry for hundreds of years.²²

Many literary and history critics view the troubadour œuvre as the medieval equivalent of narrative fiction in contemporary times. In *An Overview: Why the Troubadours?* the late medievalist and literary historian Paul Zumthor emphasises the important place of the troubadours in European literature and literary studies, whose unique poetry some critics view, in terms of “the historical order, [as] an absolute beginning.”²³ Literary historian Norris J. Lacy argues the evolution from verse poetry to prose romance has left a gift to literature that “is almost incalculable.”²⁴ The *cansos* appropriation for courtly love romance is supported by the fact that the troubadours wrote in the vernacular and for some time, romance literally meant a text written in the native tongue.

Adding to the romance was the comparison between the troubadour’s concept of love and that of the literature of antiquity. In marked contrast to representations of women

²⁰ M. Equicola and T. Rymer, cited in *ibid.*, pp. 1 – 2.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Kay, *op. cit.*, p. 212.

²³ Zumthor, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

²⁴ Norris J. Lacy, “The evolution and legacy of French prose romance,” *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance*, ed. Roberta L. Krueger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) p. 167.

and love in the literature of antiquity, troubadour lyric—in traditional criticism—centres on men mastering sexual desire in the service of love to women. Dominant themes of love in antiquity for both women and men centre on self-interest where passion takes the form of rivalry and jealousy, suspicion and hatred leading to deceit and terrible acts of betrayal and revenge. Historian Alan M. Boase (1964) maintains in *The Poetry of France, 1400-1600* that unlike representations of passionate love in lyric, the literature on love from antiquity could not be more different:

the Greeks and Romans, not unlike the Chinese, regarded love as a sickness, as soon as it overstepped the bounds of that sensual pleasure which was regarded as its natural expression.²⁵

Reddy could not find any examples of masculine love service in the literature of antiquity across many cultures, including “Nordic sagas, Old English epics, Celtic folktales, chansons de geste, or other literature of the early Middle Ages prior to the twelfth century.”²⁶ Since the apparent sudden appearance of devoted love service by the troubadours, they have been synonymous with romance and their bearing on the narrative and experience of romantic love and falling in love is profound.

Assumptions that created a mystique

The troubadours belong to an era so symbolic of romance in the Western imagination, that according to historian John Gamin in *The Myth of Medieval Romance*, many scholars

²⁵ Alan M. Boase cited in Boase, op. cit., p. 1.

²⁶ William M. Reddy, *The Making of Romantic Love: Longing and Sexuality in Europe, South Asia & Japan, 900-1200 CE* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2012) p. 2.

viewed the medieval period as if it were ‘one long romance’.²⁷ Simon Gaunt maintains in *Romance and Other Genres* that there has been a tendency for critics to favour romance as a topic of investigation, creating “a skewed, even erroneous view of medieval literary culture.”²⁸ Early critics of the *cansos* came under the spell of this romanticism which influenced their interpretation. Excessive attention to the *cansos* “at the expense of other genres” by early criticism created a romantic reading of troubadour poetry that was “somewhat misleading” according to medievalist and French scholar, professor William Burgwinkle.²⁹

Further confounding theorisation Gaunt argues, is a “peculiar circularity” arising out of “complications ... in which the study of medieval romance takes the form of its object of study”.³⁰ Professor of French medieval studies, David Hult expands on this point regarding Gaston Paris’ controversial naming of courtly love and its history in influencing scholarly interpretation;

it is possible to recognize therein a glimmer of the modern hermeneutic insight that cultural and ideological constructs are themselves constitutive of the categories they purport to discover “independently” in the objects they study.³¹

Feminist scholarship has also been under the same influence of a misguided historical

²⁷ Gamin, op. cit.

²⁸ Simon Gaunt, “Romance and other genres,” *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance*, ed. Roberta L. Krueger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) p. 48.

²⁹ William Burgwinkle, “For Love or Money: Uc De Saint Circ and the Rhetoric of Exchange,” *Romanic Review* 84.4 (1993): p. 347.

³⁰ Gamin, op. cit., p. 149.

³¹ David F. Hult, “Gaston Paris and the Invention of Courtly Love,” *Medievalism and the Modernist Temper*, eds. R. Howard Bloch and Stephen G. Nichols (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996) p. 193.

view of medieval literature that privileged romance. By accepting, uncritically, historical interpretations of falling in love, feminist accounts have tended to give credence to its naturalisation. While academia this century has produced many new theories, and an “anti-Romantic or anti-Platonic interpretation has prevailed” according to Boase,³² the romanticisation of early criticism lives on in contemporary romance culture.

Three factors played an influential role in early criticism of courtly lyric that contributed to its romantic mystique; 1) the troubadours’ favourable treatment of noblewomen, 2) the first-person subject position of the troubadours and 3) the *cansos* psycho-emotional and erotic linguistics. Such was the power of these three factors for early scholars that they assumed troubadour poems and songs described an exceptional form of amatory adulterous but restrained love between troubadours and aristocratic women. However, Zumthor is unequivocal in his opinion that “no serious indication justifies the generalizations of those who speak of the “adulterous love” of the troubadours.”³³ Early interpretation of these three factors in lyric affected the construction of the psycho-emotional erotics of falling in love, the core theme of romance narrative that remains central to contemporary romance culture.

Courtly lyric is renowned in traditional scholarship for its reversal of gender relations through its depiction of the troubadour’s servile courtly behaviour towards noblewomen, along with their valorisation of feminine virtues, and the aloof, emotionally

³² Boase, op. cit., p. 26.

³³ Zumthor, op. cit., p. 15.

disengaged *domna*. This was given a spiritual meaning by many early scholars according to Van Vleck in *Memory and Re-Creation in Troubadour Lyric*, who argues the troubadours “love terminology seemed systematic, and its apparent precision seemed to afford glimpses into a spiritual knowledge beyond our own”;³⁴ a revelation for early scholars given the context of the brutality, boorishness and misogyny of the middle ages.³⁵ As Kay maintains, “[e]xaggerated claims for the ‘self’ of the lover-poet – his sensibility, skill, refinement and so on – abound in the poetry of the troubadours.”³⁶ The troubadour’s respectful, courteous treatment of aristocratic women was assumed to be the effect of a spiritual and unique kind of erotic love that seemed to emerge somewhat spontaneously in Occitania. This assumed effect was pivotal to the invention of courtly love’s mystique and its association with a magical erotic love arising from the power of attraction and its chemistry; an idea with lasting affects on the falling in love narrative of contemporary romance culture.

This presumed magical erotic love was reinforced for early scholars by the first-person subject position in the *cansos*. The first-person mode was interpreted as telling real life stories, raising speculation over whether troubadours were engaged in adulterous love affairs with aristocratic women. This became known as the ‘autobiographical assumption’, something that has been highly influential in the theorisation of courtly love for hundreds of years. In her review of Kay’s book on ‘subjectivity in troubadour poetry’, Tilda

³⁴ Amelia E. Van Vleck, *Memory and Re-Creation in Troubadour Lyric* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, Oxford: University of California Press, 1991) p. 1.

³⁵ The extent of the violence and misogyny in the Middle Ages is examined in chapter 5 on courtliness.

³⁶ Kay, op. cit., p. 23.

Sankovitch outlines the history of this speculation.

One of the central features of the troubadour corpus is the omnipresence of the first-person position, displayed prominently in the many pronouncements on love and other topics. Until the middle of the twentieth century this first person was read in a literal, autobiographical, anecdotal fashion by a critical tradition going back to the preferences of Romanticism.³⁷

The preferences of Romanticism at the time early critics were writing, references Gamin's "peculiar circularity" in which the medieval period and its literature was read as representing romantic love, compounded the problem of meaning in the *cansos*. Kay argues that the influences between literary criticism and Romanticism were mutual, and that "the advent of medieval studies coincided to a great extent with Romanticism" and both are now undergoing an over-all re-evaluation.³⁸ The mutual influences between literary criticism and Romanticism played a major role in creating the troubadours' reputation as great romancers and lovers of women. Indeed, were the troubadours the first fictional representation of the 'reconstructed' male of women's imagination?³⁹

In combination with the troubadours civilised treatment of women and the 'autobiographical assumption', the rich emotional and erotic language of lyric added further substance to speculation about adulterous affairs. Lyric's depiction of emotions was interpreted as the outpourings of amorous love, emanating spontaneous and naturally from within the feeling body of the poet resulting from the power of attraction, unmediated

³⁷ Tilda Sankovitch, "Book Review: Subjectivity in Troubadour Poetry by Sarah Kay," *Speculum* 68.4 (1993): p. 1150.

³⁸ Kay, *Subjectivity in Troubadour Lyric*, p. 23.

³⁹ How the 'reconstructed' male was produced is interrogated in chapter 5.

by social conventions.⁴⁰ But as Gouk and Hill maintain,

[t]his is to assume that both emotions and the feeling, emotional subject reside outside of culture, that feelings bypass cultural norms and constraints and are experienced in their free and pure form.⁴¹

Rather than amorous love, this study argues the emotions represented in lyric were strongly mediated by the social conventions of courtliness and ennobling love.⁴² Both were discourses on civilising forms of public and socio-political love in medieval courts of Occitania, social referents used by the troubadours.

In addition to the assumptions outlined above, theorising courtly lyric has been further compounded by its many paradoxes which work against any “single univocal meaning” according to Kay:

Occitan lyric poetry is a poetry of paradox which exploits public performance for professions which are alleged to be personal and secretive in nature, combines the material support of patronage with flights of idealizing sentiment, uses highly elaborated forms for professedly inspirational outbursts of emotion, adduces images of natural and social normality for sentiments which are presented as posing a threat to the social or natural order, and draws on conventions of praise and blame to express a purportedly unique affectivity.⁴³

These paradoxes suggest the poetic representation of a lively confluence of debates concerning the many issues in everyday life, that lyric was a medium of social interaction in a similar way that forms of social media are today. As Kay points out, debating was a central function of lyric and could explain the ambiguities of style for which it is famous.

⁴⁰ Gouk and Hills, ed., op. cit., p. 21.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Each discourse is interrogated in a separate chapter; courtliness in chapter 6 and ennobling love in chapter 8.

⁴³ Kay, op. cit., pp. 17 - 18.

Meaning in *canço* rhetoric is further complicated Kay argues, by problems concerning the origins of language and transmission of texts, as well as the tendency for some poets to cultivate anonymity; she contends criticism supporting “the ‘autobiographical assumption’ was often vitiated by failure to recognize these obstacles.”⁴⁴

Indeed, Kay argues Occitan lyric poetry has much in common with academic writing today, as both must follow previous linguistic models based on a first-person perspective which is made complex by the necessities of convention.⁴⁵ And as Martin Stevens argues in *The Performing-Self in Twelfth-Century Culture*, artistic recognition may have been the impetus for adoption of the first-person:

For the first time in the literature of the Middle Ages, artists either insist on making themselves known by name or on including themselves by first-person reference in their works.⁴⁶

We know artistic recognition was bound-up with troubadour patronage and furthering one’s career in the medieval courtly world.

Under the influence of the autobiographical assumption, the veneration of women and the interpretation of emotions as natural, unmediated by social conventions, early theorisation of courtly lyric took a very ‘romantic’ turn. This romantic turn was infused with the supposed magic of ‘heterosexual’ attraction and the chemistry of falling in love. The troubadours appeared enraptured by the ‘spell’ of femininity and transformed by the erotic power of the love it engendered. This became part of the falling in love narrative

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 17.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 1.

⁴⁶ Martin Stevens, “The Performing Self in Twelfth-Century Culture,” *Viator* 9 (1978): p. 198.

appropriated for romance from the love *cansos* and passed on through fictionalisation and intertextuality. How the love portrayed in the *cansos* was interpreted by early scholars set the tone for the love known as romantic, and the falling in love narrative, for hundreds of years.

The power in a name

The term ‘courtly love’ has always caused controversy between scholars who have debated its meaning. Although *amour courtois* (courtly love) was used once by the troubadour Peire d’Alvernha in the mid twelfth century, the term was not endemic to that period.⁴⁷ Medieval French literature mostly refers to *amour fine*, *bone amour* or simply *amour*, whereas Occitan texts used *fin’amor* and is the one most in use today.⁴⁸ Paris’ coining of the term “courtly love” resulted from his *Romania* article *Etudes sur les romans de la Table ronde*⁴⁹ which examined *Le Chevalier de la Charrete* (or the *Lancelot*), a romance written by the court poet Chrétien de Troyes⁵⁰ between 1177 and 1181.⁵¹ For Paris, Troyes’ *Lancelot* begins the literary tradition of what he called courtly love;⁵² but for Troye, writing in the twelfth century, it was an appropriation of the lyric *cansos* adapted for prose romance.

⁴⁷ Moshé Lazar and Norris J. Lacy, eds., *Poetics of Love in the Middle Ages: Texts and Contexts* (Fairfax, Virginia: George Mason University Press, 1989) p. vii.

⁴⁸ Sarah Kay, “Courts, clerks, and courtly love,” *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance*, ed. Roberta L. Krueger, third ed. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000) p. 84.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 94, n.1.

⁵⁰ Gaston Paris, “Etudes sur les romans de la Table ronde,” *Romania* 12 (1883). I have used Kay’s interpretation of Paris as an English version could not be obtained.

⁵¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chr%C3%A9tien_de_Troyes, accessed 27.04.2017.

⁵² Kay, *op. cit.*

Part of courtly love's mystique has been its ambiguity of meaning. The *cansos* present a world of contraries, of oppositions and paradoxes that have always confounded scholars. This is apparent in the juxtaposition of heightened erotic passion with masculine self-control and submission to noblewomen. As literary scholar F. X. Newman explains in his introduction to *The Meaning of Courtly Love*, courtly love appears "at once illicit and morally elevating, passionate and disciplined, humiliating and exalting, human and transcendent."⁵³ This contradictory and enigmatic feature inspired the search for answers to this love in early criticism, a search that has now waned. It is now generally agreed that courtliness was a major factor in the elevating aspects of courtly love, although there remains less agreement over the erotic aspects.

The paradoxical quality of courtly love I view, in part, as the *effect* of its role as didactic material designed to control impulse and impart civility, particularly on the part of men. The oppositions and tensions posed between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour, between reason and instinct appear as contradictions, but is a necessary device for demonstrating the transition from brutishness to controlled, courteous conduct, while highlighting the difficulties it poses and the rewards it promises. 'Romance' literature and the *cansos* that preceded it, present a narrative on how impulse, passion and self-interest must be regulated in the pursuit of love; just what kind of love, has preoccupied scholars for centuries.

The story of desirous love, its heightened passion, euphoria and other-worldliness

⁵³ Newman, op. cit., p. vii.

begins with adulterous love in the *cansos*, at least in the minds of critics from the end of the late modern period who sought to account for its erotics. Among the first scholars to agree that the troubadours were engaged in adultery with married women, whether innocently or carnally, are Gaston Paris (1883), Joseph Anglade (1908), Alfred Jeanroy (1934), C. S. Lewis (1936), Denis de Rougement (1939), Alexander J. Denomy (1953), Georges Duby (1964), Jean Frappier (1964), Erich Köhler (1964), and Moshé Lazar (1964).⁵⁴ All these critics contributed to the mystique of courtly love through their interpretations which later contributed to the erotic politics of falling in love.

Love of the ecstatic but forbidden kind, considered typical in much early criticism of the *cansos*, was first appropriated for prose in the *Lancelot*. The richness and power of the erotic experience is encoded in the adulterous love between Lancelot and Guenevere set in the story of Aurthurian knights of the Round-table. For Paris, the love between Guenevere and Lancelot was striking for its erotics and in how, going against church theology and the standard misogynist views of the day, it contravened the social and moral conventions of medieval life. In an apparent reversal of medieval gender roles, what appeared as a code, a set of rules for the proper conduct of heterosexual relationships that allows, but also restrains passion while inspiring rectitude, he called courtly love. Lancelot's reverence and idolatry of Guenevere, acceptance of her superiority and humble compliance to her commands were characteristic of the love Paris called 'courtly'. In Paris' view, the love portrayed in the *Lancelot* was particular to medieval courts and

⁵⁴ Unfortunately only four are available in English and the rest I have relied on the interpretation of secondary sources.

represented a unique conception of love from that world.

The euphoria of adulterous love paired with female veneration and masculine compliance became a conceptual template of an exceptional erotic passion that today we understand as falling in love. There are implicit references to falling in love in the *Lancelot*, depicting the psycho-emotional erotic narrative through the embodied affects on Lancelot: “Just thinking of her makes him unconscious of the world around him; when he finds a comb with some of her hairs in it, he swoons in adoration.”⁵⁵ In the *Lancelot* we see the transition or progression from the ‘apparent’ frustrated and unrequited love of the verse *cansos* to the actual consummation of love in prose romance.

In *The Allegory of Love* first published in 1936,⁵⁶ British medievalist and literary critic C. S. Lewis sees courtly love as the eventual flowering of the allegorical form that had its roots in antiquity, while also noting that the sentiments of courtly love are distinctly different from the baseness of Ovid.⁵⁷ Recognising courtly love’s legacy to romance literature and culture, he traces the progression of this flowering in other literary works such as *Le Roman de la Rose*, *De Art Honeste Amandi*, including the work of Shakespeare. Lewis’ core thesis is that “[a]ny idealization of sexual love, in a society where marriage is purely utilitarian, must begin by being an idealization of adultery.”⁵⁸ Lewis maintains

⁵⁵ Kay, op.cit., p. 81. Kay’s reading of the *Lancelot* was used as an English translation could not be obtained.

⁵⁶ Since its first publication, this book has been in continual print with no alterations apart from minor spelling errors in the initial edition.

⁵⁷ Lewis, op. cit., p. 6.

⁵⁸ Lewis, *ibid.*, p. 13.

that courtly love was a “romantic species of passion”,⁵⁹ it was love of

a highly specialized sort, whose characteristics may be enumerated as Humility, Courtesy, Adultery, and the Religion of Love. ... only the courteous can love, but it is love that makes them courteous. ... Whatever ‘courtesy’ is in the place [medieval castle] it flows from her: all female charm from her and her damsels.⁶⁰

His reference to “female charm” as the instigator of courtesy at court does not allow for the discourses of courtliness and ennobling love. The idea of women as guardians of cultural and spiritual values with the moral authority and responsibility to control men—prevalent in the Victorian era and beyond—is alive in Lewis’ quote. His description of “a highly specialized sort” of love invokes the mystery associated with courtly love; this he confirms through a reference to a poem by the troubadour Guillaume, where “[d]escriptions of the act (or passion) of ‘falling in love’ ... give us some of the real magic of eyes (and of mirrors) as that magic actually exists”.⁶¹ In saying that love “*makes* them [men] courteous” he implies that this erotic love is both magical and transformative.⁶² However, Lewis says that it is not a natural form of love despite being considered so historically, “that love (under certain conditions) should be regarded as a noble and ennobling passion”, is not so.⁶³ If, as Lewis maintains, this love is not innate then it must be the product of cultural conventions and mandates as argued in this present study. Lewis concludes his examination with the *Faerie Queene* by Edmund Spenser in which the adulterous liaison is supplanted by the concept of romantic marriage; a concept that has become an ideal in contemporary culture where falling in love is seen as an elemental and

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 4.

⁶⁰ Ibid., pp. 2 and 12.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 162.

⁶² Emphasis added.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 3.

vital prelude to a fulfilling and lasting erotic union.

Three years later in 1939, passion in all its guises is present in *Love in the Western World* by Swiss writer and cultural theorist Denis de Rougemont. In this major popularizing and influential work, he undertakes “an *etymology of the passions*” with the adulterous romance of *Tristan and Iseult* as his starting point because it is “a kind of archetype of our most complex feelings of unrest.”⁶⁴ Calling *Tristan and Iseult* the one grand European legend of adultery, de Rougemont proposes to treat it not as literature, but as an example of typical relations between women and men in courtly society during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries;⁶⁵ a position difficult to reconcile now with current knowledge. The book’s structure positions *Tristan and Iseult* before the chapter on ‘courtly love’ which seems at odds with the timing of its first text, and his recognition of the troubadours as the inventors of passionate adulterous love.⁶⁶ Although we know *Tristan and Iseult* was transmitted orally by the Celts, the first known written example dates from 1155,⁶⁷ at least 50 years after the troubadours commenced writing their love *cansos*.

The excitement, exhilaration and ecstasy in troubadour rhetoric de Rougemont argues, speaks only of extra-marital love, love as a spiritual union “far beyond any love attainable in this life”⁶⁸—contributing to the mystique of courtly love. Like many of his

⁶⁴ Denis De Rougemont, *Love in the Western World*, trans. Montgomery Belgion, 4th ed. (New York: Schocken Books, 1983) p. 18.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 18 - 19.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 18 and 9.

⁶⁷ Roberta L. Krueger, “Introduction,” *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance*, ed. Roberta L. Krueger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) op. cit., p. 3.

⁶⁸ De Rougemont, op. cit., p. 17.

contemporaries, De Rougemont refers to this love as ennobling, as a religion related to the spiritual dimension rather than as a convention of courtly life with specific practices linked to patronage and career advancement for troubadours. This spiritual and ennobling quality he claims,⁶⁹ came from the influence of Catharism on the troubadours, who were inspired by the union of ideals between “*cortezia* [courtesy] and the religious atmosphere of Catharism”.⁷⁰

De Rougemont argues that the tumultuous passions and intrigue embedded in the connection between adulterous passion and death in *Tristan and Iseult* entered the collective psyche with a power that “*wins over us, usually without our knowing*”;⁷¹ a connection that is played out in the inexorable clash between monogamous marriage and the West’s hunger for passion.⁷² He maintains Western culture is addicted to the “thrill” of passion, that “everything within and about us glorifies passion”;⁷³ a prophetic statement given the continuing fixation with the passion of falling in love in Western culture almost one hundred years later. Like the rhetoric of passion in the *Lancelot* signifies what we understand as falling in love, de Rougemont’s version of *Tristan and Iseult* identifies

⁶⁹ De Rougemont, *ibid.*, p. 113.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 108. Several factors influenced de Rougemont: the Cathar movement was proto-feminist, in many respects it considered women the equals of men, they had independence and were able to become spiritual leaders; the Cathars practiced a spiritual “Love contrary to marriage, and at the same time of chastity” p. 110; the Cathar heresy developed in Occitania around the same time as courtly love; and many troubadour poems were dedicated to noblewomen who were Cathars, p. 83. De Rougemont argues that the worship of the Virgin Mary was a conversion of the idealisation of woman in Catharism that the Catholic Church had to squash in bringing people back to mainstream orthodoxy. The influence of Catharism on Occitan culture is taken up in chapter 7.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 18 – 19.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp. 8 and 16.

aspects of its psycho-emotional erotics via the vivid accounts of love's embodied affects and loss of control:

...the passion to which to yield is like a swoon. But it is too late to turn away. We are affected, we are under the spell, we grow alive to the 'exquisite anguish'. It would be idle to condemn; swooning cannot be condemned.⁷⁴

But this 'exquisite anguish' comes at a price, it can never be fully realised, as it is "perpetually unsatisfied" because it is not of this world⁷⁵—themes from traditional readings of the love *cansos* that created its mystique.

The theme of spiritual love and the passionate language of unrequited desire also feature in an article by literary critic Alexander J. Denomy, *Courtly Love and Courtliness* published in 1953. He argues that the intent of courtly love is ennoblement, achieved through it remaining unfulfilled. His central concern is on demarcating the terms and meaning of courtly love and courtliness which he argues are often conflated by scholars. Denomy insists that courtliness is a sign of social status, whereas courtly love is a process of individual personal improvement through the sublimation of desire for the loved one. But that desire must not be consummated as the loss of tension would destroy the drive for self-development;

... desire for union is to be intensified, fanned, and inflamed by every physical delight short of carnal possession, because it is desire which is the means to the end and purpose of Courtly Love: the ennobling of the lover. ... for the troubadours such love was spiritual in that it sought a union of hearts and minds rather than of bodies; it was a virtuous love in so far as it was the source of all natural virtue and worth.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 37.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 76.

⁷⁶ Alexander Denomy, "Courtly Love and Courtliness," *Speculum* 28.1 (1953): p. 44.

Following this logic, if frustrated desire is the means to virtuous love, it would seem that “carnal possession” may return the lover to his pre-courteous state (something women have often remarked on). As such, this virtuous love is inconsistent with the mutuality required of sexual/affective love, if the only way to maintain an ennobled state is to remain celibate. Here again is the conundrum we saw in the work of Lewis and de Rougemont and the puzzling question of cause and effect: how carnal desire is transformed into ennobling love through celibacy and/or courtesy. Like many other early critics, Denomy’s analysis relies heavily on medieval literature without due consideration as to its didactic purposes, or historical documents that provide information about the lives of noblewomen from that era and how that may have impacted on the construction of courtly love.

There is a fundamental misperception in early criticism (partly resulting from the focus on literature and the movement of Romanticism) that regards the didactic *effects* of courtliness and ennobling love—namely courtesy, civility and social virtues—as the *cause* of a spiritual, submissive and transformational form of love as exemplified in the *cansos*. It is now generally accepted that the personal virtues depicted in the *cansos* came about through the civilising movement of courtliness, of which courtesy was one virtue. Adjacent to the social dictates of court etiquette was the power of aristocratic women and the inducements of patronage in effecting the veneration of noblewomen in the love *cansos*. Early critiques take as axiomatic the theme of adultery in the *cansos*, focusing on whether or not it was a social reality or only a literary theme. Another way to read the apparent emphasis on adultery and the embellishment of troubadour rhetoric is as a lesson to courtiers, that how-ever compelling your desire—like the physical and emotional

suffering expressed by the troubadours—the sanctity and status of noblewomen is inviolate and must be respected. This reading could account for some of the irony in troubadour lyric, where some poets pay lip service to a pro-feminist agenda.

Moving forward forty years momentarily, a critic on the cusp of the third millennium looks back on early criticism to explain the fixation by early critics with erotic meaning and adultery in courtly lyric. In his 1999 article *The Troubadour's Lady as Seen through Thick History*, literary critic William D. Paden argues that early scholars were affected by elements of social and literary life of the nineteenth century.⁷⁷ The traditional view of adulterous love has been greatly influenced by what Paden calls ‘thick history’; reading the troubadours through the filter of nineteenth-century cultural phenomenon he says, created perceptions that were reflected back into theory, perceptions formed without evidence, historical or textual.⁷⁸ These cultural forces, namely nineteenth-century realism in the novel and repressive discourses on sexuality, Paden argues, created a “readiness” to read adultery in troubadour poetry.⁷⁹ During the period 1830-1900 novels by men on the subject of female adultery—most notably *Madame Bovary*⁸⁰—had a major impact on

⁷⁷ William D. Paden, “The Troubadour's Lady as Seen through Thick History,” Exemplaria: Medieval, Early Modern, Theory 11.2 (1999): op. cit., p. 221.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 224.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 236 - 37.

⁸⁰ Bill Overton cited in Paden, pp. 238-39. In The Novel of Female Adultery: Love and Gender in Continental European Fiction, 1830-1900 (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1996) Overton's subject is “based on a plot in which a married woman from the middle or upper classes is seduced by an unmarried man and comes to grief”, p. vi. In Overton's view, the female adultery at the centre of these novels expresses “masculinist anxiety stemming from what had been briefly achieved by women during the Revolution” and the need to quash rising feminist forces by portraying the suffering incurred through flouting patriarchal law. “What is at stake in monarchy and marriage,” Overton argues, “and what is at stake in the novel of female adultery, is the rule of the father”, p. 16.

the critics of courtly love who, Paden speculates, thought “it no longer seemed sensible to assume the troubadours did not imitate reality.”⁸¹ The other cultural element was the increased sexual repression of the Victorian Age when sex was under scrutiny from Freudian psychoanalysis.⁸² Paden argues that “the realism of the nineteenth-century French novel of adultery is another discourse of sex which arose from the same etiology that produced psychoanalysis.”⁸³

In the following, we move back to the late modern period to a theorist who questions the adultery hypothesis, turning to psychoanalysis. In his 1960 article *The Meaning of Courtly Love*, literary critic Herber Moller interrogates Freud’s Oedipal complex in order to account for courtly love’s central paradox and answering its erotic narrative.

First, the female love object is, as a rule, the wife of another man; and yet this relationship is celebrated as the source of a higher morality, notwithstanding the prevailing religious and social sanctions of monogamy. Second, the lover is represented as overwhelmed by an intense yearning for physical and emotional gratification, and yet ideally this yearning should never be allayed by possession in reality.⁸⁴

Unlike earlier critics, Moller seeks social referents for these paradoxical themes which he proposes reside in the expectations of courtly audiences and their interaction with poets. He argues that the poetry can be seen as a projection, a collective fantasy with vivid imageries of veneration and yearning for the mother; this childlike love of the troubadour for his lady/mother can never be satiated, but “is a protracted yearning which steadily

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 237.

⁸² This was argued by Michel Foucault in his *History of Sexuality* first published in 1978.

⁸³ Paden: op. cit., p. 240.

⁸⁴ Herbert Mollar, “The Meaning of Courtly Love,” *American Folklore Society* 73.287 (1960): p. 40.

mounts up, as it cannot be appeased because of an unconscious prohibition.”⁸⁵ However, Moller finds that this theory is troubled on two counts: the poetry lacks a corresponding narrative of strong emotion directed at the menacing father figure, that would seem a necessary parallel of fear, guilt, and jealousy allied with the Oedipal complex;⁸⁶ and there is a disconnect between the Oedipal mother figure who is all-loving and protective, and the seemingly distant, cold and unresponsive lady of the courtly love *cansos*.⁸⁷ While maintaining the status of the lady as a mother figure, Moller then turns to the aspects of personal development in courtly love, emphasising the maternal role as a guardian of “moral authority.”⁸⁸ This figure of maternal love is never threatening or punishing; “The one and only deep fear of troubadours ... is being rejected or quietly abandoned as unworthy of the lady’s love” in the event that he fails to live up to the standards of etiquette and courteous conduct at court.⁸⁹ Moller finds courtliness the most likely explanation for the themes of female adoration, but by maintaining the figure of maternal love he keeps women tied to traditional gender roles over-looking their power as seigneurial lords. The theme of rejection and abandonment for troubadours could reflect concerns over loss of patronage and practical support, dependent on noblewomen’s power to give or withhold. Moller’s courtliness thesis also fails to adequately account for the erotic themes that, as I will argue, can be understood in terms of the conventions of ennobling love.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 43.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 44.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 45.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 46.

⁸⁹ Ibid., pp. 46 - 48.

Where many early scholars found mystical transcendent meaning in courtly love, others find illusion. These are the “revisionists” of the 1960s—D. W. Robertson, Jr., Talbot Donaldson, and John F. Benson who the literary critic Don A. Monson opens with in his *Speculum* article of 1995, *The Troubadour’s Lady Reconsidered Again*.⁹⁰ While Monson says these critics provided a much needed challenge to common assumptions about courtly love, he points out that they also

accepted at face value some of the most questionable assumptions underlying the theory, [of courtly love and] their critique of it often presents a view of medieval literature and society just as distorted as that which it seeks to replace.⁹¹

The following examines the first and last of the above mentioned revisionists who use a sociological method examining the historical context of courtly love’s creation.

In the title of his 1968 book chapter *The Concept of Courtly Love as an Impediment to the Understanding of Medieval Texts*, scholar of medieval English literature D. W. Robertson makes his position clear. His chapter challenges historical concepts of courtly love in literature, concluding that courtly love had nothing to do with the Middle Ages and should be studied as the subject of “an aspect of nineteenth and twentieth century cultural history.”⁹² He cites the many contradictions and disagreements by scholars over courtly love’s meaning as a reason to doubt its validity, saying that it exists primarily in

⁹⁰ Don A. Monson, “The Troubadour’s Lady Reconsidered Again,” *Speculum: A Journal of Mediaeval Studies* 70.2 (1995): p. 255.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² Jr. D. W. Robertson, “The Concept of Courtly Love as an Impediment to the Understanding of Medieval Texts.,” *The Meaning of Courtly Love*, ed. F. X. Newman (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1968) p. 17.

the minds of academics.⁹³ The many, varied examples of medieval love poetry he argues, are carefully constructed by scholars to fit the precepts of courtly love.⁹⁴ As a way of life, or a code for living, Robertson states courtly love is impractical and questionable given its lax attitude to adultery which is in conflict with medieval times; the high station of the lady and the incredible feats required of the man in winning her favour are highly improbable. He doubts that “chivalric love” was practised between knights and noblewomen and was properly speaking the kind of love reserved for a king or queen.⁹⁵ Robertson views works like *De amore* by Andreas Capellanus, *Lancelot* by Chrétien de Troyes and the *Roman de la rose* as “ironic and humorous” and that what is being satirized is not courtly love but “idolatrous passion”, examples of which can be found in the Old Testament.⁹⁶ However, Robertson’s argument takes no account of why medieval romance literature came into existence, or its meaning and purpose in historical context.

In a similar vein, medieval scholar John F. Benton asks us to suspend our beliefs about courtly love, but addresses the gap in Robertson’s work by looking for the evidence on medieval love contained in the material of historical documents; “spiritual and canonistic writing, medical treatises, penitentials, letters, chronicles, law codes, court cases, etc.”⁹⁷ Examining these sources, his chapter traces erotic representation from antiquity to the high Middle Ages for information about the social mores of medieval love,

⁹³ Ibid., p. 3.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 8.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 3.

⁹⁷ John F. Benton, “Clio and Venus: An Historical View of Medieval Love,” *ibid.*, p. 20.

marriage, sexuality and adultery. During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries—the golden age of courtly love—Benton states that religious writing extolled celibacy over marriage, but in reality marriage was desirable and the norm for much of the population.⁹⁸ Once married however, the church expected both husbands and wives to love each other.⁹⁹ Benton alludes to falling in love when he asks whether couples ever married following a passionate attraction and indeed, finds records of marriages taking place “following the attraction of carnal passion”.¹⁰⁰ While pre-marital sex was not the norm according to Benton, records of “so-called mantle-children” in Germany, France, and England is “proof enough of the existence of carnal love before marriage.”¹⁰¹ Another argument against the validity of courtly love for Benton is the portrayal of adultery in courtly love; Given the disparity between medieval historical records and the topics covered in courtly love, he concludes that “courtly love has no useful meaning, and is not worth saving by redefinition.”¹⁰² In Benton’s opinion, medieval people understood the importance of practicing social forms of love in maintaining civility and in honouring ones’ superiors. However, he does not explain how or why these forms of love came to appear in courtly

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 21.

⁹⁹ Ibid. Benton states that “the Epistle to the Ephesians, attributed to St. Paul throughout the Middle Ages, contains the exhortation (5:25), “Husbands, love your wives,” and the prayer that the bride “be as loveable as Rachel to her husband” was included in the early medieval wedding service.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 22.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., pp. 22 - 23. Children born out of marriage were legitimised through a practice known as “*sub pallio*”, by placing the child “beneath the sheet which is customarily put over those who are ceremonially married in Holy Church”; these children would then be considered lawful heirs and subsequently known as “mantle-children”. While carnal love may have resulted in a child, whether that love was the reason for marriage is unknowable. We know that often these marriages were designed to protect the child, who would otherwise be treated with disdain.

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 37.

literature which is a goal of this thesis.

Medieval scholarship has for some time been moving away from the focus on courtly love. At the founding meeting of what was to become the International Courtly Literature Society in 1973, there was a spirited debate about what to call this new society. One group wanted the “Courtly Love Society” but the general consensus was to move away from the historical associations and assumptions attached to the love word in medieval scholarship that began with Paris.¹⁰³ This decision reflected the decline in interest in love during the 1960s, 70s and 80s as the central question in medieval scholarship. Since then courtly literature scholars have moved into intertextual and codicological studies and interdisciplinary work.

In the *Poetics of Love in the Middle Ages* published in 1989—in which the socio-political contexts are read in conjunction with literature—editors Moshé Lazar and Norris J. Lacy want to move beyond the limiting single term ‘courtly love’, to the virtues referred to repeatedly in the work of the troubadours and their didactic meaning.

The generality of the term *cortezia*, the fact that it is a term designating a group of social and moral virtues, is indicated by its nearly invariable opposition to *vilania*, which represents a whole set of anti-courtly characteristics (greed, cowardice, avarice, disloyalty, vulgarity, etc.). Should we wish to be more specific, we could without unreasonable distortion identify the three cardinal components of *cortezia* as *pretz* (or *valor*), *mezura*, and *joven*. The fundamental requirements of *cortezia* thus appear to be that the lover must love in a courtly manner, follow the dictates of *joven* (youth or generosity), and maintain moderation. Any attempt to reduce *cortezia* further, and any attempt to equate it with something called “courtly love” or to apply either term indiscriminately to a complex and disparate body of literature, will inevitably fail and will

¹⁰³ The International Courtly Literature Society web page: <http://www.iclsnab.org/?page%20id=8> accessed 13.07.2017.

in the process impede our understanding and appreciation of texts.¹⁰⁴

By this approach they hope “it frees us from the tyranny of the “courtly canon—” allowing us, for instance, to break the tradition of giving such significance to works like the *Lancelot* as representative of courtly love.¹⁰⁵

Reading how the following theorists express their meaning of courtly love shows the degree of romanticisation that Paden (above) articulated. Denomy exemplifies the position of early literary and history scholars’ autobiographical assumption. He argues that although “courtly has the essential meaning of belonging to, emanating from, for and in a court” when applied to love, “courtly has quite another meaning”.¹⁰⁶

It denotes and particularizes that sort of love that is accounted the origin and font of man’s natural excellence, *the novel conception that sexual love is the ennobling love force in man*. ... For the troubadour, *cortezia* is a quality that has its *origins in love*.¹⁰⁷

Denomy emphasises the erotic; men are subdued and made courteous through amorous love, by which means they are ennobled, and ennobled, women. While Denomy acknowledges that “the troubadours were primarily concerned with moral worth and moral perfection,”¹⁰⁸ he advocates making a “vital distinction between courtliness and Courtly Love.”¹⁰⁹ In *The Courtly Love Tradition* historian Bernard O’Donoghue also highlights the erotic element saying, “[a]ny definition of courtly love will show it to be

¹⁰⁴ Lazar and Lacy, *Poetics of Love in the Middle Ages*, p. viii. Indeed, this thesis is a study of the impact of early critics in shaping the content and meaning of courtly love and its legacy to romantic love as we know it today.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Denomy, op. cit., p. 46.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., pp. 47 – 48. Italic emphasis of *cortezia* in original text, other emphasis added.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 63.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 47.

bound up with romantic and supra-sensual love, as is immediately obvious from a reading of the troubadours.”¹¹⁰ Jean Frappier contributes to its erotic mystique and esotericism when he describes it as “an art of loving inaccessible to common mortals, this embellishment of erotic desire, this discipline of passion like a religion of love, constitutes courtly love.”¹¹¹ For Denomy and others, *cortezia* or courtesy arises out of erotic love viewed as having mysterious civilising powers. In all these examples, the erotic is charged with the magical power to produce a metamorphoses in men, an idea at odds with historical evidence and most women’s experience.

The question of adultery

In terms of courtly love’s meaning, the controversial question of adultery has operated at the core of medieval scholarship; was it a medieval reality, or simply a literary phenomenon. In the past, many historical, literary and cultural studies of courtly love began with this question. But in recent times courtly love’s historical reality is of less interest to scholars, who share a similar view with the late medieval historian and feminist Joan Kelly, that “whether such love relationships actually existed or if they were mere literary conventions ... [is] a fruitless question”.¹¹² Barring the discovery of new historical evidence, we can never know with complete certainty the answer to this question. However, an examination of medieval canon law and theology along with historical

¹¹⁰ Bernard O'Donoghue, The Courtly Love Tradition (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1982) p. 3.

¹¹¹ Jean Frappier cited in Alfonsi, op. cit., p. 428.

¹¹² Joan Kelly, “Did Women Have A Renaissance?,” Feminism and Renaissance Studies, ed. Lorna Hutson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) p. 27.

records of secular practices and punishments for adultery suggest its portrayal in the *cansos* is fictional, and perhaps represents a form of socio-political love that we do not as yet understand.

Contemporary medievalist scholars make the case for a revision of past theories “on medieval realities” arguing that texts and “interpretation results ... must be reanalysed, and conventional wisdom, rewritten.”¹¹³ In traditional criticism, the epic and the romance are classified as imaginary works of fiction with a didactic function, whereas the first-person of lyric was read as autobiographical (as discussed above). Like others, I take the view that troubadour lyric had a didactic function in transmitting, via entertainment, courtly conduct that was part of the civilising transformation of medieval Europe. This view is reinforced by the fact that lyric was written in the native tongue making it accessible to all members at court, regardless of rank or education. If courtly lyric was exclusively a work of fiction, its representations of women, men and love must also be imaginary. W. C. Calin sheds some light on the matter by pointing out that,

the existence of texts violently hostile to *fin'amour* [fine love] proves that the ideology was there and had acquired a certain degree of orthodoxy: if nobody had entertained it, there would be no reason to write against it.¹¹⁴

This is sound logic. However, what I propose is that rather than animosity about the ‘apparent’ depictions of adultery, the hostility to *fin'amor* may have reflected conservative reactions against the subversion of warrior masculinity through courtliness, and the

¹¹³ Jennifer R. Davis and Michael McCormick, “The Early Middle Ages: Europe’s Long Morning,” The Long Morning of Medieval Europe: New Directions in Early Medieval Studies, eds. Jennifer R. Davis and Michael McCormick (Hamphire, England and Burlington, USA: Ashgate, 2008) p. 5.

¹¹⁴ W. C. Calin cited in Flori, *op. cit.*, p. 256.

positive portrayal of women as having status and power.

Just as fictive depictions of courtly love do not mean it was a reality, fictive depictions of adultery do not mean it existed as a practice, at a time when canon law expressly forbade it, and it was subject to severe punishments. Adultery within the peasant and clerical classes was considered a serious breach punishable by legal and physical means as historian Linda Paterson outlines here:

In some places in the south the local lord could confiscate the adulterer's property and inflict physical punishment on him. In some towns, the convicted pair was to run naked within the city walls, sometimes being whipped, or the woman pulling the man along by a cord tied to his genitals.¹¹⁵

Canon law on adultery conformed to the will of theologians in that husbands and wives should be treated equally, but this was not the case in practice.¹¹⁶ Husbands often accused their wives of adultery, “while wives largely suffered in silence, or if they did accuse their husbands, the courts ignored or rejected the accusations.”¹¹⁷ Women were very much the possession of their male kin and any threat to the line of succession meant “a wife’s unfaithfulness was harshly judged and repressed severely” according to Flori.¹¹⁸

But adultery by the aristocracy was of a different order. Benton argues it ran counter to medieval attitudes and brought harsh punishments, particularly for a vassal—and perhaps a troubadour—when having sexual relations with a lord’s wife was

¹¹⁵ Linda M. Paterson, The World of the Troubadours: Medieval Occitan society, c. 1100-c. 1300 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

¹¹⁶ Judith M. Bennett and Ruth Mazo Karras, eds., The Oxford Handbook of Women and Gender in Medieval Europe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) p. 172.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ Flori, *op. cit.*, p. 242.

considered treason and the penalty was death.¹¹⁹ Benton gives some examples of horrific punishments enacted on noblemen who had carnal relations with a lord's wife.

When Count Philip of Flanders suspected a young noble of adultery with the countess, he executed him by hanging him upside down in a latrine, while his wife, heiress of Vermandois, was simply disgraced. ... [W]hen two nobles were accused of adultery with the wives of Prince Louis and Prince Charles, the king had the young men castrated, dragged behind horses to the gallows and hanged.¹²⁰

Women mostly had less severe punishments "usually repudiation", but if the husband refused to forgive his wife Benton notes, "she would in fact be better off in the grave."¹²¹ There is ample evidence in historical records of "noble husbands who murdered their wives on suspicion of adultery."¹²² For aristocratic women, adultery came at considerable risk while a double standard applied to aristocratic men. A husband could have sexual intercourse with one or many women in the marital home with complete immunity.¹²³ But for a married woman it was a serious crime analogous "with homicide, burglary of the church or people's homes, assault with a sword, and witchcraft."¹²⁴ All through the Middle Ages canonists feared husbands who caught their wives at adultery would kill them, and this was reinforced by secular legal institutions that allowed and even forgave violence against adulterous wives.¹²⁵

Although it is impossible to say with any certainty, it seems very unlikely that

¹¹⁹ Benton, *op. cit.*, pp. 26 – 29.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² Ann Marie Rasmussen, "Medieval German Romance," *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance*, ed. Roberta L. Krueger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) p. 192.

¹²³ H Gilles cited in Paterson, p. 233.

¹²⁴ Brunel, cited in *ibid.*

¹²⁵ Bennett and Karras, eds., *op. cit.*

troubadours were having sexual affairs with ‘the lady’ of courtly lyric, most often married women, the wives, daughters and sisters of the ruling aristocracy, at least not in an ‘accepted’ social way that the large numbers depicted in lyric would suggest. Just the risk of pregnancy alone would have been a huge deterrent. Apart from the risk of pregnancy and the punishments involved in adultery, perhaps the most convincing argument against the actuality of sexual liaisons, is the poetry itself. If it depicted a social reality, it would offer a clear and very dangerous indication, of at least the *possibility* or *intention* of committing adultery; anonymity of ‘the lady’ provided no protection as *domnas* were often identified through dedication of the poem. By implication, this would render the lord of the particular court, a cuckold and the butt of jokes about his masculinity and inability to control his female kin. It seems the simplest way of dealing with such a threat, would be to expel or ban the author in question from court, imprison him or have him summarily executed; thereby removing the threat, restoring the lord’s dignity and protecting the honour of ‘the lady’ in question. We also know how popular torture was in the Middle Ages, but there are no historical records to date to indicate that troubadours were tortured as a means of extracting the name of an adulterous *domna*. All of which, in my view, argues against adulterous affairs as the subject matter of troubadour lyric, whether fictional or real.

Under the realities of medieval gender politics, it is difficult to imagine ‘the lady’ of courtly lyric fame having affairs with troubadours—even in secrecy. Given the level of social acceptance suggested by the extent of the troubadours’ œuvre, it seems highly unlikely: if representative of reality, it implies a mass socio-cultural movement condoning

noblewomen's sexual liberation, potentially involving hundreds of women across two centuries with high political implications, which is not evident in historical records.

In the absence of evidence and plausibility for adulterous affairs, how can the apparent theme of erotic love combined with men's submission and the veneration of women in lyric be explained? For this we must turn to other social referents, other forms of love in the socio-political environment of Occitania's royal and aristocratic courts and women's position in that realm, in the context of the intellectual and philosophical movement emanating from that world. A feminist analysis of the social and political discourses on medieval types of love is apposite to the question of what type of love is represented in lyric. The following section provides a brief historical overview of feminism's contribution to medieval scholarship, and then examines several of the primary early theoretical contributions to courtly love between 1980 and 2000. Later contributions are discussed throughout the rest of the study.

Feminism rethinks courtly love

The study of women's lives, their responsibilities and contribution to the medieval world and its culture has been studied by scholars across disciplines for more than a century, but under the hegemony of the canon this work was marginalised; it was scattered, lacking depth and coherence.¹²⁶ During the last 30 plus years, however, feminist medieval

¹²⁶ Laine E. Doggett and Daniel E. O'Sullivan, "Introduction: The Work of E. Jane Burns and the Feminisms of Medieval Studies," *Founding Feminisms in Medieval Studies*, eds. Laine E. Doggett and Daniel E. O'Sullivan, Gallica, Volume 39 (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2016) p. 1.

scholarship has reached critical mass producing a robust, comprehensive and foundational field of knowledge “with more visibility, inter-relatability, and viability in academe.”¹²⁷ In *Feminisms*, Barbara Stevenson provides a precise summary of the development of feminist medieval scholarship from its beginnings in the Early Modern Era with publications about women writers, up to 2006 with encyclopedias and other studies on the topics of women’s roles, gender and women’s writing.¹²⁸ She argues these publications are “expanding exponentially”, and that no other movement has transformed medieval studies like feminism.¹²⁹

However, this very success has caused concern about the future of feminist medieval studies. For example, Elizabeth Robertson has expressed concern that the plethora of feminist knowledge in this area may mean “that the category of women has been so thoroughly dismantled” that the previous momentum will be lost.¹³⁰ Burns notes that there has been a waning of interest in women with studies going in other directions of late, causing her to ask, “Is it possible that feminism’s highly visible role in medieval studies during the 1980s and 1990s carried knowledge production to a point where

¹²⁷ Ibid. Two medieval feminists in particular have been trail blazers in their contribution to feminist medieval theorisation and leadership in promoting feminist medieval scholarship: E. Jane Burns and Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner. Both have recently had a volume of essays published in their honour for their contribution to the field.

¹²⁸ Barbara Stevenson, “Feminism,” *Handbook of Medieval Studies: Terms, Methods, Trends*, ed. Albrecht Classen (New York: Berlin, de Gruyter, 2010).

¹²⁹ Ibid., p. 549.

¹³⁰ Elizabeth Robertson, “Feminism and Medieval Studies: Where Have We Been, Where Are We Now, and Where Are We Going? Or, What Has Happened to Women in Feminist Studies of the Middle Ages?,” *Founding Feminisms in Medieval Studies*, eds. Laine E. Doggett and Daniel E. O’Sullivan, Gallica, Volume 39 (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2016) p. 239.

feminism has become unnecessary?” But she answers, “I think not.”¹³¹ While feminist analysis has shifted from its previous central place in medieval studies, the last decade or so has seen it moving outward to “inhabit a broader band of diverse sites that it has penetrated more deeply.”¹³²

Working from the knowledge of women’s historical marginalisation, feminist medieval scholarship in the 80s and 90s brought feminist theorisation of gender, power, sexuality and identity to the study of women in the Middle Ages. They began by asking simple questions like “Where are the women in this text, or image, or document, etc.?”¹³³ No where has the position of medieval women been put under more scrutiny than that of medieval French literature on the subject of courtly love. Feminist theorisation initially followed a similar trajectory to that of romantic love, whereby early damning criticism is followed by more favourable views. In her 2001 study of twenty years of feminist criticism, Burns observes “[f]eminist readers have often dismissed the concept of courtly love as a problematic precursor of the highly misogynistic system of modern, Western romantic love.”¹³⁴ However, studies of courtly love literature, read in conjunction with

¹³¹ E. Jane Burns, “Feminism and Medieval Studies: Moving Forward,” *Exemplaria: Medieval, Early Modern, Theory* 26.2-3 (Summer/Fall 2014): p. 291.

¹³² *Ibid.* Burns gives examples of these more diverse areas, “Medieval studies books with obvious feminist content are published each year by a range of presses, including, for example, Cynthia J. Brown, *The Queen’s Library: Image-making at the Court of Anne of Brittany, 1477–1514* and her edited collection of essays entitled *The Cultural and Political Legacy of Anne of Bretagne: Negotiating Convention in Books and Documents*; Dyan Elliott, *The Bride of Christ Goes to Hell: Metaphor and Embodiment in the Lives of Pious Women, 200–1500*; Liz Herbert McAvoy, *Medieval Anchoritisms: Gender, Space, and the Solitary Life*; Gwen Seabourne, *Imprisoning Medieval Women: The Non-judicial Confinement and Abduction of Women in England ca. 1170–1509*, and Sarah Sheehan and Ann Dooley, eds. *Constructing Gender in Medieval Ireland*, to name a few.”

¹³³ Robertson, *Feminism and Medieval Studies*, p. 238.

¹³⁴ Burns, “Courtly Love: Who Needs It? Recent Feminist Work in the Medieval French Tradition,” p. 29.

historical studies on the roles of medieval noblewomen, has produced richer and more nuanced critiques that trouble standard readings of gender, heteronormative coupling and women's lack of subjectivity in courtly love.

Early traditional criticism typically placed the *domna* atop the pedestal of adoration as the central figure of worship who, paradoxically, despite being 'silent', dominates a submissive troubadour vying for attention in his quest to serve her. This woman-centred thesis was challenged in a volume of "groundbreaking" essays in 1987, *Courtly Ideology and Woman's Place in French Medieval Literature* that medieval feminist Kathryn Gravdal argues is an "attempt to redefine courtly ideology from within medieval texts themselves."¹³⁵ In Burns' essay, "The Man Behind the Lady in Troubadour Lyric", she argues that far from dominating, women are cast in conflicting roles as both *domna* or lord and 'feminine' lady who is both venerated and disparaged, desired and feared, and that "[s]ervice is but a thinly veiled form of seduction leading ultimately to subjugation."¹³⁶ While the *domna* is presented as having power over the troubadours life and death, Burns argued that the lady gains little power or authority from her exalted position.¹³⁷ These ideas were taken up by Gaunt in his article "The Poetry of Exclusion", where he argues that the lady of lyric had no subjectivity or voice, that lyric was not at all about women's experience, and that even in the most touching and erotic poetry it is not

¹³⁵ Kathryn Gravdal, "Courtly Ideology and Woman's Place in Medieval French Literature," *Romanic Review* 78.2 (1987).

¹³⁶ E. Jane Burns, "The Man Behind the Lady in Troubadour Lyric," *Courtly Ideology and the Position of Woman in Medieval French Literature*, eds. E. Jane Burns and Roberta L. Krueger (Romance Notes XXX, 3, 1985) p. 266.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

always evident to whom the poet is referring, women or men.¹³⁸ In fact, Gaunt maintains that lyric references troubadour sexual/affective subjectivity not that of women, who are mere narrative props, the passive bystanders in the fantasies of men, silent objects to be admired and adored.¹³⁹

However, in more recent times, feminist analysis of courtly love has afforded a more positive “reevaluation” of its “gender politics”.¹⁴⁰ The *domnas* silence in the *cansos* has been explained by Ruth Cassel Hoffman as the result of poems non-narrative form,¹⁴¹ and scholar of medieval Occitan and French literature, Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner argues that “the *cansos* as a genre ... are resolutely monologicistic in form”.¹⁴² This goes some way to explaining the lady’s lack of subjectivity and voice in lyric. The traditional view of heterosexual coupling has also been contested. The staging of women across the full spectrum of courtly love includes “single women” as protagonists outside of relationships with men and “[a] range of courtly women ... joined in same-sex relations, whether homosocial, homoaffective, homoerotic, or more mystical and metaphorical that offer other paths of resistance to heterosexual courtly coupling.”¹⁴³ Indeed, Burns argues courtly love provides a space to deconstruct gender, sexuality and identity for both women

¹³⁸ Simon Gaunt, “Poetry of Exclusion: A Feminist Reading of some Troubadour Lyrics,” Modern Language Review 85.2 (1990).

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

¹⁴⁰ Burns, “Courtly Love: Who Needs It? Recent Feminist Work in the Medieval French Tradition,” p. 48.

¹⁴¹ Ruth Cassel Hoffman, “The Lady in the Poem: A Shadow Voice,” Poetics of Love in the Middle Ages: Texts and Contexts, eds. Moshe Lazar and Norris J. Lacy (Fairfax, Virginia: George Mason University Press, 1989) p. 231.

¹⁴² Bruckner, Matilda Tomaryn. “The Trobairitz.” *A Handbook of the Troubadours*. Eds. R.R.P. Akehurst and Judith M. Davis. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995, p. 217.

¹⁴³ Burns, *op. cit.*, p. 26

and men.

Despite its heteronormative veneer and its tendency to displace and occlude women as subjects, courtly love, when taken as the full range of amorous scenarios staged between elite heterosexual couples in a court setting, offers models for love relations that disrupt the binary and exclusive categories of male and female and masculine and feminine used typically to structure the Western romantic love story.¹⁴⁴

Burns' study addresses the full scope of courtly love including lyric and the romances it inspired, arguing that falling in love¹⁴⁵ in this courtly medieval tradition does not necessarily keep to inflexible gender binaries that favour men.¹⁴⁶ For this reason, courtly love remains relevant to contemporary culture and not something to be dispensed with.¹⁴⁷

This present study focusses exclusively on the *cansos* as the genesis of courtly love, with an alternative explanation for its gender disruption through a reassessment of the love relations—noteably adultery—it purportedly depicts; namely the interaction of two medieval discourses on socio-political love, courtliness and ennobling love. In early studies, feminists contested the power and authority afforded the *domna* and her veneration as a model of virtue in traditional criticism, but her 'apparent' sexual liberation remains an open question; a question tied to her status and power. Mainstream criticism of lyric typically explains the *domna's* status as either the adored but unattainable lover, as the spiritual superior of men, and/or as recognition of her status as a feudal lord. Other mainstream scholars challenged the *domna's* status as either ironic, or as courting favour

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 48.

¹⁴⁵ Burns' reference to 'falling in love' was the only one I found during my reading of feminist medievalists.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 27.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

with her husband, or as symbolic with the *domna* only a temporary and nominal replacement for an absent male relative, usually the husband. These readings have been contested by feminist medievalists through detailed studies of the daily lives and activities of noblewomen, showing the sources of power and agency available to them.¹⁴⁸ In the unlikely-hood of adulterous relations, how can the poets sublimation to the *domna* be explained?

The politics of masculine submission

Courtly lyric has been noted throughout history for its association with a positive transformation in troubadour behaviour linked to their valourisation of women. This is what has always made courtly love so unique and is the rationale in this study for focussing on masculinity. The idea that sexual love, in and of itself, has the power to transform male character has historically been a major contribution to the mythology of courtly lyric. But if, as I argue, the power of sexual love did not produce the masculine submission we see in lyric, how did it come about? Indeed, how can we account for the sensitive, emotionally expressive character of troubadour's *cansos*, adoring his silent indifferent, aloof *domna*¹⁴⁹ lavishing her with praise and devotion while submitting to her every whim in proving his love? In the context of the misogyny and brutality of the Middle Ages, it sounds whimsical to say the least.

Masculine submission is crucial to the 'romance' of courtly lyric and what made

¹⁴⁸ Women's roles and the power available to them is discussed in chapter 7.

¹⁴⁹ P. G. Walsh 1982 cited in Burns, op. cit., p. 23.

it so unique for its time. This association survives into modernity in the female expectation and/or hope—however misplaced and against historical evidence—that men will submit to the demands of love, subverting traditional gendered power relations. Courtliness is now widely accepted as the subject behind representations of courteous masculine behaviour in lyric and romance. As a medieval civilising movement, courtliness so thoroughly permeates medieval literature, that for a long time it has been hidden in plain sight. From 1980 onwards, Bruckner made it her primary research focus.¹⁵⁰ Through her examination of proper courtly behaviour across many sites including hospitality, the *trobairitz*, epics and romance, Bruckner has contributed to a greater understanding of courtliness' importance in shaping medieval literature, culture and society.

The repeating theme of masculine submission throughout the troubadours' corpus has been closely studied by Alfonsi, who argues that it signifies a marked difference compared with the “simplistic character” of literature from antiquity.¹⁵¹ Through her philological study and semiotic examination of the Occitan vernacular of troubadour lyric, Alfonsi reveals “the carefully constructed nature” of masculine submission in the development “of the Courtly Love casuistry.”¹⁵²

The first-person subject position, with its intimately experiential themes of masculine devotion, has historically been tied to the power of attraction and love in lyric.

¹⁵⁰ Bruckner has produced over 60 publications and 37 reviews on the subject of courtliness. Unfortunately, I came to her work quite late, and the majority dealt with romance texts not the *cansos*.

¹⁵¹ Alfonsi, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p. xi. According to the Oxford online dictionary casuistry means, “The resolving of moral problems by the application of theoretical rules” which is consistent with the influence of courtliness on the troubadours during the period they were writing lyric.

But as Alfonsi explains, masculine submission has not been well understood as an independent thematic element capable of informing our understanding of courtly lyric.

Because of the esoteric nature of many tenets of Courtly Love, the principle of masculine devotion has been skirted over by most scholars who want to consider it as both self-evident and self-explanatory.¹⁵³

Alfonsi describes most of the scholarship seeking to explain the “esoteric quality” of courtly love literature as “abstruse”.¹⁵⁴ Indeed, the “vocabulary of submission”, uniform across Alfonsi’s “examination of some 1000 poems by some 80 poets” living between the late eleventh to the end of thirteenth century,¹⁵⁵ suggests something other than the collective expressions of individual men ‘in love’ or ‘simply’ a French literary art form.

As we know, the troubadours did not call their works courtly love, something that “has created confusion as to its veritable meaning.”¹⁵⁶ Alfonsi’s textual analysis of troubadour lexicon gives us clues as to their meaning based on the semiotics and semantics specific to *langue d’oc*, their Occitan native tongue.

Although the adjective *courtois* appears frequently within their lyric, in such expressions as *chanson* [French song] *courtoise*, *saison* [season] *courtoise*, *parler* [speech] *courtois*, the poets did not use it in reference to their particular code which they themselves labelled *verai’amors* [true love], *bon’amors* [good love], *fin’amors* [pure love].¹⁵⁷

Taken at face value, the referents ‘true’, ‘good’ and ‘pure’ love might indicate a moral dimension, possibly linked with the spiritual or religious realms. But when used “in reference to their particular code”,¹⁵⁸ it suggests a formal code of ethical conduct enacted

¹⁵³ Alfonsi.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 95

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. xi.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. viii.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

within the courtly environment, and courtliness is a most plausible candidate.

But courtliness is not simply etiquette; it is the practice of social love for one's fellow human beings. As the troubadour Guilhem de Peitieu VII makes clear, he is submissive to love as a fundamental principle, "No one can be really true, with respect to love, unless he is submissive to it."¹⁵⁹ It is the *practice* of courtliness that produces 'true', 'good' and 'pure' love forms of social love conducive to harmony at court; not amorous desire for the *domna*. Indeed, Alfonsi explains how masculine submission is founded on the virtues of *jovens*, pointing out that "[g]enerosity" is "the virtue most characteristic of *jovens*",¹⁶⁰ a word from the troubadour's own code.

Because of the intricate relationship of the principles which comprise the code of Courtly Love, a lover could not possibly exhibit the virtue of submission without that of *jovens*. We are not necessarily speaking of historical sincerity when we say that the troubadours were sincere in their profession of Courtly Love. But the literary sincerity professed cannot be doubted because of the interwoven nature of the code.¹⁶¹

Alfonsi states that *jovens* is the principle virtue in the code of courtliness, and the "literary sincerity" she speaks of points to lyrics didactic function. In his essay *Fin'amor* literary critic Lazar also states that *jovens* "appears to represent a set of duties and virtues."¹⁶² In the above quote, love is contingent upon the conditions of generosity—of mind, heart and spirit—which emphasises the central concern of courtliness, that of personal growth through knowledge and self-reflection; to my mind, this is the semantic foundation for the love we call 'courtly', the (non-sexual) public and social love inherent in courtliness.

¹⁵⁹ Kay, op. cit., p. 90.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., p. x. The virtues contained in the code of courtliness are expanded on in chapter 6.

¹⁶¹ Alfonsi, op. cit., p. 13. Emphasis added. The term 'lover' had a different meaning at this historical time which is explained in chapter 7.

¹⁶² Lazar, op. cit., p. 68.

Indeed, I argue that courtliness—not erotic love—was behind the troubadour’s homage to the social status of noblewomen, many of whom were territorial lords in their own right with the wealth and political power to grant financial favours, artistic patronage and career advancement.

Charged with the erotic

Without the context of courtliness to explain masculine submission, the idea that men would relinquish control over, and be submissive to women, during that historical period carried extraordinary ontological power for traditional scholars who read it as a *unique special kind of erotic love*. And indeed, for its time, it appeared so. But we must resist projecting contemporaneous meaning upon a medieval culture, and instead examine the forms of love pertinent to that time. As a secular humanist public love, courtliness was part of the civilising movement spreading throughout Europe.¹⁶³ As I will argue, when this love is combined with the convention of ennobling love, courtly lyric appears charged with the erotic and its mythology as a phenomenon was created. Essential to both these forms of love is the emotional display of passion in demonstrating sincerity—or at least its appearance. The intensity of passion aroused by courtliness and nobility, centred on the voluptuously attired courtly body and its manners, was further magnified through the sensual linguistics of ennobling love that eroticised the body; expressions of passion with profound romantic affects on scholars.

¹⁶³ This ‘movement’ is expanded on in chapter 6.

Reading how the following theorists express their meaning of courtly love shows the degree of romanticisation. Denomy exemplifies the position of early literary and history scholars' autobiographical assumption. He argues that although "courtly has the essential meaning of belonging to, emanating from, for and in a court" when applied to love, "courtly has quite another meaning".¹⁶⁴

It denotes and particularizes that sort of love that is accounted the origin and font of man's natural excellence, *the novel conception that sexual love is the ennobling love force in man*. ... For the troubadour, *cortezia* is a quality that has its *origins in love*.¹⁶⁵

Denomy emphasises the erotic; men are subdued and made courteous through amorous love, by which means they are ennobled, and ennobled, women. While Denomy acknowledges that "the troubadours were primarily concerned with moral worth and moral perfection,"¹⁶⁶ he advocates making a "vital distinction between courtliness and Courtly Love."¹⁶⁷ In *The Courtly Love Tradition* historian Bernard O'Donoghue also highlights the erotic element saying, "[a]ny definition of courtly love will show it to be bound up with romantic and supra-sensual love, as is immediately obvious from a reading of the troubadours."¹⁶⁸ Jean Frappier contributes to its erotic mystique and esotericism when he describes it as "an art of loving inaccessible to common mortals, this embellishment of erotic desire, this discipline of passion like a religion of love, constitutes courtly love."¹⁶⁹ For Denomy and others, *cortezia* or courtesy arises out of erotic love and

¹⁶⁴ Denomy, op. cit., p. 46.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., pp. 47 – 48. Italic emphasis of *cortezia* in original text, other emphasis added.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 63.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 47.

¹⁶⁸ O'Donoghue, p. 3.

¹⁶⁹ Jean Frappier cited in Alfonsi, op. cit., p. 428.

is viewed as having mysterious civilising powers.¹⁷⁰ In all these examples, the erotic is charged with the magical power to produce a metamorphoses in men, an idea at odds with historical evidence and most women's experience.

All three theorists above reflect Ganim's "peculiar circularity" where courtly love was assumed to have a 'romantic' a priori existence, a special kind of natural, innate passionate and devoted love. The emotions represented in lyric were seen as emanating naturally and spontaneously in unmediated form from the body due to the erotic power of heterosexual attraction and admiration. But this interpretation of courtly lyric's emotions severs it from the wider social and political discourses of the sociality and environment of its creation. As I argue in chapter 8, lyric gained its amorous sensibility through the erotic linguistics of ennobling love expressed through corporeal metaphors, giving the impression of amorous love.¹⁷¹ This figuring of the power of the erotic has survived into modernity and continues to be reinforced through the narrative power of the psycho-emotional erotics of falling in love.

Another element affecting courtly love's erotics has been the masculine bias in the arts and literature, where representations of sexual desire and love, until quite recently, have been the almost exclusive province of men and masculine sexuality. Early critics

¹⁷⁰ This new research into love is examined in chapter 8.

¹⁷¹ In 'Of Woman Born' Adrienne Rich argues that the mythology of courtly love's passions extended into early beliefs concerning human reproduction. It was believed that some of courtly love's magical spirit was transferred to its progeny. As Rich explains, children or "bastards" from such a union were considered "exceptionally vital and dynamic beings," as they were "begotten in the intensity of passion rather than the dull, obligatory sheets of marriage" pp. 159 – 200.

were both a product and creators of this self-perpetuating cycle, with further “skewed” effects¹⁷² on romances’ semiotics and semantics as described above. Working in tandem with the transformative love of courtly lyric for traditional scholars, was the idea that it was entirely consensual; male passion is held in check by men’s respect for women, a theme endemic to romantic love that appears in contemporary theories. As Giddens argues “the element of sublime love tends to predominate over that of sexual ardour” in romantic love, where “[l]ove breaks with sexuality while embracing it.”¹⁷³

In similar terms to Giddens, Reddy describes courtly love as a “type of sexual partnership” and maintains the ‘romantic’ form of love is the “opposition of love and desire”.¹⁷⁴

Desire is an appetite, self-regarding, pleasure seeking. Love is other-directed and entails placing the good of the beloved above one’s own. True love motivates the lover to master self-regarding desire. Loving self-restraint, because it subordinates desire to concern for the other’s well-being, in turn renders desire potentially innocent. When the beloved returns one’s love, and when neither of the two lovers’ well-being is threatened by sexual embrace, then love and desire may both be fulfilled without harm. The opposition between love and desire is thus a productive one.¹⁷⁵

Here the autobiographical assumption of courtly lyric is evoked, that ‘true’ love—read as a unique, special kind of erotic love—carries an ‘inherent’ power capable of motivating self-restraint and masculine compliance to the demands of love. But this gives too much power to erotic love, and none to men mastering their self-defeating behaviours which is

¹⁷² Ganim, op. cit.

¹⁷³ Anthony Giddens, The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love and Eroticism in Modern Societies (Cambridge: Polity/Blackwell, 1992) p. 40.

¹⁷⁴ Reddy, The Making of Romantic Love: Longing and Sexuality in Europe, South Asia & Japan, 900-1200 CE pp. 44 and 1.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 44.

the lesson of courtliness. Is Reddy's oppositional duality between love and desire, a particularly masculine concept with its origins in men's historical treatment of women as sexual objects, devoid of sexual subjectivity, and linked with the discourse of men's uncontrollable sexual urges, the spontaneous ignition of male "hydraulic" erectile function? The moderating affects of love on desire suggests that love has magical transformative powers, taking the emphasis off the personal growth work required for love. Rather than desire being under the control of love, can love be the ignition of desire?

Reddy maintains that the reason for the opposition between love and desire by the troubadours, was their rebellion against the "uncompromising condemnation of all sexual pleasure" imposed by the Gregorian Reforms, a Christian movement implemented by Pope Gregory VII between 1050 – 1080 to reform church and society.¹⁷⁶ He argues that through their poetry and songs, troubadours "showed their listeners how they could quietly enjoy what they could not openly claim."¹⁷⁷ But many of the poems were dedicated to real women which, in the context of medieval gender politics, troubles Reddy's proposition, as does the autobiographical assumption and the dangers of adultery and pregnancy for women. His analysis seems to assume without question "sexual partnership" between *domnas* and troubadours, arguing it "became part of the emergent aristocratic code of conduct known as "chivalry"¹⁷⁸ Reddy does not differentiate between "song, poetry, and fiction"; the first two belong to the genre of lyric, whereas the third belongs to the genre

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 4.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 5.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 44. See chapter 5.

of chivalrous epic and romance with divergent masculinities that play out in quite separate medieval spheres.¹⁷⁹

For the theorists discussed above, who to some extent are representative of traditional historical scholarship, courtly love is charged with the erotic even as they register that it is under some kind of discipline or restraint. Some view the restraint as imposed by the implacable *domna*, while for others the discipline is imposed by rules of conduct at court. For example, here Maurice Valency downplays the erotic.

The romantic passion which these poets popularized was not, properly speaking, a passion at all. It was, from the beginning, a sort of cult, a creed which based the well-being of man upon the love of woman and exalted this love accordingly.¹⁸⁰

Valency dismisses “romantic passion” putting emphasis on “a sort of cult” to explain this type of love, which seems to take us closer to courtliness and ennobling love. Indeed, romantic passion is put in perspective if we take a step back from the sexuality historically associated with courtly lyric.

In *Courtly Love, the Love of Courtliness, and the History of Sexuality*, professor of German James A. Schultz questions “modern assumptions” about sexuality in courtly love and interrogates normative concepts of sexuality, the body and desire, maintaining that courtly love is not “sexually dimorphic”; it does not conform to modern ideas of

¹⁷⁹ See C. Stephen Jaeger, The Origins of Courtliness: Civilizing Trends and the Formation of Courtly Ideals 939-1210, The Middle Ages, ed. Peter Edwards, 38 vols. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985). Also Aldo Scaglione, Knights at Court: Courtliness, Chivalry, & Courtesy From Ottonian Germany to The Italian Renaissance (Berkeley, Los Angeles, Oxford: University of California Press, 1991).

¹⁸⁰ Maurice Valency cited in Alfonsi, op. cit., p. 428.

sexuality divided along the lines of either gender or heterosexuality.¹⁸¹ Indeed, he argues the features that differentiate the sexes that are important in modern life to many, “play no part in provoking [courtly] love.”¹⁸² This view is supported by Karma Lochrie’s study that heterosexual orientation as an identity “simply did not exist” in the medieval period.¹⁸³ And Johnathon Ned Katz maintains (after Foucault) in *The Invention of Heterosexuality* that heterosexuality as an identity was not part of Western concepts until the late nineteenth century.¹⁸⁴ Schultz contends “courtly love is provoked not by the (heterosexual) nature of the “desiring subject” but by the nobility and courtliness of the beloved object.”¹⁸⁵

Indeed, Schultz argues, “Courtly lovers are aristophiliacs: they fall in love with nobility and courtliness.”¹⁸⁶ For Schultz, courtly love’s erotic quality comes from courtliness, but to my mind there is a further element to courtly lyric that both reinforces and confuses its erotics; the discourse and practices of ennobling love. The ennobling quality of passionate love has been viewed as the restraining force on masculine desire, but in the absence of adulterous affairs how can the erotic element in lyric be explained? One explanation is that the erotic element came from ennobling love, a socio-political

¹⁸¹ James A. Schultz, *Courtly Love, the Love of Courtliness, and the History of Sexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006) p. xviii. Schultz’s research is based on Middle High German and Old French text but is relevant to lyric, as one of the original genres on themes of courtly love.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 170.

¹⁸³ Karma Lockrie cited in *ibid.*, p. xvii.

¹⁸⁴ Jonathan Ned Katz, *The Invention of Heterosexuality* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2007).

¹⁸⁵ Schultz, *op. cit.*, pp. 21 and 52.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. xx.

discourse that operationalised deference and respect for both women and men at court. In courtly lyric the women of Occitania's nobility were the subjects being addressed, the most notable being Eleanor of Aquitaine.¹⁸⁷

Interrogating the medieval forces at work in shaping men's behaviour combined with the social status and power of noblewomen are imperative to the politics of courtly lyric and its legacy to romantic love. Gaunt maintains that "[f]or a new genre to emerge, new conditions of production, new needs and drives leading to new ideologies, must exist."¹⁸⁸ How did the shift in priority from a masculinity founded on chivalric knights, to a new identity formed through the practice of courtliness' love come about? The "new conditions" were brought about through a civilising program implemented by the clerical class to reign in the violence of waring knights. It is the ideological shift from the values of warrior heroism to those of courtliness, and its impact on the creation of courtly lyric, that is the subject of the following two chapters.

Conclusion

The invention of courtly love's mystique as a unique, ecstatic amorous and transformational love was a construction of historical social and literary forces, not adulterous affairs between troubadours and *domnas*. Early literary and history criticism contributed to courtly love's mystique through interpretation of the *cansos*, by assuming the first-person subject position in lyric was autobiographical, as referring to actual

¹⁸⁷ Why women were the subjects of lyric is taken up in chapter 7 on the culture of Occitania.

¹⁸⁸ Gaunt, "Romance and other genres," p. 51.

adulterous affairs. Speculation about the identity of many of the adored *domnas* and the nature of their relationships with the authors of dedicated works, added to the intrigue. Representations of the *domna*'s apparent sexual/affective freedom increased its charisma, as did the submission of troubadours in their devotional amours to the lady, considered revolutionary and in stark contrast to the literature of antiquity.

Further to the above factors, contributing to courtly love's mystique was the influence of its nomenclature on theorisation, and the influence of Romanticism coinciding with the onset of medieval studies, that privileged romance in early interpretation of medieval literature. And significantly, masculine bias within culture and scholarship meant interpretation of lyric was filtered through exclusively male ideas about gender, power, women, sexuality, desire and love. The combination of all the above factors created a narrative that became central to the ideology of romantic love and the psycho-emotional erotics of falling in love, fuelling Western imaginations about the mysteries of romantic love for centuries.

However, as I will argue over the following chapters, the sensuality and physicality of lyric that gave vent to courtly lyric's eroticism was the effect of the rich, emotional and corporeal linguistics of ennobling love. In addition, that the extraordinary transformative power of the love we call 'courtly' was affected through the revolutionary civilising movement of courtliness, pivotal to the new intellectual and philosophical ideology spreading through Europe at the beginning of the Middle Ages. Unfortunately, courtliness has been overshadowed by chivalry which has historically been identified as the model for the 'gentle' man of romance, out of all proportion to historical reality, and is the subject

of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5

Chivalry & its Discontents

The type of gentlemanly and restrained masculinity, mixed with courage and physical prowess is commonly called chivalrous, particularly in romance culture as the epitome of the man for whom many heterosexual women yearn in their quest to fall in love. This chapter will survey several glamorous misconceptions about chivalry, the most glaring of which is its popular conflation with courtly love. In fact, chivalry must be distinguished and set aside from courtly lyric before the latter's contribution to the ideology of falling in love can be better understood. This, in turn, prepares the ground for my broader intention to refigure romantic love as performative. In this endeavour, it will be necessary to identify and categorise characteristic features of medieval romance, and to consider their weight and potential effects. These categories provide a framework for conceptualising and structuring social, cultural, intellectual and political aspects of the medieval period, all of which offer particular insights into the 'falling in love' narrative.

In this chapter then, I examine the various definitions of chivalry, and its French and English historiography. First, some contemporary understandings and representations of chivalry are explored. These understandings are contrasted with historical evidence of medieval knights' lives, demonstrating a slippage between fictionalised accounts of

chivalry and the harsh realities of medieval misogyny and brutality. I argue that chivalry, as it is understood in contemporary times, is thus an imagined masculinity and is in conflict with the mentality and subjectivity of relatedness. The chivalric tradition is currently being revisited in contemporary discourse and is implicated in the recuperation of misogynist ideology, the remaking of separate spheres for women and men and the hegemony and glorification of heterosexuality.

Imagining chivalry

In popular culture, chivalrous knights represent the epitome of romantic masculinity. In everyday language, ‘chivalry’ is a heavily gendered term attached to the desirably heroic, self-sacrificing gentleman who places respectful love, and the subject of his love, above all else. The chivalrous hero of contemporary popular fiction is polite and honourable, but also (thrillingly) brave, strong, and unflagging. The chivalrous male is thus a complex combination of both macho warrior and gentlemanly lover: elements captured by Dana Densmore in the title of her 1969 article “The Iron Hand in the Velvet Glove”.¹ The figure of the noble knight is emblematic of chivalry: a model of representation made familiar through tellings and re-tellings of the Arthurian epics and the topic literature that followed. The ‘knight in shining armour’ epithet is still used to refer to a man who is both lover and hero in equal part. The historical romance/drama set in the fifteenth century about Robin

¹ Dana Densmore, “Chivalry--The Iron Hand in the Velvet Glove,” No More Fun & Games: A Journal of Female Liberation 3 (1969).

Hood, played by Russell Crow, is a prime example.²

The word ‘knight’ is commonly charged with images of chivalrous men engaged in extraordinary feats of bravery, added to which is the emotional resonance of masculine honour, self-sacrifice, generosity, and the altruistic protection of women and the afflicted. We see this version of the chivalrous man in contemporary romance very clearly in the Oscar nominated 2001 American film *Kate and Leopold*³ (starring Meg Ryan and Hugh Jackman in the title roles). Leopold arrives in contemporary New York from the 1800s through a ‘wormhole’ wearing an officer’s uniform with a sword signifying martial skill and as the weapon of chivalrous duels. He knows how to ride and fight but he is also very well-mannered: he is eloquent, erudite, intelligent and urbane, always conducting himself with dignity and integrity.

Kate is economically independent and unattached, appearing cut off from her emotional life, she is aloof and disinterested in Leopold who is self-reflective, sensitive and caring; the central narrative sees Leopold rescuing Kate from her emotional isolation. This depiction of a gender reversal is evident in traditional readings of the *cansos*. What would traditionally be classified as chivalric qualities are demonstrated in one pivotal scene. Kate is walking in Central Park when her bag is snatched. Leopold witnesses the theft and quickly mounting ... yes ... a white horse, borrowed from one of the many tourist carriages available in the park, chases the thief and summarily returns the bag to Kate.

² While Robin Hood is an archer not a knight, the 2010 film is interesting for its portrayal of chivalrous masculinity adopted by a commoner who is fighting for a just cause. Robin’s relationship with Marion is also the epitome of the respectful gallant man who never takes advantage of his greater physical prowess.

³ *Kate and Leopold*, dir. James Mangold, 2001.

Kate, however, is unimpressed, and tells him she can fight her own battles, leaving Leopold confused and perplexed. We take it that since Leopold is from an earlier world, he is used to women swooning over such a 'chivalrous' act; he is out of place because he is out of time.

The heroine is presented as a challenge; Kate is a modern woman trying to survive. She is somewhat sceptical of romance, and is not predisposed to trust the 'hero' on face value. However, as the film progresses it is Leopold's capacity for self-reflection, his sensitivity and thoughtfulness, his courtesy and courtliness that gets her attention, and restores her jaded capacity to love. This courtesy is demonstrated through his home-cooked candle lit dinners on the terrace, doing the shopping, sleeping in a chair by her sickbed, his many acts of kindness and generosity, and his capacity for listening and responding to her needs. In these ways and more, Leopold typifies the attributes of courtliness that in contemporary culture is misunderstood as chivalry, as that particularly masculine combination of bravery, gallantry, and respect.

This working definition of chivalry is not limited to popular culture or the popular imagination, but is also evident in more scholarly literature. Hughes uses the term chivalry many times in her study to indicate "the kind of 'gentlemanly' qualities" expected of men from the medieval period through to "the Victorian upper classes."⁴ Illouz discusses chivalry as "a cultural system" whereby

[w]omen's social inferiority could ... be traded for men's absolute devotion in love, which

⁴ Hughes, op. cit., p. 49

in turn served as the very site of display and exercise of their masculinity, prowess, and honor.⁵

This combination of strongly masculinised devotion, fearlessness and competence is thus marked as nostalgic. In popular and scholarly discourses of romance, chivalry is marked as belonging to a bygone era: in particular, it is marked as having emerged from a social context of gender inequality in which a well-behaved man might offer a woman rescue from distress.

Reinforcing this nostalgia in *Rethinking Chivalry and Courtly Love* (2011), professor of literature Jennifer Wollock observes in her opening sentence that “[c]hivalry is still a magical word in Western civilization, but one that is still too often misunderstood”.⁶ Wollock’s reference to magical is a legacy from legendary medieval tales like *King Aurthur*, the *Lancelot* and *Tristan and Isuelt*, the didactic material of literature that recounts the exploits and loves of the chivalrous hero influencing romance for centuries to come. As we saw in the previous chapter on courtly love, the historiography of medieval literature and culture has often confused the ideal for the real. Through an examination of traditional chivalric and courtly texts as well as treatises and conduct books from Western Europe from the Middle Ages through the Victorian period to the present day, Wollock argues how chivalry and courtly love remain relevant to the contemporary global world; chivalry for its restraint on violence and courtly love for its challenge to traditional arranged marital practices. She maintains that chivalry and courtly

⁵ Illouz, op. cit., p. 8.

⁶ Jennifer G. Wollock, *Rethinking Chivalry and Courtly love*, (Oxford, UK: ABC-CLIO, 2011, p. 1), <<http://flinders.eblib.com/patron/FullRecord.aspx?p=678309> accessed 14.08.2017>.

love developed in tandem, one influencing the other, beginning with their origins in Provençal troubadour poetry. But as I will demonstrate in chapter 7, the place that produced courtly love, Occitania (now the proper term for the region), largely rejected chivalry in preference to courtliness, which I show in chapter 6 is the model of restrained courteous masculinity—so often conflated with chivalry—that first appeared in the lyric *cansos*. While Wollock argues for women to be included in chivalric and courtly sites, her work does not take account of the gender-stereotypes embedded in the ideology of chivalry, and how it maintains asymmetries of power favouring men over women that contributes to the normativity of heterosexuality, and the hegemony of patriarchy with its propensity to go to war.

Wollock argues against “reject[ing] the [chivalric] ideal ... as rotten to the core because of the conduct of the worst abusers.”⁷ But should it be read the other way around? Do the few exemplars of chivalry by some extraordinary male historical figures⁸ suggest a widespread movement adhering to its code of conduct? In *Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe* (first printed in 1999) medieval historian Richard W. Kaeuper warns against the historical tendency to romanticise chivalry;

however enduring its links with Western ideas of gentlemanliness ... we must not forget that knighthood was nourished on aggressive impulses, that it existed to use its shining armour and sharp-edged weaponry in acts of showy and bloody violence.⁹

⁷ Ibid., p. 6.

⁸ These exceptional knights will be addressed further on in this chapter.

⁹ Richard Kaeuper, *Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) p. 2, Richard Kaeuper, “The Societal Role of Chivalry in Romance: Northwestern Europe,” *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance*, ed. Roberta L. Krueger, third ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) p. 2.

Professor of medieval history David Crouch argues in *The Birth of Nobility* (2005) that the historiography of chivalry has been distorted by nostalgia due to the “early writers [who] cannot be entirely trusted as historians.”¹⁰ He examines historiographical debates on chivalry in England and France over four centuries—its defenders, its deniers and its skeptics.¹¹ Crouch divides debates into three broad categories; the first beginning in the early 1700s with “antiquarian scholars” he describes as “preaching chivalry”, the second period spanning 1884-1984 saw “chivalry in retreat”, at the end of which studies turned to secularism and courtliness.¹² This chapter deals with the second and third categories.

Contemporary understandings of chivalrous knights in many cases bears little resemblance to the real-life knights of medieval times. Let us turn, then, to examine historical and historiographical accounts of knightly deeds to see how they might expose such misunderstanding.

“No shine ... all armour”:¹³ knights & chivalry in the medieval era

While popular romance culture is peopled by uniformly gallant Arthurian-styled knights, the reality suggests a much more diverse category and behaviour. In northern French

¹⁰ David Crouch, *The Birth of Nobility: Constructing Aristocracy in England and France 900-1300* (England: Pearson/Longman, 2005) p. 1.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid., pp. 1 - 21.

¹³ During a conversation with a middle-aged woman about romantic love, she related a recent experience of what she called romantic love that had left her very disappointed; “I thought I’d finally met my knight in shining armour ... but there was no shine ... and he was all armour.” She gave me permission to use her comment.

literature of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries,¹⁴ Flori identifies many categories of knight, including:

the ‘self-employed’: kings, princes, great lords; vassal knights who, while lords themselves, served another within the limits of feudal duties; household knights living and serving in a lord’s court; and mercenary or stipendiary knights ... and urban knights.¹⁵

In itself, this diversity challenges the much more singular image of the knight in popular culture. However, the supposedly typical characteristics and deeds of the hero/lover knight point to a significant misconception in its association with the romance of courtly love.

The term chivalry has come to denote a set of ethical behaviours by men in the context of love and war. But in its original form it was a descriptor, the contemporary name during the Middle Ages identifying a fighting man on horseback, “men-at-arms or a group of mounted and fully armed fighting men”.¹⁶ Chivalry is a word from Middle English (c. 1100 – c. 1500) which, beginning in the eleventh century, translated to *chevalerie* in Old French/Occitan which meant a knight mounted on a horse (*cheval*). In classical Latin, chivalry was a term used during that period to describe all facets related to the operation of war making its meaning clear; today it is called the military.¹⁷

Chivalry has a long history. Its roots began centuries before the Middle Ages in an ancient German rite, symbolic of chivalry according to historian Léon Gautier in

¹⁴ Paterson, op. cit., p. 40.

¹⁵ Jean Flori cited in *ibid.*

¹⁶ Oxford University Press (Online), *Oxford English Dictionary*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), <<http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.flinders.edu.au/> accessed 20.04.2017.>.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

Chivalry.¹⁸ Gautier references Cornelius Tacitus (c. AD 56 – c. AD 120), one of the greatest Roman historians, in his explanation of the German rite or “ceremonial handing of arms”, whereby a young man in his early adolescence is handed a double-edged javelin and a shield; this rite carried on the German tradition of always being armed whilst also symbolizing the young man’s advancement from membership in his family to that of the republic and its protection.¹⁹ There was no equivalent rite of passage for young women.

There are discrepancies between definitions of chivalry, perhaps reflecting the stages in its gradual transition (over hundreds of years) from its origins as a German ritual to its later refinement under tutelage of the Church. Historian of the Middle Ages Maurice Keen observed that while chivalry may be “elusive of definition ... tonal rather than precise in its implications,” essentially it belongs to the knight on horseback and the world of war.²⁰ In “Chivalry and its Place in History” historian F. J. C. Hearnshaw reduced multiple definitions to four, variously explaining it as “a body of knights or horsemen equipped for battle”; the tenure of a knight’s service; “knighthood as a rank or order”; and as “the whole knightly service of the later middle ages, with its peculiar religious, moral, and social codes and customs.”²¹

Commonplace in the academic literature of chivalry is reference to its code of

¹⁸ Léon Gautier, *Chivalry*, trans. D. C. Dunning, ed. Jacques Levron, 1964 ed. (London: Phoenix House, 1884).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

²⁰ Maurice Keen, *Chivalry* (Newhaven: Yale University Press, 1984) p. 2.

²¹ F. J. C. Hearnshaw, “Chivalry and its Place in History,” *Chivalry: Its Historical Significance and Civilizing Influence*, ed. Edgar Prestage, The History of Civilization (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd., 1928) p. 1.

conduct, so I anticipated it would be in written form taken from the extant historical record. But this is not the case. The earliest attempts at writing a chivalric code came not from the medieval period as one would expect, but from two historians of the nineteenth century. The first was Charles Mills in *The History of Chivalry or Knighthood and its Times* in 1825 who Crouch says, “declared that chivalry was a social, not a military phenomenon, and he tried to identify its key features: generosity, fidelity, liberality and indeed courtesy.”²² The second historian was Gautier in 1884 who saw chivalry in terms of the correct conduct on the battlefield and as a masculine code for life;

[i]t would seem that the ancient code of chivalry can be reduced to ten commandments, like the Decalogue, as follows: 1. Thou shalt believe all that the Church teaches and shalt obey all her commandments. 2. Thou shalt defend the Church. 3. Thou shalt respect all weaknesses and shalt constitute thyself the defender of them. 4. Thou shalt love the country in the which thou wast born. 5. Thou shalt not recoil before thine enemy. 6. Thou shalt make war against the infidel without cessation and without mercy. 7. Thou shalt perform scrupulously thy feudal duties, if they be not contrary to the laws of God. 8. Thou shalt never lie, and shalt remain faithful to thy pledged word. 9. Thou shalt be generous, and give largesse to everyone. 10. Thou shalt be everywhere and always the champion of the Right and the Good against Injustice and Evil.”²³

Both historians had a significant impact on future medieval studies; Mills for his well-defined model of the historical progress of chivalry and Gautier for his thorough investigation into the literary and historical sources, as well as his attention to the eleventh and twelfth centuries, formative in the evolution of chivalry.²⁴

²² Crouch, *op. cit.*, pp. 10 - 11.

²³ Gautier, *op. cit.*, pp. 9 - 10. Gautier’s use of the word ‘infidel’ today resonates with the violence and horror of terrorism that has become part of our global reality, and indicative of a particular mentality of prowess and protecting ones’ honour almost exclusively associated with men. Crouch argues that “Gautier constructed his massive analysis of medieval chivalry on purpose to expose the moral bankruptcy of the secular Third Republic, and to provide the ammunition for a moral revolution in France”, p. 8.

²⁴ Crouch, *op. cit.*, pp. 10 - 12.

While historically it has been usual to think of chivalry in tandem with courtly love, Crouch states that chivalry did not become “a self-conscious medieval concept ... until the first quarter of the thirteenth century”²⁵ when the golden age of courtly love was the twelfth century, suggesting some factor other than chivalry was shaping the gentlemanly masculinity of troubadour poetry. Courtliness is the most likely contender and will be discussed later in this chapter. For now, let us journey back into the medieval knightly world of the eleventh century where, according to Paterson “[t]he knight was the medieval warrior par excellence.”²⁶

Lawlessness, violence and bloodshed were common. Many knights of this period were brutal, ruthless mercenaries only answerable to the highest bidder with little regard for women or respect for human life as Hearnshaw (who specialised in medieval history) recounts below in graphic detail. He gives a thorough, if gory, account of knights’ deeds, drawing on primary reference sources from the medieval period.²⁷ I quote him here at length so as not to dilute his illustration of the knight’s social standing. His depictions of their vicious atrocities and lawlessness are absolutely at odds with the imagined chivalrous knight so commonly portrayed in myth, literature and film.

The knight of the early Norman period—whether in England or on the Continent—was a purely feudal personage. He held a parcel of land on condition of military service; he was bound by the terms of his tenure to follow his lord into the field forty days each year, fully equipped, and adequately accompanied, at his own expense; further, he had to attend his lord’s court, pay certain reliefs and aids, submit to various rights as to worship, marriage, escheat, forfeiture, and so on. He was not an attractive individual. No one loved him. It is

²⁵ Ibid., p. 8.

²⁶ Paterson, *op. cit.*, p. 37

²⁷ Despite having “a conservative interpretation of the past” and overall a view of chivalry as a positive force for social service, Hearnshaw was not afraid to show the worse side of knightly behaviour, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/F._J._C._Hearnshaw, accessed 24.08.2017.

difficult, indeed, to say by whom he was most detested—by the King and the officials of the nascent National State; by the Pope and the clergy of the dominant Catholic Church; or by the commonality of the subject Third Estate of citizens, burgesses, peasants. The King found him an intolerable nuisance: he was useless and inefficient in war, turbulent and rebellious in peace, an insuperable obstacle to tranquility and good government. The Church suffered incalculably at his hands: he was greedy and aggressive, constantly on the alert to rob bishoprics and monasteries, defiant of ecclesiastical discipline and much inclined to secure control of the spiritual power by putting his creatures into holy orders. To the commonalty he was an unmitigated terror, a mere bandit, unrestrained by any consideration of mercy or of honour.

We have lurid records of his doings in the chronicles of the period; we have traditions of his behaviour in the *Chansons de Geste*; the Germans still perpetuate his memory in a proverb in which “knight” is synonymous with “tyrannical bully”—*Er will Ritter an mir warden*, “He wants to play the knight over me.”²⁸

As Hearnshaw’s account suggests, the medieval knight was far removed from the chivalrous knights in shining armour of romance fiction. While *Kate and Leopold’s* Leopold (to extend the example discussed above) is situated as ‘out of time’, contemporary people would most likely be shocked by the realities of medieval knighthood and its disconnection from the kinds of nostalgically imagined representation delivered to us on-screen. As British historian Richard Kaeuper confirms, “[t]he violence of the medieval world would astound a modern time-traveller.”²⁹

Although generally despised, knights were indispensable to the establishment of the economy of feudalism, and so the aristocracy ignored whatever foul means were used in securing their estates and fortunes. Entries taken from the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* describe the feudal knights’ brutality, and are quoted here by Hearnshaw:

[Knights] seized those persons that they thought had property and put them in prison and tortured them with unutterable torments; for never were martyrs tortured as they were. They hanged them up by the feet and smoked them with foul smoke; they suspended them by the thumbs or by the head and hung armour on their feet; they knotted strings about

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

²⁹ Kaeuper, “The Societal Role of Chivalry in Romance: Northwestern Europe,” pp. 98-99.

their heads and twisted them so that they went into the brain. They put them into dungeons in which were adders and snakes and toads and so killed them ...”³⁰

One extreme example is the knight known as Bevis of Hamton, Hearnshaw says:

[He] was almost purely sanguinary. His only considerable activity was homicide. After reading his story I calculated that, apart from the prodigious but untabulated slaughter which he effected in conjunction with others in four great battles, he himself, with his own hand—before he settled down, sated with adventure, in tranquil domesticity—had slain more than 650 human beings. ... Psychologically he is no more interesting than a modern machine-gun, or any other engine of indiscriminate slaughter.³¹

Knights did not confine their violence to other warring knights, but were equally brutal with the general populace. According to J. Flach knights were

brutal and cruel in their dealings with common folk, and free from all respect for women. ... In their savage outbursts of anger, or their cold ferocity, nothing restrained them; neither regard for weakness nor religious fear had any influence over them; they killed unarmed men without mercy; they burned nuns in their convents.³²

As these accounts make painfully clear, it is inconceivably misguided to mistake the figure of the medieval knight for the stock romantic hero. By the beginning of the eleventh century, feudal lords had achieved their objectives in establishing their wealth through violence, which had in turn become an intractable problem for the State, the Church and the general populace.

The castle became the only effective unit of power, its lord in a position to terrorize and exploit the surrounding peasantry and to wage private war on his neighbours.³³

The powerful feudal nobility with its inveterate army of knights, impenetrable in their many castles were at perpetual war with themselves and the state, posing a dangerous

³⁰ Hearnshaw, op. cit., p. 5

³¹ Ibid., p. 6.

³² J. Flach cited in Hearnshaw, op. cit., pp. 5 – 6.

³³ Paterson, op. cit., p. 38.

obstacle to peace, reliable commerce and unified governance.³⁴

Eventually the wanton violence and destruction perpetrated by knights was redirected from the service of feudal lords to the service of the church according to historian Wright.³⁵ Two initiatives of the church were instigated in controlling violence and establishing public order. The ‘Pax Dei’ movement—or the Peace and Truce of God—was instituted by the church in 989³⁶ and the first Christian Crusade was announced at the Council of Clermont in 1095, where “Christianity became militarized.”³⁷ Feudal knighthood was given a ‘make-over’ and renamed the ‘Order of Chivalry’, encoded as “an ethos in which martial, aristocratic and Christian elements were fused together”—at least in fiction (as we will see).³⁸ The combined power and authority of Church and State achieved some control over the populace by redirecting the knights’ destructive force into fighting the Holy War for the Christian ‘cause’, and “theologians rejoiced at their new ability to supplement the force of argument by the argument of force.”³⁹ Fighting for a just cause was exalted as an honourable occupation legitimised by the Church during the crusades, not just for knights but also for clerics. Hearnshaw says that “even popes began to don armour” and engage in fighting.⁴⁰

Not surprisingly, this redirection merely altered the rationale for violence without

³⁴ Hearnshaw, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

³⁵ Wright, cited in *ibid.*

³⁶ The ‘pax dei’ movement was first instituted in Occitania and will be discussed in chapter 6.

³⁷ Hearnshaw, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

³⁸ Keen, *op. cit.*, pp. 1 – 2.

³⁹ Hearnshaw, *op. cit.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

resolving what was an entrenched problem involving men's violence and the institutionalised use of force, now sanctioned with the fervour of religious justification. Moreover, the 'Order of Chivalry', as a supposedly honourable code of behaviour, was entirely voluntary. This no doubt impacted on the actual rate of compliance by feudal knights, whose modus operandi had up until that point been singularly free of any moral imperative. Any potential benefit this new code might have wrought was undermined by the knowledge that all members of the Crusades, upon their return, were given a "plenary indulgence"⁴¹ expunging all violations resulting from war. Running counter to the chivalrous ethics of faithful and trustworthy public service,⁴² plenary indulgences may have worked to excuse the level of unmitigated slaughter and violation. By the late medieval period, critics of knighthood complained that "it is not war that is being waged in this kingdom, it is robbery".⁴³

Chivalrous masculinity

Chivalry and knighthood are thoroughly gendered terms. Women are rarely—if ever—described as chivalrous; the chivalrous knight is strongly and thoroughly marked as masculine. In her study *From Boys to Men: Formations of Masculinity in Late Medieval Europe* professor of history Ruth Karras, notes that chivalry establishes masculinity as the converse of femininity, and that knights dominated other men "through violence and

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 10.

⁴² Keen, op. cit., p. 234.

⁴³ R. L. Kilgour cited in *ibid.*

through control of women.”⁴⁴ Karras argues this construction of chivalry has had an extraordinary influence on the making of men in the West, the culture of Western romance and the customs of chivalry.⁴⁵

While those customs are basic to our understanding of chivalry as honourable, gallant, and respectful—this construction is almost entirely imaginary; that is, historical texts portraying chivalry were fundamentally didactic, written as instruction for men on how to behave, not as depictions of reality. It was not until 1200 that the meaning of *chevalerie* began to change from a mounted warrior to incorporate “social and moral behaviour appropriate to noble knights.”⁴⁶ We know from prominent medievalist Elspeth Kennedy in “The Knight as Reader of Arthurian Romance” (1994), that knights read or listened to readings of chivalric Arthurian literature and the *chanson de geste*, the epic poems and songs⁴⁷ but that was well before the time of the troubadours which troubles a mutuality between chivalry and courtly love. Chivalric romances focused on a noble masculinity defined by heroic deeds, the worship of prowess, courage, and honour, not the romantic gentleman showing elegance of manners, the courteous, thoughtful, attentive and gracious form of masculinity we read in the troubadour’s meditations on love.

Thus far, this chapter’s focus has been on the early historiography of chivalry and the role of Christianity and its church in shaping chivalry’s ethos. Crouch argues this focus

⁴⁴ Ruth Mazo Karras, From Boys to Men: Formations of Masculinity in Late Medieval Europe (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003) p. 12.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁴⁶ Crouch, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

⁴⁷ Kaeuper, Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe pp. 30 - 31.

has declined during the twentieth century since a group of historians went in search of another source for noble conduct in the concept of ‘courtliness’ and its secular origins, concentrating on the time 1050-1220.⁴⁸ He argues Keen and Jean Flori were part of the break-away group and had a major influence on those that followed, the British historians John Gillingham, Matthew Strickland and Richard Kaeuper and the German professor and historian C. Steven Jaeger.⁴⁹ Chivalry is central to Gillingham’s, Strickland’s and Kaeuper’s work while Jaeger mentions it briefly. Kaeuper and Jaeger view knights as apart from clerical society and that clerks saw them as a hazard to law and order.⁵⁰ However, Jaeger covers a broader field in his study of courtliness, uncovering the standards of conduct appropriate to a medieval court which was the birth-place of courtly love. As this topic is of key importance to this study, Jaeger is the primary theorist.

The idealised, romanticised understanding of chivalry that holds sway today is a fiction. In *The Origins of Courtliness* (1985) Jaeger outlines how this fiction has been confused with fact:

The courtly lover of romance and lyric was a knight, and this literature originated in France. It follows that the ideals of behavior represented in courtly literature were those of the French feudal nobility and that ideals of courtesy are in their origins “chivalric.” *This assumption is a distortion of very large proportions.* It is as if we imagined that the values and ideals represented in western films must have originated with the cowboys onto whom they are projected and not with the authors and screenwriters who chose the cowboy as their embodiment.⁵¹

In the same way, stories of ‘the Round Table and the Free Palace’, amongst others, should

⁴⁸ Crouch, op. cit., pp. 8 and 21.

⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 23 - 27.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Jaeger, op. cit., pp. 113 – 14. Emphasis added.

not be read as any kind of historically accurate representation of something called chivalry. Rather, the stories present models of conduct that “the statutes of various chivalrous orders sought to evoke.”⁵² Keen argues this was more in pursuit “of contemporary myth-making” to conceal the character and activities of the actual knight errant—a kind of medieval public relations, or ‘spin’. Keen asks:

whether the late medieval cult of chivalry was not a sham, a tinsel covering disguising the ugliness of war and political strife and permitting the nobility to glamourize the misdeeds that were the basis on which, all too often, gentlemen as well as mercenaries maintained their estate.⁵³

Ostensibly, chivalry borrowed a courtly code of conduct, but courtliness and chivalry have far less in common than is often assumed. Chivalry did not borrow from courtliness so much as tack a courtly façade onto its warring practices, like a mask camouflaging the ‘macho’ culture beneath, or a wolf in sheep’s clothing. The political spin put on apparently honourably chivalrous behaviour appears in the pages of Old French romances alongside depictions of rape, constituting clear evidence of chivalry’s misogynist attitudes and brutality; as French medieval scholar and feminist Roberta L. Krueger maintains in *Women Readers and the Ideology of Gender in Old French Verse Romance* (1993), “[t]he female subject within romance is frequently objectified and appropriated by chivalric values.”⁵⁴ She describes Old French romances as “wager tales” where women are “pawns” in traditionally gendered plots, “initially menaced and then

⁵² Keen, pp. 191 – 192.

⁵³ Keen.

⁵⁴ Roberta L. Krueger, *Women Readers and the Ideology of Gender in Old French Verse Romance*, Cambridge Studies in French (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) p. xii.

amply compensated by chivalry” being returned to the role of “exemplary faithful wife.”⁵⁵ She states these romances “afford a view of chivalry at its worst and best.”⁵⁶

Jaeger encourages us to view medieval literature as didactic, as “a system of education and its curriculum as the most important element in the process of civilizing” designed to inculcate more honourable values in knights.⁵⁷ However, the depiction of sexual violence and rape against women for chivalric knights to ‘rescue’ them, calls into question its didactic value and highlights the underlying mentality of chivalry. As Gravdal argues, its didactic potential is eradicated, and it becomes voyeuristic entertainment for men predisposed to sexual violence.⁵⁸ She argues sexual violence is romanticised in Chrétien’s 6,808 verse poem of Yvain, in which 540 verses are devoted to a rape sequence. Labelling this poem as ‘educational’ is misleading as in fact it serves different (or additional) purposes as Gravdal explains:

[t]he poet has economically combined the ideological function of romance as a heroic glorification ... of chivalry with one of its didactic functions, which is to teach knights to protect ladies, while at the same time managing to exploit the erotic potential of sexual violence.⁵⁹

The historical and literary evidence suggests that when chivalry prevailed, men’s sexual identity was characterized as virility, as equivalent with embodied strength, vigour and physical force. As Kelly Oliver argues, “[f]rom Plato to Arnold Schwarzenegger

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 154.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Jaeger, op. cit., p. 8.

⁵⁸ Kathryn Gravdal, “Chretien de Troyes, Gratian, and the Medieval Romance of Sexual Violence,” *Signs* 3.17 (1992): p. 584.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 576.

paternal Eros has been figured as virility.”⁶⁰ Virility also has strong associations with valour and the mythology of invincibility. Oliver says:

The solidity and hardness of the virile body represents the control and containment of the body. Virile Eros is the love of what is fixed and unchanging, what does not flow or change. Virile subjectivity is the notion of a subject that is contained and in control of itself and its environment. ... The virile subject is the subject who relates to the world and others as objects of his knowledge and control.⁶¹

While Eros is a concept from antiquity it remains relevant today as part of a discourse on masculine sexual subjectivity. Chivalry reinforced a “Virile Eros” enmeshed with violence. Its romanticisation as an imaginary, idealised masculinity masks its historical relationship with misogyny, sexual violence, and rape. A closer look at the historical evidence suggests that chivalry is antithetical with sexual/affective love and relationships of equality. Indeed, practices of chivalry are consistent with a patriarchal system of institutional male domination,⁶² in which violence and rape form “the archetype of masculine sexuality.”⁶³ Notwithstanding its veneer of appropriate behaviour towards women, violent chivalry remains firmly embedded in patriarchal culture, reinforcing the inevitability of male aggression. Chivalry is representative of the connection between militarism and a patriarchal standard of masculinity. These connections need to be borne in mind when we imagine, or reimagine, chivalry.

The historical record gives ample testimony of most knights’ appalling violence

⁶⁰ Kelly Oliver, “Virility,” *Australian Feminist Studies* 12.26 (1997): p. 197.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 204.

⁶² Arthur Brittan, *Masculinity and Power* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989).

⁶³ Emmanuel Reynaud, *Holy Virility: The social construction of masculinity* (London: Pluto, 1983) p. 48.

and self-serving behaviour.⁶⁴ It is difficult to reconcile the actual knight of historical record with the noble character portrayed in medieval fiction and contemporary romance culture. There were however, some outstanding exceptions during the twelfth, thirteenth and fourteenth centuries according to Hearnshaw who lists “Godfrey of Bouillon, Tancred of Sicily, William Marshall, Saint Louis, the Cid, Sir Walter Manny, Sir John Chandos, Bertrand du Guesclin, the Black Prince, and the Chevalier Bayard” as distinguished by their noble character and conduct.⁶⁵ Apart from these notable exceptions, in reality the ‘ideal’ of chivalry never materialized.⁶⁶

There is ongoing debate regarding what century, and what importance, to ascribe the reputed “Golden Age of Chivalry”.⁶⁷ Even Gautier, whom Hearnshaw describes as “the greatest of all historians and apologist of chivalry,” cannot reconcile the barbaric behaviour of nobles and knights in other centuries “with any ideal of decency.”⁶⁸ Similarly, Henderson argues that scepticism is warranted regarding the genuineness of an honourable chivalry even at its inception:

nothing more striking distinguishes the Middle Age both from Classical Antiquity which preceded it, and the Modern Commercialism which supplanted it, than the enormous discrepancies that displayed themselves between its theories and its practices.⁶⁹

We know from the personal historical record of some knights that the literature did serve a didactic function, but these knights seem to have been the exception. In reality, chivalry

⁶⁴ There are many other aspects of the knightly class that are not addressed here because chivalry is the focus in the construction of a specific masculinity.

⁶⁵ Hearnshaw, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

⁶⁶ Peter of Boise and John of Salisbury cited in Hearnshaw, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

⁶⁷ See John Batty, Mr Henderson, G. G. Coulton, Froissart, and Joinville cited in Hearnshaw.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

was more a literary phenomenon than a lived experience. It is conceivable that the taint of ‘real’ chivalry’s misogynistic violence infects idealised, popular understandings of romantic love. Indeed, some courtly love theorists confuse chivalry with courtliness. Claude Fauriel defined troubadour poetry as “the expression of ideas, feelings and actions Chivalrous”⁷⁰ and Jean Frappier maintained,

[i]n reality the terms of courtly courtesy sometimes mean, in a broad sense, the chivalrous generosity, the elegance of worldly politeness, a certain way of life, and sometimes, in a sense more restraint.⁷¹

The slippage between fact and fiction crosses over into academia creating confusion between the two very different worlds of chivalry and courtliness.

It would seem, then, that what is presented to us as ‘chivalry’ today is far removed from its medieval germ. In fact, in contemporary usage, the term chivalry usually refers to an almost entirely imaginary model of masculinity. In her analysis of gender in medieval romance in *Questions of gender in Old French Courtly Romance* (2000), Krueger articulates its gender politics and its effects for women.

If knights are the self-appointed protectors of women and if they often decide women’s fate, only a select few are simultaneously powerful, honorable, and beloved. Violence between knights, jealousy between men over women, and verbal and physical abuse of women run as strong currents throughout romance. These destructive forces suggest that the physical superiority, sexual prowess, and moral perfection of the “ideal” romance knight were impossible to sustain in reality – and that women often bore the brunt of men’s resentment.⁷²

Under chivalry, the concept of honour is bifurcated by gender. Masculine honour is heroic and executed through the protection of feminine honour, which is premised on virginal

⁷⁰ Claude Fauriel (1846) cited in Alfonsi, op. cit., p. 427.

⁷¹ Jean Frappier cited in *ibid.*, p. 248.

⁷² Krueger, “Questions of Gender in Old French Courtly Romance,” p. 144.

and moral purity and put at risk through ‘other’ men’s carnal abuses; as Krueger puts it, “in the world of chivalric honor, the masculine hero is constructed in opposition to woman, upon whose objectification his honor depends.”⁷³ The extreme case of chivalric honour is still prevalent in many parts of the world in the form of ‘honour killings’ that are regularly reported on international news, when death is exacted on those women who refuse to live under the hegemony of patriarchy and the warped code of honour it proselytises in some parts of the world.

Chivalry’s modern revival

Since the medieval period, chivalry has been promoted by conservative forces as the hegemonic standard of masculinity to which men should aspire and as such, constitutes a bastion of male power, privilege and authority that continues to influence the thinking and behaviour of many men in contemporary life.⁷⁴ It appears chivalry is making a comeback in what is described as its “modern form” in a worldwide phenomenon where groups of women and men gather dressed in medieval garb—including armour for men—to reenact tournaments, jousting and sword-dueling. Chivalry is being revived through movements like “The International Fellowship of Chivalry-Now” with its own coat of arms and

⁷³ Krueger, op. cit., p. 99.

⁷⁴ Although chivalry may seem an anachronism in our contemporary world, we had a reminder recently of its on-going importance when Prince Phillip, as part of Queen Elizabeth’s Diamond Jubilee celebrations, was inducted into another chivalrous order; he was already a member of eight other chivalrous orders. While chivalrous orders are perhaps largely symbolic, tied to royal and aristocratic lineage and driven by conservative forces, their ethical, moral and mental precepts remain part of the social fabric giving rise to traditional concepts of manhood.

mission statement;

Out of the Shadows, we come as men of light, men of vision and men of honor – to replace what was lost, to fix what was broken, and renew a pervasive conscience long considered dead. ... Chivalry spells out certain ethical standards that foster the development of manhood. Men are called to be: **truthful, loyal, courteous to others, helpmates to women, supporters of justice, and defenders of the weak.**⁷⁵

Despite the rhetoric invoking a specific masculine ethos, the virtues espoused originated with courtliness and were appropriated by chivalry. The positive messages in the above quote for men claims to be pro-feminist, but reinforces gender differences by claiming an ethic particular to men, thereby delineating men and their role in life as separate and unique from women's; men as home-protectors, not home-makers. There are many webpages and self-help books on this subject.

Dean Joseph Jacques repeats this rhetoric in *Chivalry-Now: The Code of Male Ethics* by emphasising 'The Quest' as missing in men's lives.

An appropriate male ethic for the twenty-first century will never try to re-establish sexual or cultural dominance. Quite the opposite. It will contribute to a full and balanced partnership with women, and with other men as well. It calls for courtesy, and the self-discipline, energy and strength on which real courtesy is based. It calls for the willingness to use that purposeful combination for the good of others.⁷⁶

Again the central message appears to be positive in as much as it is encouraging men to be more attentive to the needs of others, but the coupling of the terms hero and quest invoke a particular type of heroic masculinity underscored by the warrior ethos. Central to this ethos is 'the masculine quest', the idea of a valiant mission that constructs men's lives differently to women's, as having a superior purpose. It seems without a quest men

⁷⁵ <http://www.chivalrynow.net/articles/chivalry.htm> accessed 24.08.2014. Bold emphasis in original text.

⁷⁶ D. Joseph Jacques, *Chivalry-Now: The Code of Male Ethics* (John Hunt Publishing, 2010) p. 8.

would be, disappointingly, just like women. Here Jacques romanticises a by-gone era when men could enact justice on their own terms, and deplores the culture that the civilising influences of courtliness helped make possible.

One cannot be a knight in shining armor anymore. Horses are not welcomed on most city streets, and carrying a sword or mace might get one arrested. Laws forbid citizens meting out justice on their own. The outrage we experience when we see blatant injustice is usually swallowed in moral impotence. The warrior ethic has been defiled by that of the merchant, investor and celebrity, who offer nothing of deep significance in return.⁷⁷

Other non-fiction books with similar messages are *The Deeper Quest: Our Guide to Knighthood*, *The Complete Gentleman: The Modern Man's Guide to Chivalry*, and *Warriors and Wildmen: Men, Masculinity, and Gender* which it says presents a direct challenge to the de-gendering focus of modern feminism. We even see in ads across media men in full shining knightly armour washing the dishes and bringing in the laundry; the message is clear, 'real' men can be domestic without becoming 'feminine'.⁷⁸ It would appear that the convention of chivalry is being revived, perhaps in an attempt to reclaim lost ground by reinforcing a distinctly masculine culture and narrative perpetuating gender roles and sexual binaries, reinforcing hierarchical relations of male dominance founded on masculine muscle used in the protection of women.

While chivalry's ethos encourages men to treat women well—a necessity born of men's abuse—it remains embedded in a conceptual system that values men and women differently. This form of chivalrous masculinity, and its feminine counterpart, permeate every page of a million bestseller from America called *The Rules: Time-tested secrets for*

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ <https://www.peopleschoicecu.com.au/> accessed 19.06.2015.

capturing the heart of Mr Right, which outlines 35 rules of manipulation in ‘hood-winking’ a man. The authors Ellen Fein and Sherrie Schneider advise women to pander to men’s power and control, saying “He *must* take the lead” in everything while women, in the so-called tradition of courtly love, should remain aloof like the *domna*, concealing their needs and wants to capture a man’s heart.⁷⁹ The solution offered by Fein and Schneider is that women should “Remember that if you want a good marriage, *The Rules* never really end!”⁸⁰ This model of gender relations is unsustainable and inevitably breaks down, unless women are prepared to let men take the lead in everything. Domestic violence is highly likely when men realise they are not really in control.

Moving beyond the sexual and gender politics of *The Rules* is crucial for a love revolution based on justice and equality. As hooks explains, men must let go of self-defeating macho behaviours and for women, the challenge is in understanding that chivalry is patriarchal masculinity masquerading as something else.

Looking for a man who can love is a search that can take ages. Most men are still clinging to the rewards and forms of power patriarchy extend to them for not being loving. Since patriarchy wounds men in the place where they could be self-loving by imposing on them an identity that denies their wholeness, in order to know love, men must challenge patriarchy. And there are men who are rising to the challenge. These are the men women want to find.⁸¹

These are men that women want to find, and are more likely to embody the masculinity of courtliness which is the subject of the following chapter.

⁷⁹ Ellen Fein and Sherrie Schneider, *The Rules: Time-Tested Secrets for Capturing the Heart of Mr. Right* (New York: Warner, 1995) p. 64.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 168.

⁸¹ hooks, *op. cit.*, p. 175.

Conclusion

Medieval chivalry is variously defined, and associated with activities as diverse as ancient German rites of passage, to essential combatants in the establishment of feudalism, to protectors of women and the afflicted, to devoted warriors in the Crusades for God. Knighthood is strongly associated with violent warring premised on feudal and religious allegiances. As a self-conscious form of honourable behaviour, it did not materialise until the thirteenth century which was in any case, tenuous. In contemporary life, its traditions are maintained within royal and aristocratic worlds through pomp and ceremony, and is associated with the ultra-conservative right-wing. While present day chivalrous orders are perhaps largely symbolic, they are nevertheless part of the social fabric giving rise to traditional concepts of manhood, and their ethical, moral and mental precepts are being rehabilitated in a modern revival of chivalry.

The modern construct of chivalry reinforces and maintains a discourse that men will be transformed by love. In the context of romance, what we understand as chivalry has more in common with courtliness than the activities of medieval knights. Courtliness is an ideology of urbanity, civility, and aestheticism. Regardless of their common influences, chivalry and courtliness can be understood as occupying two quite distinct discourses within romance literature. The first inhabits the idealised warrior world of 'epic' romance based on the masculine quest for the 'holy grail', tying love to feats of bravery and combat, reinforcing traditional forms of masculinity, hetero-patriarchy and gender-normativity. The second inhabits the 'courtly' world of lyric poetry based on the reconstructed male of courtliness that challenges traditional forms of masculinity, identity

and subjectivity. In essence, chivalry remains a model of opposition and war, not of love and relatedness; for that we must turn to the discourses and practices of courtliness.

CHAPTER 6

Courtliness & the 'Reconstructed' Male

Essential to the mystique of courtly love—and subsequently the ideology of romantic love—is the idea of masculine submission to women effected through a special and unique kind of love that transformed knights into the 'reconstructed' male of romance. But the reconstructed male cannot be dislocated from the larger context of civilising forces spreading throughout Europe during the Middle Ages. Masculine deference must be assessed as part of the civilising forces of courtliness at work in modifying male behaviour in the courtly environment. In this chapter, I undertake this task.

Courtliness takes us out of the historically heroic ethic of chivalry privileged as virile masculinity, into a set of moral principles for daily living designed to subvert the warrior mentality. Instigated as part of a solution to endemic violence and lawlessness, courtliness brought a humanising influence to the medieval period that challenged hegemonic knightly masculinity. Where the warrior impulse was to fight, with knightly honour tied to bravery, the courtly impulse is urbanity and diplomacy with honour and renown tied to the ability to get on with others. In the medieval courtly world courtliness was the cultivation of courtesy and virtues in the development of skills necessary to harmonious relations, good governance and peace. While chivalry is the domain of

traditional romances in the style of King Arthur and the heroic deeds of the knights of the round table, courtliness is the domain of the troubadours of the love *cansos* and the romance of falling in love.

This chapter examines courtliness, its origins, its medieval context and culture, and how its politics of deference shaped depictions of troubadour mentality, identity and subjectivity in the courtly *cansos* which in turn, endorsed the transformative power of courtly love. Courtliness embodies the attributes of medieval urbanity (courtesy and refinement of manner), self-control, self-reflection, emotional intelligence, good communication and attentive/affective care for others. It prepares the mentality for relatedness and love. But it is the love of friendship, or an attitude of unconditional positive regard for others that was the catalyst for the transformation of masculine subjectivity we see in courtly lyric, not an all-consuming sexual ardour for the *domna* as per the autobiographical assumption. As such, it is a model of medieval masculinity conducive to relationship that, although too often misunderstood, remains relevant to contemporary culture and romance—remembering the gentle prince and the transformed frog from fairy-tales. As bell hooks argues in *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity and Love* the reconstruction of masculinity is fundamental in changing the gender politics of sexual love.¹

¹ bell hooks, *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love* (New York: Washington Square Press, 2005).

Courtliness as a civilising movement

The literature on courtliness is vast, and increasing in modern medieval scholarship. This study is restricted to the historiography of the period 939-1200 with emphasis on Occitania where courtly love was born and courtliness was formative in the creation of the ‘reconstructed’ male of romance. This was principally evident in the love *cansos* but also other lyric forms by the troubadours. The Oxford English dictionary defines courtliness as “[t]he quality of being courtly; courtly civility or ‘grace of mien’; courtly elegance of manners”; mien from Old French, meaning “[t]he look, bearing, manner, or conduct of a person, as showing character, mood etc.”² Courtliness stemmed “from the Latin *curialitas* and *curia* meaning “senate” or “meeting”” which speaks of governance, formality and ritual.³

Definitions of courtliness in historiography, despite pertaining to different geographical areas in Europe, all highlight the attainment of interpersonal skills in the process of self-control, refinement and sophistication. Professor of French Daniel E. O’Sullivan and associate professor of Italian, Laurie Shepard give a succinct definition of courtliness in context: “[a]gainst the medieval social landscape of daily violence, courtliness denotes a civilizing concept whereby behaviour in a potentially explosive center of political and social ambition – the court – becomes ritualized.”⁴ Scaglione says

²<http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.flinders.edu.au/view/Entry/43243?redirectedFrom=courtliness#eid>, accessed 07.06.2017. The entry for courtliness contained a note: “This entry has not yet been fully updated (first published in 1893).” There was no entry in the OED for *curialitas*.

³ Daniel E. O’Sullivan and Laurie Shepard, eds., Shaping Courtliness in Medieval France: Essays in Honor of Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2013) p. 1.

⁴ *Ibid.*

courtliness is “a somewhat vague yet powerful ideology ... in the form of a common mentality” designed to produce public order, civil servants and bureaucrats.⁵ Jaeger argues that courtliness was

aimed at taming the reckless assertiveness of the European feudal nobility, at limiting its freedom in manners and morals, at restraining individual wilfulness, and at raising this class from an archaic and primitive stage of social and civil life to a higher stage, imbuing it with ideals of modesty, humanity, elegance, restraint, moderation, affability, and respectfulness.⁶

Kay’s definition focuses on the specifics of courtly behaviour as “the set of social qualities and skills required for distinction at court, and which include refined speech, elegance of manner and dress, cheerfulness and deference”.⁷ With its combination of classical ideals, humanism, aesthetics and cultivation of the mind, courtliness marked the genesis of the Renaissance. Indeed, Lazar argues that the passage of time between the eleventh and twelfth centuries saw a significant “transformation of society and mentality, a rearrangement of ethical and aesthetic values, and a qualitative change in attitude toward life and its earthy pleasures.”⁸ In the broadest sense, courtliness was a didactic, humanist, socio-political and aesthetic movement that restrained violence and civilised boorish mentality in the cause of public order and good governance.

However, defining what constitutes a medieval court is not as simple as outlining courtliness, although each necessarily (re)shaped the other. This (re)shaping is reflected in professor of French Virginie Green’s characterisation of court/liness as “the imaginary

⁵ Scaglione, *op. cit.*, pp. 6 and 54.

⁶ Jaeger, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

⁷ Kay, “Courts, clerks, and courtly love,” pp. 84 - 85.

⁸ Lazar, “*Fin’amor*”, p. 61.

space of social rituals for medieval culture.”⁹ Walter Map, a twelfth century English courtier in the court of Henry II asked, “What is the court?” answering “I could say that I am in a court, that I speak of the court, but God knows what the court is” although he notably equated them with Hell.¹⁰ This comparison with Hell troubles the medieval court of the contemporary imagination as a refined cultured place but like the medieval period, it has also been romanticised. Professor emeritus of French Peter Haidu gets under the gloss of courtliness to reveal what he maintains is the oppressive materialism of centralised political power in courts “transformed into institution and building: Versailles, Matignon, the White House ... [w]hat is civilization? ... other than capitalism.”¹¹ Haidu’s transhistorical view goes to violence which remains rapacious he argues, but under the control of state ideology. While the physical structures of modernity are fixed representations of power, medieval courts were not permanent constructions but groups of people often on the move, as Burns explains, courts are

defined less by physical location or architectural structure than by the people who comprise it: the assembled knights and ladies, seneschals, squires, retainers, clerks, and servants. One of their key functions is to provide the audience for court entertainment ...¹²

These court attendees were obliged to practice courtliness or be considered ineligible for

⁹ Virginie Greene, “Humanimals: The Future of Courtliness in the *Conte du Papegau*,” Shaping Courtliness in Medieval France: Essays in Honor of Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner, eds. Daniel E. O’Sullivan and Laurie Shepard (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2013) p. 26, Maxine Greene, “Book Review: Chapter 10: Epistemology and Educational Research: The Influence of Recent Approaches to Knowledge,” Journal of European Studies 34.1-2 (2004).

¹⁰ Peter Haidu, “A Perfume of Reality? Desublimating the Courtly,” Shaping Courtliness in Medieval France: Essays in Honor of Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner, eds. Daniel E. O’Sullivan and Laurie Shepard, vol. Gallica (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2013) p. 28.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 30 - 32.

¹² E. Jane Burns, “Performing Courtliness,” The Oxford Handbook of Women and Gender in Medieval Europe, eds. Judith M. Bennett and Ruth Mazo Karras (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) p. 400.

success at court.

Central to this chapter then is the concept of civilisation, a concept essential to understanding how the self-consciousness of the Western mind developed.¹³ Broadly speaking, an ethical set of principles for living has been part of the development of self-consciousness since the time of Plato (died 348? BC), who stressed ethics as the heart of learning.¹⁴ Jaeger argues the ideals of Cicero (106 - 43 BC) influenced the courtliness that emerged in German Imperial courts and cathedrals where a curriculum based on an ethic of state service was established, drawing on classical humanism incorporated with traditional Christian values.¹⁵ The emphasis on ethics and proper conduct in education was present in the Carolingian Renaissance from the late eight century through the ninth century in France where, Scaglione argues, a court was regarded as an environment for personal improvement as well as tutelage.¹⁶ During the mid-tenth to the mid-twelfth centuries, the civilising process continued at pace in Germany and France through the advent of outstanding teachers in royal courts who also influenced tutoring in cathedral schools: the primary objective was producing worthy candidates for careers at royal and aristocratic courts.¹⁷

Prior to the 1980s, the prevailing explanation for the civilising process and the

¹³ Norbert Elias, The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations, trans. Edmund Jephcott, ed. Johan Goudsblom and Stephen Mennell Eric Dunning (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing, 1994).

¹⁴ Scaglione, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

¹⁵ Jaeger, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

¹⁶ Scaglione, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

ethical conduct permeating medieval courtly literature had been based on the work of the renowned German sociologist Norbert Elias.¹⁸ The civilising process, Elias maintained, was largely the result of changing economic and trading conditions requiring greater cooperation, effecting social cohesion and “interdependencies”.¹⁹ In later work he recognised the earliest accounts of manners were from the courts of Provence and Italy, but does not use the term courtliness.²⁰ Instead he refers to “courtization ... the increasing constraints – particularly self-constraint”, the process by which the standards of aristocratic “courtly-romantic tendencies” gradually infiltrated other sectors of society.²¹ Jaeger and Scaglione, two major scholars on the origins and politics of courtliness, reference Elias in their texts for his contribution to our understanding of the process of civilization, while each expressed differences about where and when the beginnings of the major transformation took place. In contrast to Elias, Jaeger claims the deliberate instruction in courtliness was the actual mechanism driving the process of civilization that in turn, produced social cohesion. Commencing in 939 in Germany, he argued courtliness was being practiced quite some time before its appearance in the courtly literature of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.²² Jaeger maintains that whereas

Elias sees courtesy as a product of certain social changes, a response to conditions. I maintain just the contrary: courtesy is in origin an instrument of the urge to civilizing, of the forces in which that process originates, and not an outgrowth of the process itself.²³

In other words, courtly society was created out of the civilising forces of courtliness and

¹⁸ Elias, *op. cit.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Norbert Elias, *The Court Society*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983).

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 216 - 17.

²² Jaeger, p. 173.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

its sanctions for non-compliance, that increased cooperation, not the interdependencies created by increased trade. Basing his argument on chronology, Jaeger asserts that the civilising process and the subsequent rise of courtly ideals pre-dates events Elias draws on by more than a century.²⁴ Although Scaglione acknowledges Jaeger's contribution in stressing the significant impact of "the earlier curial ethos of imperial Germany" on its development,²⁵ he maintains that courtliness was being established "at the same time or even earlier than in Germany, in the Flanders, northern France, Normandy, and Anjou".²⁶ Scaglione stresses that

Jaeger fails to do justice to the uniquely creative power of the Provençal and French poets of love lyric and romance. ... The fact remains that the tradition of courtesy and courtly love spread throughout the western lands under the impact of twelfth-century French literature.²⁷

Recent reassessments in medieval scholarship resulting from advances in archaeological methods have prompted a re-evaluation of texts. Significant new theoretical propositions regarding the development of European civilization have altered the chronology of events, and perceptions of the period, according to medieval historians Jennifer Davis and Michael McCormick.

Many features that distinguished the full flowering of medieval civilization in the eleventh and later centuries had in fact begun to develop two or three hundred years earlier than previously perceived. That forces us to rethink the place of the early Middle Ages in the long-term development of the European civilization. Today the early Middle Ages appear not so much as a dark night after the fall of Rome, but as a long morning whose creative powers laid down the parameters and future directions of European economic, cultural

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Scaglione, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 68.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 61.

and political development.²⁸

Following these re-evaluations, medievalists now think that change was more gradual than sudden resulting from long-term social and cultural developments throughout Europe beginning in the early Middle Ages.²⁹ Revisions of the timing of civilising effects on European culture seem to support Jaeger's thesis on courtliness.

Given historical evidence of courtliness practices in both Germany and northern France, this raises the fascinating question as to why Occitania was the birth-place of courtly love lyric, and whether that was related to the power of its aristocratic women.³⁰

Re(s)training destructive emotions

Along with changes to mentality came control of the emotions. The latest research in the neurosciences indicates the inextricable interconnection between thinking and feeling, between thought and affect, showing that mental processes and emotions are a unity, they work together. Mastery of destructive impulses and emotions in the eleventh and twelfth centuries and beyond was an elemental part of developing the intellect and ethical behaviour, examples of which we see in the courtly love *cansos*. In their creative works, the troubadours were simultaneously reflecting the courtly culture around them, as well as using their songs and poems as didactic material in the social discourse of ideas about

²⁸ Davis, Jennifer R., and Michael McCormick. "The Early Middle Ages: Europe's Long Morning." *The Long Morning of Medieval Europe: New Directions in Early Medieval Studies*. Eds. Jennifer R. Davis and Michael McCormick. Hampshire, England and Burlington, USA: Ashgate, 2008. P. 1.

²⁹ Ganim, op. cit., p. 162.

³⁰ This question is addressed in chapter 7.

urbanity, manners, and emotions, particularly the complexities of love in its many forms, its joys, its sorrows, its triumphs and its failings.

Historian Barbara H. Rosenwein argues that despite some qualifications the Middle Ages is the direct forebear of modern Western civilization.³¹ Rosenwein maintains history is incomplete without the study of the role of emotions, something historians have always been interested in but without focus or direction.³² As the German historian and researcher of emotions, Ute Frevert puts it, “[e]motions are not only made by history, they also make history.”³³ The study of courtliness and its mentality has much to reveal about its part in the development of human emotions.

The Dutch historian Johan Huizinga famously likened the medieval period to the “childhood of man [sic]”, a period in which “[e]very experience had that degree of directness and absoluteness that joy and sadness still have in the mind of a child.”³⁴ This was the emotional world that the discourses and practices of courtliness sought to pacify, moderate and educate along with the help of medieval romance literature. Courtly lyric portrays a complex set of emotions consistent with the ethics and values of courtliness that, per Rosenwein’s view, constitute an emotional community:

Emotional communities are not constituted by one or two emotions but rather by constellations—or sets—of emotions. Their characteristic styles depend not only on the emotions that they emphasize—and how and in what contexts they do so—but also by the

³¹ Barbara H. Rosenwein, Emotional Communities in the early Middle Ages (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2006) p. 2.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 1.

³³ Ute Frevert cited in Illouz, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

³⁴ Johan Huizinga cited in Rosenwein, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

ones that they demote to the tangential or do not recognize at all.³⁵

The royal and aristocratic courts of Aquitaine, Poitiers, Auvergne, Champagne, Artois, Picardy and many others that produced courtly lyric had a long history of courtliness that shaped their social and emotional communities.

Performing courtliness involved more than just being polite, if undertaken with sincerity it effected a thorough transformation in thought, feeling and character. Jaeger argues the importance placed on emotional qualities in German courts is evident in the preference for young men's "personal qualities, *elegantia morum* [elegance of manners], *suavitas morum* [sweetness of character], and *nobilitas morum* [nobility of character]," that were more highly valued for court service than just literateness.³⁶ Referring to the work of Giselle de Nie, Rosenwein explains how important didactic texts were in cultivating emotional intelligence: "texts were memorized, made part of the self, and 'lived with' in a way analogous to communing with a friend."³⁷

However, the cultural significance of courtliness has been undermined through romantic appropriations. Jaeger separates the ethical stimulus behind courtliness, and its development during the Middle Ages, from the distorted idealism about the period as characterized by Victorian romanticism. He argues the fairy-tale quality of the 'chivalric' Arthurian romance was a fanciful mutation obscuring our understanding of the actual values and ideals that produced medieval courtesy and its civilising influence. Arthurian

³⁵ Rosenwein, op. cit., p. 26.

³⁶ Jaeger, op. cit., p. 214.

³⁷ Giselle de Nie, *Studia Patristica* 35 (2001): 52 – 64 cited in *ibid.*, p. 25.

romance expressed a chivalric ‘ideal’ that, unlike courtliness, in the context of the day was never realised.

Jaeger maintains chivalric and courtier narratives represent two opposed views of courtliness³⁸ in romance and epic literature. While chivalry’s primary occupation was militarism, courtliness was

the civilizing process that preceded the flowering of courtly literature in the twelfth century and introduced the *ethical ideals that have come to be called “chivalric”*. *The term is misleading* if taken to refer to the class in which the ethical ideals of the chivalric knight in romance originated. These were native to another social class: the educated members of courts, the curiales who served kings, bishops, and secular princes, and the entire class of men who aspired to that position.³⁹

Over the period spanning the tenth to the thirteenth centuries, the warrior mentality of the class of feudal knights became subordinate to the ethical and civil virtues of the “educator/statesman” through the gradual process of education and instruction of which romance literature was a part.⁴⁰ In contrast to chivalry that reinforced prevailing institutions courtliness disrupted the patriarchal system of entrenched male violence.⁴¹ Scaglione states, romance literature is “[a]n impressive body of medieval literature ... deeply pervaded by a sense of courtliness, chivalry, and courtesy.”⁴² He explains how the ideology of courtliness was the catalyst for “three separate yet coexistent codes: (1) the courtly code governing “lyric poetry together with the romances,” (2) the chivalric/heroic narrative dealing with “epic tales” and (3) “the chivalric/*Courtois*” which were “treatises

³⁸ Jaeger, op. cit., p. 236.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 4. Emphasis added.

⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 12 – 13.

⁴¹ Krueger, Women Readers and the Ideology of Gender in Old French Verse Romance p. 154.

⁴² Ibid., p. 6.

on conduct and manners or etiquette.”⁴³ The epic is the narrative of the chivalrous knight discussed in the previous chapter which, the feminist medievalist Thelma Fenster argues, offers models of masculinity coupled with anger, aggression and non-reflection.⁴⁴ In contrast, the lyric focused on love to the exclusion of fighting and according to Scaglione, created

an opposition between epic and lyric, with the romance standing in between and trying to harmonize the two in a difficult, problematic, and precarious balance. ... [I]n the Middle Ages the culture of courtliness and courtesy had managed to combine the two ethics: the knight was both a brave warrior and an artistic lover. Chrétien de Troyes’s *Erec et Enide* and *Yvain* confronted the problem inherent in this uneasy association from the two opposite ends: the ideal noble knight must be a great fighter to be a worthy lover, but can hardly be both at the same time. Erec forgot his knightly duty for too much dallying with Enide, whereas, conversely, Yvain forgot his wife while pursuing his knightly adventures. *The paradox was evident and dramatic: we men must fight to qualify for love, yet we cannot love while we fight.* By the very nature of the genre, lyricists chose to concentrate on loving, always subsuming the fighting qualities.⁴⁵

In choosing love over fighting, the troubadours dispensed with the heroic warrior discourse, instead focussing on the internal struggle in mastering and transforming the instincts and impulses upon which the warrior relies.

Courtesy became the currency for negotiating the courtly realm and adherence to the courtliness code of conduct was compulsory for those wanting to attain recognition, social status and advancement at court, including the troubadours. All members of court, regardless of gender, were obligated to address each other with the kind of love underpinning courtesy. It was the performance of a formal etiquette showing respect and care for the individual through the practice of civility. Unlike chivalry which operated

⁴³ Ibid., p. 7.

⁴⁴ Thelma Fenster, “Why Men?,” *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages*, ed. Clare A. Lees, vol. 7, *Medieval Cultures* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1994) p. ix.

⁴⁵ Scaglione, op. cit., pp. 11 – 12. Emphasis added.

outside the courtly environment and relied on the honesty of individual men to practice it, the impetus to practice courtliness was simple; it was mandatory for anyone wishing to succeed at court, “restraint, moderation, and self-control became requisite qualities for entry into court service.”⁴⁶ Jaeger explains the social role of courtliness:

By lavish displays of courtliness and talent the courtier lays down his credentials and his qualifications for court service. ... ambitious *curiales* stage displays of modesty, affability, restraint, and gentleness, in order to insinuate themselves cunningly into the favour of princes. This is the perspective from which courtier narratives ordinarily view courtly attainments: as means of entré, as instruments of ambition. The calculation behind courtly performances need not even be concealed, and both the performance and calculation can be perceived as objective testimony to the courtier’s merit, much the way our students’ grades are accepted by potential employers who do not sniff dubious motives behind a young man’s urge to excel.⁴⁷

Situating courtliness and its social role within the history of civilization shows its fundamental importance in the will to create a better world.

Until quite recent times, *courtoisie* was considered representative of a social reality understood to have erupted somewhat suddenly and unexpectedly in Occitania, in tandem with courtly love literature.⁴⁸ This apparent spontaneous eruption of civilised male behaviour towards women in courtly lyric—traditionally considered the transformative effect of erotic love—was the catalyst for its mythology. Some historians read the civil tenets of courtesy and courtly love as an indication of an *existing* social reality and so sought explanations for that civilising effect in an adulterous love between the *domna* and the troubadour. But as per Jaeger, the “aesthetic-ethical world” expressed in courtly

⁴⁶ Jaeger, *op. cit.*, p. 238.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

literature is not a pathway into understanding the medieval social world but rather an obstruction to uncovering that context.⁴⁹ Rather than reflecting a social reality, courtly literature was part of the didactic instruction of courtliness that shaped courtly society. As Jaeger states, “[i]n the courtly period the urge to representation allied itself with forces of civility, urbanity, and refinement.”⁵⁰ While courtliness was not initiated with the specific intention at improving the lot of women, in her article *Did Women Have a Renaissance?* Kelly states that “humanism represented an advance for women as well as for the culture at large.”⁵¹

Both Jaeger and Scaglione see courtliness, its curriculum and system of education, as the fundamental component in the course of civilising. It began with the courtier class of feudal nobility positioned between the secular world and the religious realm.⁵² Courtiers spread courtesy and erudition to the class of warriors through a civilising campaign disseminated through a curriculum of education, inculcating social and political etiquette, and medieval courtly literature was its articulation. Over time, courtliness was integral in altering the bases of social relations within the courtly environment, and eventually transformed the medieval world through its spread to the lay classes.⁵³

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. x.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 3.

⁵¹ Kelly, op. cit., p. 35. While Kelly is referring to the Renaissance that followed the medieval period, her comments on the benefits of humanism for women are relevant to the medieval period in the context of courtliness.

⁵² Scaglione, op. cit., p. xii.

⁵³ Jaeger, op. cit., p. 31.

The ‘reconstructed’ male and fears of emasculation

The tensions between chivalry and courtliness played out during the medieval period in various forms—tensions that continue within contemporary culture and its representations of romance—perhaps indicating the degree of resistance against relinquishing heroic masculinity. One example of these tensions from twelfth century France is a satirical poem called the “Love Council of Remiremont” where nun’s are represented as debating who make the better lovers, clerics or knights;

Union with clerics, this is our Rule . . .
We know them to be affable, pleasing and lovable,
In clerics there is courtliness and honesty.⁵⁴

In fact, during the medieval period, there was no difference in the medieval lexicon⁵⁵ between the term courtliness and chivalry, as in essence, both were the performance of courtesy or *cortezia* within particular contexts, courtliness within the court, and chivalry within the realm of knights. But since then courtliness has been subsumed under the more ‘manly’ notion of chivalry as a hedge against effeminacy. The preference for the more

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 158. Nuns debating the merits of men as lovers is contrary to our contemporary understanding of their calling. Whether the poems subject matter reflects historical reality, or is meant to be taken ironically is unclear and troubled by the final sentence in the following historical account of the poem offered for clarification, and for its view of women in medieval life.

“The ‘Concilium Romarici Montis’ is an account in Latin verse of a mock church council said to have been held at Remiremont (Romarici Mons), not far from Nancy and Strasbourg in eastern France. The Council was convened by the nuns of the royal abbey of Remiremont, a religious community whose members were recruited from the nobility. The abbey had already been in existence for about five hundred years when the poem was composed in the twelfth century.

The subject of the Council is Love; accordingly the opening ceremonies include a reading from Ovid’s *Ars Amatoria*. A Lady Cardinal (Cardinalis Domina), decked in spring flowers, presides over the deliberations, which quickly turn into a formal debate on the relative merits of the knight (miles) and the clerk (clericus) as lovers. Representatives of the two factions of ladies extol their candidates and disparage the opposition (at quite unequal length; the women who favor the clerici are given much more than their fair share of time). Finally a vote is taken, and the Cardinalis Domina declares the unsurprising result: henceforth only clerks are to be eligible as lovers for the ladies of Remiremont. Whoever fails to honor this decision is solemnly excommunicated.” <http://faculty.georgetown.edu/jod/pascalint.html>, accessed 24.03.2016.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 16.

masculine term of chivalry saw the gradual conflation of courtliness under chivalry's banner through the historical romanticisation of knighthood and the gallant gentleman.

Courtliness had many detractors who feared men would become effeminate through the demise of chivalry. The fear that men, through adoption of 'courtly' ideals and practices, would relinquish some warrior element considered 'essential' to their masculinity is endemic in patriarchal discourses of masculinity, both past and present—and perhaps with good reason, as Jaeger so eloquently explains here.

The ultra-conservative mentality always equates restraint with cowardice and sees heroism and manhood threatened by the advance of civilization. Wit, charm, learning, and a fierce and biting eloquence are gifts that do not serve a man in wreaking revenge. Just the opposite: *they create a rift between thought and deed which he can no longer cross. Insight does not generate the spark of action; it only produces an urge to search for further confirmations of the need to act.* ... The rebellion against courtesy sought to pull the warrior class back into the primitive ethical atmosphere of the heroic epic at a time when that ethic had shot its bolt.⁵⁶

References to concerns over soft, effeminate men at risk of losing their masculinity is evident in literature from the early medieval period onwards according to professor of English Michelle M. Sauer in *Gender in Medieval Culture*.⁵⁷ We also see this in relatively recent scholarship: “The chivalry of the Crusades” says Gautier “may well appear rough and barbarous. In truth it is healthy and manly. It made of France a great race whose glories have filled the world.”⁵⁸

But this ideal of chivalry is quite different from the one in our contemporary

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 195 – 96. Jaeger gives ample evidence of medieval attitudes and fears over the emasculation of men in his chapter titled “Courtliness in the Chronicles”. Emphasis added.

⁵⁷ Michelle M. Sauer, *Gender in Medieval Culture* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015).

⁵⁸ Gautier, p. 9.

imagination epitomised by the courtly—read gallant—gentleman of romance, who according to Gautier, has already been degraded by a less virile chivalry. Gautier protested that the heroic virtues embodied in fighting for the good, by the thirteenth century gave way to an emasculated knight softened by the luxuries and manners of court life, where the effeminising etiquette and social instruction from the romances of the Round Table took over from the robust teaching of the *Chanson de Geste*.⁵⁹ According to R. William Leckie, fighting was seen as the duty of the European nobility by the conformist clergy and other medieval chroniclers who were threatened by the prospect of peace and its influence on their morality.⁶⁰

Opposition to courtliness from conservative factions was fierce. For some, courts were thought of with contempt, equated with immorality and depravity and the softening of men, as opposed to the masculine feats and trials of the battle field.⁶¹ This sentiment was expressed by Alexander Neckham writing at the beginning of the thirteenth century when he asked; “[w]hat shall we say to the fact that many knights besmirch their lives by imitating the damnable courtliness—or should I say putrid scurrility—of courtiers?”⁶² Scathing attacks on the effects of courtliness also came from the English chronicler, Ordericus Vitalis (1075 – c.1142):

These effeminate men, these dirty libertines who deserve to burn in hell-fire, rejected their warrior customs and laugh at the exhortations of the priests. They spend their nights at banquets of debauchery and drunkenness, in futile talk, playing dice and other games of

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

⁶⁰ R. William Leckie cited in *ibid.*, p. 177.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Alexander Neckham cited in Jaeger, *op. cit.*, p. 222.

chance. ... They take pains to please the women with all kinds of lasciviousness. ... Instead of covering their heads with caps they wear ribbons, and their external appearance is the sad reflection of their souls.⁶³

Effeminacy was also equated with homosexuality with phrases like “unmanned man” (*vir evirate*) and “effeminate man” (*homo effeminate*)” used to vilify and condemn.⁶⁴ Fears over the erosion of a distinctly heroic manliness were supported by the dress code of courtliness.

One’s courtly appearance had to reflect refinement and graciousness of manner, so the hard materials of the knights armour gave way to the soft fabrics and decoration in keeping with the performance of courtliness; bowing, bending, dancing, flourishes of the hands and arms require ease of movement. In his *Historia Ecclesiastica*, Vitalis provides insights into French creative innovation and its “success in shaping court fashions.”⁶⁵ The Count of Anjou, for example, came under attack from Vitalis for his invention of the new “pulley shoes ... with pointed, turned-up toes [designed] to conceal the deformity of his own feet.”⁶⁶ Jaeger explains how male fashion

include[d] growing their hair long, parting it in the middle, curling it with hot irons, and wearing long, tight-fitting shirts and tunics. ... Part of the purpose of these fashions was to please women: “Femineam mollitiem petulans iuventus amplectitus, feminisque viri curiales in omni lascivia summopere adulantur”—“(Our wanton youth is sunk in effeminacy, and fawning courtiers seek the favours of women with every kind of lewdness.”)⁶⁷

Bodies were as much on display as the virtues of *cortezia*, and the new courtly fashion for

⁶³ Quoted by Jeanroy in Lazar, p. 62.

⁶⁴ Sauer, op. cit., p. 89.

⁶⁵ Jaeger, op. cit., pp. 179 – 80.

⁶⁶ Ordericus Vitalis cited in Jaeger, op. cit.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

men saw a diminution in sexual differentiation; as Schultz argues, courtly bodies “are not distinguished morphologically by sex.”⁶⁸ Courtly fashion was the fashion of “radiance” and beauty for men as much as women; in courtly literature female and male bodies are almost the same in how they are “named and the attributes that make them beautiful.”⁶⁹ Courtly dress blurred the edges of gender presentation. Style of dress and deportment had to epitomise the courtliness and nobility of the subject.⁷⁰

The exterior fashion of courtliness had to be matched with its daily performance at court where ideally it transformed the interior, the psyche and subjectivity. Vital to this transformation were the performing arts conducted in the open space of court, where didactic literature, courtly performance, social mores, ritual and fantasy converged in the theatre of daily living, as Burns explains.

Medieval literary texts document the literal use of court space for a wide range of performances: musical entertainment, dances, performances of troubadour song in the Occitan tradition ... romances read aloud or actually enacted, sometimes with musical interludes, and epic narratives composed and sung at court.⁷¹

This was the theatre of learning coupled with entertainment where knights, secular clerics, and courtiers alike were trained in the ways of courtliness. Emphasis on the practice of virtues in generating harmonious relationships—usually the domain of women—further diminished sex differentiation in the model of the ‘reconstructed’ male.

This remodelled male must acquaint himself with the values and practices of love

⁶⁸ Schultz., op. cit., p. 80.

⁶⁹ Ibid., pp. 83 and xix.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p.xx.

⁷¹ Burns, “Performing Courtliness,” op. cit., p. 398.

of which instruction is evident in romance literature and medieval historical documents. In this passage from *De principis instructione* by archdeacon and historian Gerald of Wales (c. 1146 – c. 1223), the qualities of the virtuous male are outlined.

First we should know that there is nothing so useful as to be loved, nothing as inexpedient as the opposite. ... Goodness is popular and agreeable to all men, and nothing impresses itself with such ease on humane sensibilities. And if we bring this goodness to fruition through a gentle and polite manner, moderation in commands and affability of speech, respectful choice of words and unassuming form of address, and a graceful modesty, it will bring us amazed to the pinnacle of affection.⁷²

The kind of love referred to here is of an aesthetic intrinsic to a spectrum of ideals and behaviours common to courtliness; it is not of the sexual/affective kind but lays the foundation for psycho-emotional affectivity. As Jaeger maintains, breaking with patriarchal feudal warrior masculinity, courtliness “sought to inspire love rather than fear”.⁷³ This was a public, socio-political love between members of court, not heterosexual love of the autobiographical assumption as Flori argues, “[w]hat was original about *courtoisie* was that it gave pride of place to the woman and the love she inspired.”⁷⁴ However, for early historians depictions of love in troubadour lyric created the impression of heterosexual love affairs like those of the contemporary imagination.

Courtly attributes & troubadour subjectivity

Having examined courtliness discourse and politics, we turn now to the troubadour’s vocabulary to examine the qualities they cultivated in shaping the mentality and

⁷² Gerald of Wales cited in Jaeger, op. cit., p. 169.

⁷³ The Hildersheim chronicler cited in *ibid.*, p. 168.

⁷⁴ Flori, op. cit., p. 239.

subjectivity of the ‘reconstructed’ male. The love *cansos* contain six key moral precepts and virtues the poets sought to emulate; namely, *cortezia*, *mezura*, *jovens*, *pretz*, *valors*⁷⁵ and *joy d’mor*.⁷⁶ As a group, these Occitan words collectively represent the code of principled courtly conduct the troubadour’s were expounding.

Subjectivity is central to lyric, so much so that in Kay’s study she maintains the first-person subject position is primary in the organisation of “textual effects” and that the troubadours

were negotiating the complex contradictions implicit in that [first-person] position. ... The subjectivity produced by this language is rhetorically complex, and the songs [and poems] are not amenable to reading as ‘true’ or ‘false’ with respect to specific emotions or incidents.⁷⁷

New approaches in literary criticism highlight the complexities involved in interpreting singular meanings to courtly lyric. Despite these complexities however, affect can be deduced by examining the meaning of frequently used Occitan words in the troubadours’ creative works, in accounting for the unprecedented articulations of love in the *cansos* and the underlying psycho-emotionality. Consequently, I define troubadour subjectivity in the love *cansos* as the affect of the values and beliefs, thoughts and feelings held by an adherent to courtliness principles and its aesthetic.

According to Lazar, ‘courtly love’ has historically been confused with, and used interchangeably with courtliness, and *cortezia* has been used as the equivalent of

⁷⁵ These terms are defined further in this section.

⁷⁶ This term is defined in the following section.

⁷⁷ Kay, *Subjectivity in Troubadour Poetry*, pp. 214 and 4.

courtliness—both are incorrect.⁷⁸ Lazar points out that in his examination of the scholarship of medieval love literature there is confusion over “such ill-defined terms of *courtoisie* ‘courtliness’, *amour courtois* ‘courtly love’, and *fin’amor* ‘perfect love’.”⁷⁹ The lack of discrimination between these terms has resulted in their being used interchangeably, with works and authors used as if they are monolithic, and the long time of the Middle Ages condensed as if it were one period.⁸⁰

While many phenomena are presented as courtly in the troubadours’ songs (courtly season, courtly song, courtly speech, courtly land, courtly weather, etc.), love is generally qualified as *verai’amor*, *bon’amor*, or most frequently, *fin’amor*. None of these is interchangeable with *courtoisie* or its Occitan equivalent *cortezia*.⁸¹

Lazar quotes Frappier (1951) and Denomy (1953) as scholars who equated *cortezia* with ‘courtly love’.

The word *cortezia* cannot be defined with precision as to its exact meaning.⁸² Lazar argues that *cortezia* is used in a couple of ways; sometimes to reflect the merits and qualities of the ideal knight, and sometimes as one element in a code of principles that typify the ideal lover.⁸³ In her 1986 study *Masculine Submission in Troubadour Lyric*, scholar of medieval French Sandra Alfonsi gives a similar definition of *cortezia* saying in its plainest form it is sometimes partly confused with Chivalry.⁸⁴ Like Lazar she gives two

⁷⁸ Lazar, op. cit., pp. 64 - 65.

⁷⁹ Ibid., op. cit., p. 64.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid., p. 67.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Sandra Resnick Alfonsi, *Masculine Submission in Troubadour Lyric*, American University Studies: Series 2, Romance Languages and Literature, vol. 34 (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 1986) p. viii. Alfonsi is not a well-known medieval scholar. However, her book is a detailed analysis in English of Occitan words and their meaning in lyric. I found her work very accessible and for the most part in agreement with

foci of *cortezia*; as the enlightened state of being achieved by the devotee to the code of Courtly Love (actually the code of courtliness), while at the same time *cortezia* is one of the virtues in that code of principles to which the aspiring courtly lover strives.⁸⁵ Alfonsi and Lazar both argue that *cortezia* combined with *mezura*, *jovens*, *pretz*, *valors* and *joy* are the group of virtues that constitute courtliness.

We move now to the other individual terms that are the component parts of the courtliness code. The source of *mezura* is possibly “Christian philosophy” according to Alfonsi and refers to “the proper social conduct necessitated by Reason.”⁸⁶

Mezura may be most easily defined as the ability of the courtly lover to conduct himself with guarded circumspection in his pursuit of happiness. It is both a means of self-direction and a necessary social obligation. As such, it is the base of *cortezia*. It is not only an active component of the latter but it is likewise a virtue to be placed at the same level of importance as such other qualities as wisdom, prudence, generosity, humility. As the base of *cortezia*, it represents a program of self-discipline, of willing obedience to social customs adhered to by members of an elevated society; it demands self-control, bridling of instincts and passions, and visible self-refinement.⁸⁷

Lazar concurs with this meaning, saying it is “the notion of moderation, a sense of balance between emotion and reason, between social and individual considerations, and whose opposite is *desmezura*, which is almost the equivalent of *folia* ‘folly’.”⁸⁸ Kay defines *mezura* in operational terms, as the struggle to master virtues over vices, saying “the inner battles which take place in an individual human soul” are expressed through the use of “allegorical devices” by the troubadours.⁸⁹ But Kay maintains that the struggle is not

Lazar on the meaning of these words.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid., pp. viii - ix.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Lazar, op. cit., p. 67.

⁸⁹ Kay, op. cit., pp. 50 – 51.

merely metaphorical: “moral and spiritual experience is not *like* a battle, it *is* a battle in which victory and defeat have momentous consequences.”⁹⁰ An example of this battle appears in a poem “where ... canonical vices storm a castle defended by the virtues of courtliness”.⁹¹ D. Scheludko maintains that “the castle functions both as an image of the individual soul (or mind) *and* as one of the entire social fabric”,⁹² concurring with E. Köhler who views “the subject as a synecdoche for the social group.”⁹³

There is disagreement over the term *joven*; some associate it with ‘youth’ while others with ‘generosity’. Quoting Köhler (1964), Lazar argues that *joven* is rarely used to mean youth, or young individual, but “has the connotation of generosity, liberality, member of a group praising *joven* and *fin’amor*.”⁹⁴ Alfonsi agrees the meaning of *jovens* is ambiguous, that despite its Latin root *juvenis* meaning youth, she argues that generosity most closely characterises *jovens* and that “a state of physical youth is in itself no great virtue”.⁹⁵ Some have argued that *jovens* shares similar principles with that of the concept of *futuwwa* “found in the writings of ancient Arabic mystics and philosophers, as well as in the Hispano-Arabic literature created during the same era as that of the troubadours” and introduced into southern France by the troubadour Marcabru who frequented Musulman Spain and used *jovens* repeatedly in his work.⁹⁶ The ancient Arabic concept of

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 51.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² D. Scheludko cited in *ibid.*

⁹³ E. Köhler cited in *ibid.*, p. 84.

⁹⁴ Lazar, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

⁹⁵ Alfonsi, *op. cit.*, pp. ix - x.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. x. Lazar acknowledges the hispano-arabic influence on the troubadours: “It should be noted ... that the rejection by many scholars of a relationship between hispano-arabic poetry and troubadour songs

futuwwa comprised “generosity, liberality, moral veracity and reputation” which is akin in substance to the troubadours’ code.⁹⁷ Troubadour success depended in part on the personal demonstration of *jovens* in daily life, as well as through their literary creations designed to educate and stimulate discourse.

[T]he virtues inherent in *jovens* must be possessed not only by the aspirant lover but also by any member of society who would be considered *courtois*. The entire concept is closely associated with the remuneration hoped for and expected by the troubadour from both his protector and his poetically-exalted lady. ... The aspirant lover ... needed to display these virtues if he hoped to succeed. Possession of the qualities inherent in *jovens* was, then, the primary means of attainment of self-renown and reputation.⁹⁸

Scaglione maintains that such behaviour formed “part of a process of social climbing [for those] “marginal men” who sought recognition by the upper social stratum”.⁹⁹ In the following extract from a poem by troubadour Daniel V. Arnaut, explicit reference is made to courtliness as a civilising force and its relationship to renown; “[c]ourtly Education and Fidelity abide there, and transform themselves into Merit.”¹⁰⁰ Reluctance to participate in courtly assays was countered through practical and financial necessity. The level of scrutiny involved with court members constantly observing each other created rivalry. The troubadours competed and engaged in “self-promotion”, debating one another’s reasoning through their poems and songs.¹⁰¹

Lazar argues the prime constituents of *cortezia* seem to be *pretz/valor, mezura,*

(as proposed by Nykl) is no longer acceptable (see Pérès, Pollman, Giffen, Menocal)”, p. 69.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Alfonsi, op. cit., p. ix – x.

⁹⁹ Scaglione, op. cit., p. 94.

¹⁰⁰ Arnaut Daniel V. cited in Kay, op. cit., p. 58.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 52.

and *joven*, but gives no definition of *pretz/valor* which will now be the focus. Alfonsi presents the two words as a semantic unit—*pretz e valor*—which she argues was the troubadours’ intention. *Pretz e valor* is “the sense of worldly renown and moral worth, attained only through possession of such virtues as *cortezia*, *mezura*, *jovens* and adherence to the code of courtly love”;¹⁰² the love intrinsic to courtliness. In his seminal *Speculum* article *The Provençal Expression Pretz e Valor*, medieval historian and literary critic A. H. Scutz presented a thorough analysis of literary criticism on this Occitan term. Scutz concluded that while *pretz* and *valor* are distinct and separate words they are “used in frequent association”,¹⁰³ arguing that

pretz carries over from its economic use the idea of an estimation of personal worth by common consent within a given *milieu* and under given circumstances, hence [it is] mutable and extrinsic. Valor is the basic worth of a person, the sum of inherent qualities, hence intrinsic and not subject to common estimation. It may include ... the sum of powers or potentialities, therefore, ... subject to development in the highest degree.¹⁰⁴

For the troubadours reliant on pleasing the court for their income, being considered *pretz e valors* was a high honour and indicative of their personal level of development in the art of courtliness, defined by two troubadours: “Folquet de Marseilla writes: “Cortezia non es als mas mezure” (Courtliness is nothing but measure; 12:41). For Marcabru, “Mesura es de gen parlar / E cortesia ed d’amar” (Measure is to speak honourably, and courtliness is to love; 15:19-20.)”¹⁰⁵

When the practices and politics of courtliness are given adequate weight, it

¹⁰² Alfonsi, op. cit., p. x.

¹⁰³ A. H. Schutz, “The Provençal Expression Pretz e Valor,” *Speculum* 19.4 (1944): p. 493.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Lazar, op. cit., p. 67.

becomes clearer that it is not the troubadours' ardent love for women—in the narrative of falling in love—that produced the 'reconstructed' male of romance, but adherence to a code of courtly conduct. It is difficult to imagine individuals living and working in a court environment *not* inculcating its mentality and subjectivity; whether in a sincere attempt at improving character for better relations and/or in attaining high office; in mere conformity to social custom, in the guise of deception in pursuit of personal gain; or as calculatingly predatory in pursuit of sexual gratification. The calculation that can be behind courtliness references feminist concerns regarding men's use, and abuse, of romantic love, in that it can be used as a mask of gentlemanliness to conceal ulterior motives and intentions. That being said, moving away from chivalry as a model of masculinity toward courtliness has the potential to subvert traditional gender roles and heteronormativity, shifting emphasis from love as something you fall into through irresistible chemistry, to the less romantic reality that love requires self-awareness, a range of interpersonal skills, and the knowledge that for the most part, love is challenging and hard work.

The didactics of 'courtly love'

The didactics of courtliness promoted self-awareness in developing a capacity for human relatedness. Kay maintains many poems are “an interesting study of the ‘self’ as mutable”¹⁰⁶ where psychological transformation is demonstrated through the use of

¹⁰⁶ Peire Rogier cited in Kay, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

subjective allegory, showing “the sophisticated self-awareness of certain poets”.¹⁰⁷ Kay defines subjectivity within troubadour lyric as “[t]he elaboration of a first person (subject) position in the rhetoric of courtly poetry.”¹⁰⁸ But who is this subject and how does his subjectivity emerge?

According to Butler, subject-formation is a complex process, “construction is neither a subject nor its act, but a process of reiteration by which both ‘subjects’ and ‘acts’ come to appear at all.”¹⁰⁹ Using her academic ‘self’ as an example, Kay explains the “process of reiteration” in her subject-formation through writing her book.

In writing a book about the troubadours, I, like them, write partly because of what has already been said, and partly, in some sense, ‘as myself’. Although I defer to scholarly institutions such as ‘the literature’, this study is personal – ‘subjective’ in the colloquial sense ... because I have undergone these influences at a particular time, in a particular order, and have internalized them to varying degrees, for example according to my competence to understand them, there is a sense in which it is also ‘autobiographical’; that is to say, it records a particular coincidence of the intertextual with the historical. ... Our inevitable dependence on prior discourses, which broadly constitutes what since Kristeva has been styled ‘intertextuality’, can be seen as overdetermining subjectivity; when ‘I’ write, what others have written writes through ‘me’. The subject is thus simultaneously the *subject of* what ‘I’ write (or say) and *subject to* what others write (or say).¹¹⁰

The troubadour individual was “simultaneously the subject of” a rhetorical tradition and his interpretations of it, and “subject to” the immediate influences of courtliness, and the exchange of ideas with other poets. Indeed, many troubadours speak directly of “Courtly Education”.¹¹¹ According to Kay, the first person in lyric is principally constructed

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., pp. 57 and 213.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 1.

¹⁰⁹ Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (New York and London: Routledge, 1993) p. 9.

¹¹⁰ Kay, op. cit., pp. 1 – 2.

¹¹¹ Ibid., p. 94.

through language, maintaining that masculinity and subjectivity were “overdetermined” under the influence of historical courtly values.¹¹² This historical value I argue is present in the combined effects of courtliness and ennobling love which are key contenders.¹¹³

Troubadour subjectivity in lyric is consistent with courtliness, combined with the passionate language of ennobling love, not the amorous love of a troubadour for his *domna*. This runs counter to traditional criticism exemplified by Denomy who argues “*cortezia* is an outcome of love”¹¹⁴ in the narrative of the transformational power of love. My view reverses Denomy’s: *cortezia* is not an outcome of love, but a new kind of love is the outcome of *cortezia*. The “assumption still made by many critics” Gaunt argues, is “that ‘courtly love’ poetry is *about* women.”¹¹⁵ In *Poetry of Exclusion: A Feminist Reading of some Troubadour Lyrics* he argues

in some texts women were deliberately excluded from the poetic representation of love as the poet concentrates either on himself or on relationships between men, and that this is an *explicit* articulation of an attitude that is *implicit* in much troubadour poetry. ... [F]or most troubadours only the male view of love was interesting, that their poetry examines male emotions, never those of women, masculine relationships, rarely relationships between the sexes.¹¹⁶

However, if we remember that the *cansos* are “monologicistic in form”,¹¹⁷ the omission of the female subject is intelligible; this lyric form is primarily meditations on the theme of socio-political love rather than representing adulterous love affairs. Women’s concerns

¹¹² Ibid., p. 212.

¹¹³ Ennobling love’s contribution to the erotics of lyric is examined in chapter 7.

¹¹⁴ Denomy, op. cit., p. 62.

¹¹⁵ Gaunt, “Poetry of Exclusion: A Feminist Reading of some Troubadour Lyrics,” p. 310.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 310 - 11.

¹¹⁷ Bruckner, op. cit., p. 217.

are not irrelevant to the love *cansos*. Female subjectivity becomes ‘visible’ and ‘audible’ if we look through the lens’ of courtliness and ennobling love and hear the poets paying homage to noblewomen at court.

Alfonsi tells us the ultimate goal of practicing courtliness is “*joy d’amor*”,¹¹⁸ the happiness attained in achieving the intellectual, psycho-emotional and spiritual benefits of mastering its virtues. *Joy d’amor* is applicable to any social situation in relations with others, and is described in this portrayal of Geoffrey the Fair by his biographer, Jean de Marmoutier, writing between 1170 and 1180.

He was ... gentle, gracious, of a most mild spirit; he bore offenses and injuries patiently and clemently; upon hearing abuse heaped upon him, he ignored it patiently. He was amiable and jocund to all men alike, but especially to knights; and there was so much goodness and kindness in him that those whom he subjected by arms he conquered even more through clemency.¹¹⁹

It would appear that Geoffrey the Fair had a courtly state of mind and subjectivity, he presented as having a powerful calming effect on warrior mentality, which was one purpose of courtliness.

Kay gives an example of the moral worth of *joy d’amor* in the following quote from a song by Cercamon, saying it is “an exhortation to rejoice in love, and cultivate it [for] future *Pretz* and *Joy* ... for this Love upholds a courtly ideology with which the poet seeks to identify himself.”¹²⁰

Love’s merit is so precious and supreme that she has no regard for base lovers, miserly

¹¹⁸ Alfonsi, op. cit., p. x.

¹¹⁹ Jaeger, op. cit., p. 204.

¹²⁰ Kay, op. cit., p. 52.

rich men, or arrogant paupers; there aren't two men in a thousand sincere enough for true love to obey them.¹²¹

Here love seems personified as 'she,'¹²² as if love itself is the demanding *domna* whose dictates must be obeyed in order to be deemed worthy of giving and receiving 'true' or genuine, authentic love. Bernart de Ventadorn sings about the distinction *joy* brings:

My heart is so full of joy that everything is transformed for me; for with the wind and rain my happiness grows, so that my song climbs and rises up and my value increases.¹²³

Bernart links his capacity to love with his personal value. Here Arnaut de Marueilh reflects on the didactics of love and its psychological benefits:

There is no worth without joy, and without worth no honour, for Joy brings Love, Love a gay lady, Gaiety solace, and Solace courtliness ...¹²⁴

Adherence to the attributes and virtues of courtliness gave rise to a new mentality and subjectivity at court, and troubadour lyric was both its expression and instruction.

However, Jaeger seems to argue for a different status for the lyric when he says "the romance had a pedagogic function to fulfil ... whereas the lyric gave vent to the subjectivism of court society, to the cult of the ego."¹²⁵ But if court subjectivism was under the influence of courtliness, it required the curtailing, not the venting, of personal ego in support of a civil society; much depends on how lyric, in this case the *cansos*, are interpreted. The didactics in lyric are evident in the next three stanzas of another song by

¹²¹ Cercamon cited in Kay, Subjectivity in Troubadour Poetry. In order to save on word length, I have not included the original Occitan texts, and all translations are by Kay. All brackets (both round and square) within quotes are by Kay.

¹²² This could also be due to translation and the 'gendering' of French nouns.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

¹²⁵ Jaeger, *op. cit.*, p. 14

Bernart, “Non-es meravelha” in which he describes the challenges and rewards of ‘courtly love’:¹²⁶

I. It is not surprising if I sing better than any other singer since my heart draws me more toward love and I am better made to love’s command. On it I have set heart and body and knowledge and understanding and strength and power. The bridle draws me so much towards love that I do not linger anywhere else.

Bernart equates his better singing with the spiritual benefits of practicing love and how it absorbs his whole being, so much does the ‘bridle’ or restraint of practice and its benefits, humble and engage him.

II. The man who does not feel some sweetness of love in his heart is dead indeed, and what is the point of living without love, but to be a nuisance to other people? May God never take such a dislike to me that I ever continue living so much as a day or a month once I become guilty of being a nuisance and have no desire for love.

Love operates as an absolute at the very centre of his life (at least rhetorically).

III. I love the loveliest and best with good faith and without deceit. My heart sighs and my eyes weep, so much do I love her who brings harm on me. What am I to do, given that Love seized me and the prison it has cast me into cannot be opened by any key other than mercy, and of mercy I find no trace?

Bernart exclaims the suffering involved in loving others who do not return it but he shows how, even in the lack of mercy, he acts in good faith, demonstrating appropriate courtesy towards ‘her’. Possibly a synecdoche for noblewomen “as a social group”.¹²⁷

V. Oh God, I wish that true lovers could be sorted out from

¹²⁶ Sarah Kay, “The Contradictions of Courtly Love and the Origins of Courtly Poetry: The Evidence of the Lauzengiers,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 26 (1996): pp. 214 - 15.

¹²⁷ Köhler cited in Kay, *Subjectivity in Troubadour Poetry* p. 84.

the false and that lauzengiers¹²⁸ and deceivers wore horns on the front of their foreheads! I would gladly give all the gold and silver in the world, if I had them, if only my lady could know how truly I love her.¹²⁹

How much easier love would be if we could tell the honest from the dishonest, and how much Bernart would sacrifice to know the ‘woman’ he holds in high ‘courtly’ regard, is genuine and returns his feelings without deceit.

VII. Good lady, I ask you for nothing
but to take me for your servant,
for I will serve you as my good lord,
whatever wages come my way.
Behold me at your command, a man to rely on,
before you, o noble, gentle, courteous, and gay.
You are not, after all, a bear or a lion,
you would not kill me if I give myself to you.

VIII. To Mon Cortes, down there, where she dwells,
I send this song, and let her not be vexed
that I have been so far away.¹³⁰

Finally, Bernart acknowledges the rank and status of the ‘lady’ for whom he hopes to become vassel serving her as his feudal lord. References to her aristocratic qualities are designed to both honour and placate someone with potential power over him, as shown in the metaphors of a bear and a lion.

In support of the courtliness argument, there is no historical textual or documentary evidence to authenticate love affairs between the troubadours and the ladies

¹²⁸ Kay, “The Contradictions of Courtly Love and the Origins of Courtly Poetry: The Evidence of the Lauzengiers,” p. 217. The lauzengiers are the “scapegoats of the genre, ... the role of “bad” in opposition to the “good” of the lyric poet-lover”, p. 216. “The lauzengiers are people who talk too much.” Lauzengiers represent the daily frustrations, the obstacles to be overcome in the practice of love. Lauzengiers also act as a “rival”, as a model of the “anti-type”, the anti-hero the courtly lover is seeking not to be, p. 210.

¹²⁹ Kay, op. cit., pp. 214 – 15.

¹³⁰ Frederick Goldin, *Lyrics of the Troubadours and Trouveres: An Anthology and a History* (Gloucester, Mass: Peter Smith, 1983) p. 129.

of the court. Accounts of these love affairs was once thought to exist in the thirteenth-century biographies of poets called the *vidas* and *razos*. As Burgwinkle points out,

the *razos* were for a long time looked upon almost exclusively as ‘historical’ documents, i.e. referential, unmediated by literary conventions, written in a void of subjectivity or court specificity, composed only in the interest of an objective transfer of knowledge.¹³¹

The *razos* in particular gave credence to amorous readings of troubadour poetry as “private, personal, and autobiographical” according to Van Vleck.¹³² The biographies were examined by professor of French Elizabeth Wilson Poe in her 1986 *Romance Philology* article, “Toward a Balanced View of the *Vidas* and *Razos*”.¹³³ Poe argues that all of the *razos*, and most of the *vidas*, were the work of one man, Uc de Saint Circ, “a poet, biographer, literary historian and mythographer”.¹³⁴ Referencing Favati (1961), Poe further notes that most of the *razos* were written during a three year period between “1227 and 1230, though none of the events chronicled in the *razos* postdates 1219”,¹³⁵ raising questions about their accuracy. Burgwinkle argues that in their pursuit of referents only, critics missed the “rhetoric of exchange” underlying troubadour poetry and prose which he says could be viewed as “the materialist practice of the poet/patron relation.”¹³⁶ Part of Uc’s legacy Burgwinkle argues is his awareness of the politics of exchange in troubadour poetry and prose.

The raso texts, admittedly composed after the fact, do however provide us with evidence that at least one contemporary poet recognized and acknowledged a role for the poet that

¹³¹ Burgwinkle: op. cit., p. 348.

¹³² Van Vleck, op. cit., p. 2.

¹³³ Poe cited in Burgwinkle: op. cit.

¹³⁴ Ibid., p. 348.

¹³⁵ Poe and Favati cited in ibid., p. 347.

¹³⁶ Ibid., p. 348.

seems to contradict some of the earlier rhetoric concerning devoted service and suffering. Uc de Saint Circ's admission that poets work for ladies, recognize their own value, and offer their skills on the market must lead us to reconsider some of the earlier rhetoric and question how aware his predecessors were of their power to manipulate.¹³⁷

But this economic relation of the patron and poet was reciprocal. Noblewomen recognised their own power in the market place of court, influencing their representations in lyric through their ability to remunerate.¹³⁸

Courtly love is more than the love of courtliness, it is the public social love *intrinsic* to courtliness, which according to the code of conduct is a state of loving unconditional positive regard, friendship and service towards others. Both Alfonsi and Kay acknowledge the impact of courtliness on the *cansos*. Schultz prefers to use the name "courtly" for this type of love because courtliness is the distinguishing feature of this love.¹³⁹ He argues "heterosexual desire" as the motivation for courtly love "is misleading",¹⁴⁰ and maintains "[c]ourtly lovers are aristophiliacs: they *fall in love* with nobility and courtliness."¹⁴¹

'Doing' love

The discourse and practices of courtliness explain how, in contradiction to medieval context, men were suddenly able to transcend their base instincts and impulses, to relinquish their knightly ways and spontaneously transform into models of urbanity,

¹³⁷ Ibid., p. 349.

¹³⁸ This subject is discussed in more detail in the following chapter 8.

¹³⁹ Schultz, *op. cit.*, p. xviii.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 52.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., p. xx. Emphasis added.

graciousness and civility through the love of ‘woman’. Given the historical period, the courtly love of lyric *does* seem to qualify as a special, transformational kind of love deserving the epithet ‘magical’, the iconic signature of romantic love. The iteration of courtly love discourse over time became intelligible as a ‘special’ kind of sexual/affective experience we know as romantic love. In the absence of historical evidence of love affairs between troubadours and noblewomen, how did historical readings of troubadour lyric give rise to its interpretation as “highly sensual and erotic, closely associated with the physical aspects of love”?¹⁴²

Regardless of its reputation as a ruse used by some men in luring women into bed and others into marriage, romantic love as an ideal for women has historically been associated with the reconstructed male of courtly love fame that fuelled women’s imagination. The genesis of this type were the troubadours, a model of civil urbane masculinity subsequently reproduced in Shakespear’s Romeo and Jane Austen’s Mr Darcy, two of the most well-known and iconic examples of this type in literature; both of whom play on courtliness themes of the urbane male, and lyric’s narrative of ‘falling in love’. These two archetypes of the ideal romantic gentleman are embodied in many of the burgeoning and popular cross-cultural reality television dating shows like the ‘The Bachelor’ and ‘The Bachelorette’. Almost without exception, the bachelors who appear in these programmes epitomise the courtly gentle man in their approach to dress, deportment, manner, speech and their treatment of women—who routinely call these men

¹⁴² Alfonsi, *op. cit.*, pp. x – xi. This question is examined in chapter 8 on ‘ennobling love’.

‘chivalrous’.

Unfortunately, the ‘chivalrous man’ as he is labelled and enacted in popular culture has a darker past. hooks argues that love predicated on the “dream of a strong, domineering, take-control, dashing, and daring man as a suitable mate” still operates for many women.¹⁴³ However, these characteristics are inconsistent with the sensitivity and emotional intelligence many women say they want from men in relationships.¹⁴⁴ The strong take-control, protective type perpetuates a traditional masculine guarding model of care, reinforcing heteronormativity and stereotypes of femininity and masculinity with separate spheres of ability and responsibility. In contrast, courtliness disrupts chivalric ideas of manhood, subverting traditional patriarchal models of masculinity that are the real obstacle to sexual/affective love, not men per se. As Dhavernas argues in *Hating Masculinity Not Men* “[t]he fact that all men, because of their sex, are in the position of oppressor does not mean that all male individuals are *nothing* but oppressor – any more than we [women] are *nothing* but oppressed”.¹⁴⁵

Conclusion

The central tenet of this chapter is that the representations of masculine romantic subjectivity we see in the courtly *cansos*, did not suddenly materialise out of the violence, anarchy and misogyny of the medieval period due to the miraculous, transformational love

¹⁴³ hooks, op. cit., p. 13.

¹⁴⁴ Shere Hite, *Women and Love: A Cultural Revolution in Progress* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987).

¹⁴⁵ Marie-Jo Dhavernas, “Hating Masculinity Not Men,” *Feminism and Sexuality*, eds. Stevi Jackson and Sue Scott (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996) p. 150.

for a *domna*. The mentality and subjectivity of troubadour masculinity depicted in courtly lyric, developed over a longer historical period in response to social and political forces designed to restrain and control male behaviour, particularly knights.

Courtliness provided the civility, erudition and sensitivity of the reconfigured male of romantic imagination, it was a humanising ground out of which it becomes possible to learn, and so to know, how to love. The initial readings of courtly lyric effected the ideology of romantic love and the narrative of ‘falling in love’. As Kay points out “[e]very age reads the troubadours differently.”¹⁴⁶ While scholarship has turned away from the autobiographical assumption its legacy lives on in the imagination of contemporary romance culture in the West.

The combined themes of the reconstructed male, the valourisation of women and feminine virtues together with the glorification of love, has been interpreted as an exceptional, transformational kind of love by traditional criticism. However, this study argues that the transformative power resides in the civilising effects of courtliness—or indeed any form of socialising process—that prepares the psycho-emotional soil out of which love, in all its many varied forms, can flourish. The civilising effects of courtliness came before the love it represents in constructing the courtly ‘gentle’ man of romance as a *pre-requisite* of love. As Lazar so succinctly puts it: “One can be courtly, according to twelfth-century texts, without loving; but one cannot love without being courtly.”¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁶ Kay, *op. cit.*, p. 212.

¹⁴⁷ Lazar, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

The conceptual reframing within this chapter takes the rose-coloured glasses off courtly love with paradoxical effects; it demystifies the romance of courtly love *cansos* while substantiating its possibility through performativity; a proposition allowing for change through agency. But if courtliness was widespread throughout Europe, why did its expression in courtly lyric first surface in only one specific area of France known as Occitania? This question is addressed in chapter 7.

CHAPTER 7

Occitan Culture & the Status of Aristocratic Women

While courtliness can account for representations of courtly masculinity in lyric, it alone does not explain the status of the *domna* and her veneration in lyric, or why that literature emerged in one specific area of Western Europe called Occitania. In uncovering the realities behind the troubadours' poetic mystique, we turn now to the geographical area that produced the *cansos*. What kind of "emotional community"¹ created the psycho-emotional erotics of courtly lyric? In what way was the emotional tenor of Occitania different to that of Northern France or the rest of Europe? Who were its people? Was courtliness implicated? And given the valourisation of women in the love *cansos*, was the status of Occitania's aristocratic women a significant contributing factor in the production of those texts?

This chapter argues there is a productive relationship between courtliness and the psycho-emotional environment of Occitan courts, the status of its noble women, their patronage of didactic literature and the emergence of courtly lyric. The interaction

¹ Rosenwein, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

between these elements is crucial for understanding courtly love lyric—and, by extension, its legacy to romantic love in contemporary times. Burns argues that

[f]rom the end of the eleventh century in southern France, troubadour songs and their brief fictional biographies (called *vidas*) refer to specific historical courts as the staging ground for Occitan love lyrics and political songs: the courts of Duke William IX of Aquitaine and his granddaughter Eleanor of Aquitaine, counts Raymond V and VI of Toulouse, Ermengard of Narbonne, and many lesser lords in Occitania ...²

Paterson maintains that Occitania's identity is denoted by the troubadours with its geographical boundaries being determined culturally and linguistically.³ Zumthor states that troubadour poetry and Occitan culture are principally identified with each other.⁴

Previously called Occitan, Occitania is now the accepted proper noun for this area although there is no universal agreement over this term. Occitan refers to the language and culture of Occitania. Today Occitania is generally referred to as Languedoc, southern France or Provence. During the medieval period, its most northern limit was Poitou and its most southern limit was Aragon in Spain. It ran from Aquitaine on the Bay of Biscay in the west to Dauphine bordering Italy's Lombardy to the east. Occitania encompassed thirteen regions including Limousin, Aquitaine, Poitou, Gascony, Auvergne, Languedoc, Provence and Dauphine; this region is also referred to as 'the Midi'. Paterson explains that "Occitan is a Romance or neo-Latin language" called *langue d'oc* and "was defined in opposition to other languages" in the Middle Ages.⁵ Occitania's geographical area has not altered much since medieval times, although the number of people speaking its native

² Burns, "Performing Courtliness," p. 400.

³ Paterson, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

⁴ Zumthor, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

⁵ Paterson, *op. cit.*, pp. 1 – 3.

tongue “has diminished dramatically”.⁶

Occitania has long enjoyed a reputation for its advanced and refined culture but it should not be considered monolithic: it was socially and culturally diverse with many different kinds of lived experience. There were variances in wealth and power between the many courts, some were itinerant while others were not, there were also trading towns and isolated garrisons, divergent legal conventions between towns and differing religious beliefs. Certain areas of Occitania cultivated a civilised, highly sophisticated culture with progressive property and legal rights for women and institutional practices that reduced subjugation and encouraged peace and harmony. It was also the birthplace of Eleanor of Aquitaine, one of the wealthiest and most powerful women in medieval history. Courtliness was part of Occitania’s cultural history; it had a lack of interest in chivalry and fighting, quite unique compared to the rest of France and its neighbouring states. Instead, love and relationship building were cultivated; its society exemplified the culture of the individual according to Paterson, Swabey, Turner and others, and the intellectual and emotional flowering “now known as the Twelfth Century Renaissance or Awakening” was “fundamental to the emergence of the troubadour lyric.”⁷ More than this, Paterson argues, “troubadour love lyric marked a significant step in the advance of civilization, and more particularly, in the condition of women.”⁸ Indeed, as this study argues, Occitan courtly culture had been gestating courtliness for hundreds of years before it gave birth to

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., p. 258.

courtly lyric.

Occitanians and the 'joy of love'

Perhaps adding to the mystique of courtly love is “the mystique of troubadour territory” that assistant professor of French Amelia Van Vleck argues, arose from conjecture regarding the favourable aspects of the region, its “milder climate, more dramatic landscapes set off by brighter sunshine, and lesser Germanic interference with the Roman heritage of its provincia than in the North”.⁹ Van Vleck cautions against a nostalgia that is evident in the work of early criticism. Indeed, Occitania is described in some of the history and historiography as a shining example of sophistication and civilization in an otherwise bleak and inhospitable world.

Described as tolerant and pragmatic, Occitanian’s were generally regarded as happy people, accepting of outsiders, different beliefs and cultures, translating Paterson claims, to “a relative absence of personal subjection” across many levels of society.¹⁰ Paterson states that Occitanian’s celebrated the “joy of love” and were “reported to be open, hospitable, friendly and sociable.”¹¹ Living a life of joy and striving for *joy d’mor* was the pinnacle of courtliness; the value of joy to Occitania’s culture is expressed in this poem by “Peire Rogier dedicated to his lady [Ermengard] of Narbonne”,

My heart is so fixed on joy

⁹ Amelia E. Van Vleck, “The Lyric Texts,” *A Handbook of the Troubadours*, eds. F. R. P Akehurst and Judith M. Davis (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995) p. 24.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 344.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 5 – 6.

that I cannot help but sing,
for as a child and an adult, joy has
nourished me.
Without it, I'd be nothing.
I see that everything else that people do
degrades, dishonors, and defames
if love and joy do not sustain it.¹²

Peire Vidal leaves us in no doubt about his fondness for Provence and his esteem for its people and their love of joy in the first two stanzas of his song *Ab l'alen tir vas me l'aire*:

With my breath I draw towards me the breeze I feel coming from Provence;
everything which hails from there pleases me, so that, when I hear good reports
of it, I listen to it with a smile, and for every word want to hear of hundred [sic]
more, so much does it please me to hear it well spoken of.
For no one knows of such a pleasant place to dwell as between the Rhone
and Vance, and from the coast to Durance, nor of where such true joy shines
out. For thus I have left my heart rejoicing among the free/aristocratic/
generous race ...¹³

Reflecting the same love of Occitania was a northern troubadour called Albertet who visited its courts. Comparing it favourably to northern courts, Paterson says

Albertet praises the open and generous hospitality, gaiety and sociability of the southerners, and their concern to compete with each other for a high reputation through their speech and actions. He claims they were the first to invent the notion of service at table, whereas a guest in France or Poitou can easily starve. ... they are outward-looking and playful, involving contact with rather than rejection of others. He criticised the surliness of the [northern] French and their lack of hospitality.¹⁴

Albertet's comment on "a high reputation through their speech and actions" references the quest for distinction of nobility through courtliness.

The general level of sociability described of Occitanians points to a degree of proficiency in personal development. According to Jaeger "the growth of lay literacy" was

¹² Derek E. T. Nicholson (1976) cited in Cheyette, op. cit., p. 140.

¹³ Kay, op. cit., p. 44.

¹⁴ Albertet cited in Paterson, op. cit., p. 6.

pivotal in transmitting courtesy to that section of society and the knights.¹⁵ The French nobility educated their children at court, unlike the Germans who regarded formal education “with a certain contempt.”¹⁶ While this practice was less favoured during the tenth century it gained popularity in the eleventh,¹⁷ at the end of which courtly love emerged. Speaking about Occitania’s culture Alfonsi says,

[t]he feudal society of Southern France evolved, with striking rapidity, into a refined, aristocratic society concerned with the development and propagation of an elevated and mundane culture. Southern France was at peace—warfare had ended and by the mid-eleventh century, feudal barons were occupied with the protection and development of their own lands. Likewise, this society was fundamentally wealthy and prosperous.¹⁸

Courtliness was central to education and the development of Occitania’s enlightened culture, so different to its northern French neighbours and European counterparts.

Unlike the northern French “who were inclined to despise the Occitans for their lack of marital spirit”,¹⁹ Paterson argues Occitans were not keen to adopt chivalry and their culture showed “little evidence of chivalric ideology”, which was supported by the practical involvement of its church:²⁰

at the time of the First Crusade the French were listening to military epics; the Occitans, to the courtly lyric. There was a strong indigenous courtly culture in Occitania half a century before it reached the north, and three quarters of a century before the flowering of chivalry.²¹

¹⁵ Jaeger, *op. cit.*, pp. 4 and 224.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 224.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Alfonsi, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

¹⁹ Paterson, *op. cit.*, pp. 87 – 88.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 77 and 87.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

Map considered Occitania a courtly, not a chivalric society.²² Paterson claims Occitania's cultural identity was at variance with the rest of France and Europe, so much so, that by

the end of the twelfth century certain troubadours identify the French with prowess at arms, by contrast with the *Occitan joy of love*. This corresponds to a real cleavage of values; *chivalric values* and rituals were well developed in France at this time, but *had made little impact on the south*.²³

The lack of interest in chivalry in Occitania was reflected in the low incidence of traditional “knightly ritual tournaments and dubbing ceremonies [which were] virtually absent” according to Paterson.²⁴

How can this “cleavage of values” between Occitania and Northern France be explained? Historian Ralph V. Turner reports in his biography of *Eleanor of Aquitaine* that Aquitaine's first dukes were men of erudition, beneficiaries of a classical education which included courtliness.²⁵ Turner states this classical tradition had been carried on since the fading of the Roman Empire, in the school attached to the church of Saint-Hilaire in Poitiers, capital of Poitou.²⁶ During the eleventh and twelfth centuries teachers and students at the schools were so distinguished for their erudition that the school became “the most important cultural centre in France south of the Loire” bringing students from the furthest regions of the Anglo-Norman region.²⁷ Courtly love came to life in the ducal and princely courts of Aquitaine, Provence and Burgundy. These were seats of power with

²² Walter Map, *De nugis curialium* cited in *ibid.*, p. 90.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 5. Emphasis added.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

²⁵ Ralph V. Turner, *Eleanor of Aquitaine: Queen of France, Queen of England* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009) p. 24.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*

a continuous history of classical education and the values of courtliness since Roman times, with considerable political and cultural influence throughout Occitania, making it unique from the rest of France and Europe.²⁸

Destratification and harmony

As well as the preference for courtliness over chivalry, Occitania had a number of unusual institutional practices in contrast to its neighbours that fostered destratification and harmony. As Swabey explains:

In terms of social organization, the feudal bond was much looser there than in northern France, with a bias against hierarchical structures toward more egalitarian relationships, and contracts between individuals based on mutual support and nonaggression.²⁹

She says those peasants who pledged oaths of fidelity were given free land to farm for themselves without having to perform “vassalic service.”³⁰ And as Paterson explains, instead of the “system of vassalic fidelities and obligations”, an institution called Pax Dei or ‘Peace and Truce of God’ was introduced by the church in Occitania as a practical measure in quelling lawlessness.³¹

Occitania’s preference for a friendly peaceful society is reflected in the ‘Peace and Truce of God’ initiative, the first of its kind in Europe. First introduced in Aquitaine by the Occitan church at the Council of Charroux in 989, when six bishops convened a peace

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Swabey, op. cit., p. 57.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 9.

³¹ Paterson, op. cit., p. 313.

council.³² The ‘Peace and Truce of God’ was a two part strategy involving laws, and oaths made to the church to limit violence from private feudal wars. The ‘Peace of God’ was established first and aimed to limit violence on church land towards the unarmed, the poor and church property.³³ At a time when venturing outside the walls of a castle put you in danger, these safe areas provided a much needed respite from harm. In *A History of Private Life II* historian Georges Duby explains the social benefits of claiming public communal space.

The Peace and Truce of God, ... helped create a space in which communal gatherings could take place and thus encouraged the reconstitution of public space at the village level ... In the eleventh and twelfth centuries many a village grew up in the shadow of the church, in the zone of immunity where violence was prohibited under peace regulations.³⁴

As the Occitania church owned vast lands, “the zone of immunity” covered almost one third of Aquitaine providing a safe place hospitable to peace and community building. The timing of the area of immunity is relevant here as it coincided with the period in which courtliness flourished in Occitania. Like courtliness, the peace movement was designed to curtail the violence and damage caused by the “lay nobility”.³⁵

The ‘Peace of God’ was later extended to a second strategy, the ‘Truce of God’,³⁶ forbidding “combat from Thursday to Monday morning [as well as] ... on important feast

³² Thomas Head, “The Development of the Peace of God in Aquitaine (997-1005),” *Speculum* 74.3 (1999): pp. 674 – 75.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

³⁴ Georges Duby, “Introduction: Private Power, Public Power,” *A History of Private Life II: Revelations of the Medieval World* (1988) p. 27.

³⁵ Jaeger, *op. cit.*, p. 193.

³⁶ Adriaan H. Bredero, *Christendom and Christianity in the Middle Ages* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1994) p. 110. See also Alfonsi on the ‘truce of God’ p. 38.

days, and in the seasons of Advent and Lent”,³⁷ targeting Christians but particularly knights. This produced the desired behavioural change according to medieval historian Adriaan H. Bredero,³⁸ as well as a favourable change in the emotional environment with a reduction in hostility and fear. Thereafter, these councils were held regularly to retake the Peace oaths and this idea spread throughout Europe continuing well into the thirteenth century.³⁹ The ‘Peace and Truce of God’ were substantial initiatives in limiting and controlling violence “in a world in which fighting remained a widely accepted occupation.”⁴⁰

The peaceful conditions allowed the area to prosper, producing an exciting cultural fervour in Southern France which was conducive to the creation of courtly love according to the historian Reto Bezzola.⁴¹ The Occitan Church was integral in shaping a culture of co-operation and relatedness. Paterson disputes a commonly held idea that prior to “the so-called Gregorian Reform, the Occitan Church stagnated in material, institutional and moral decadence.”⁴² In fact she argues the opposite, that the Occitan Church was a vital, energetic institution that was undermined when the laity was excluded from the election of bishops instituted by the Gregorian Reforms.⁴³ In trying to form a theocracy centred on

³⁷ Thomas Head, The Peace of God: Social Violence and Religious response in France Around the Year 1000 (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992) p. 7.

³⁸ Bredero, op. cit., p. 110.

³⁹ Thomas Head, “The Development of the Peace of God in Aquitaine (997-1005),” Speculum 74.3 (1999): p. 684.

⁴⁰ Bredero, op. cit., p. 110.

⁴¹ Reto Bezzola cited in Jaeger, op. cit., pp. 176 – 77.

⁴² Paterson, op. cit., p. 312.

⁴³ Magnou-Nortier cited in *ibid.*, p. 314.

the Pope in Rome, the reform interfered with the established relationships between clergy and parishioners,⁴⁴ alienating the aristocracy and the laity leading to “one of the great medieval conflicts, that of papacy versus empire.”⁴⁵

Broadly speaking, the people of Occitania seemed to be relatively free thinkers with a questioning and pragmatic state of mind that was critical of orthodoxy.⁴⁶ In *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*, the late historian John Boswell maintains that the region of southern France was “noted for gay sexuality, and some troubadour poetry was explicitly homosexual.”⁴⁷ Occitanian’s were open to unorthodox faiths like Catharism with its liberal views on women. Women had independence within the church,⁴⁸ with roles of authority and power that accorded well with Occitania’s progressive attitudes towards women, addressed further on in this chapter. The Cathar heresy first appeared in Occitania “from 1147” and was well established by “1174-8”⁴⁹ in contrast to the rest of France, where Cathars could be burnt “on the spot” by people hostile to their heretic beliefs.⁵⁰

Occitania was an enlightened, life-affirming culture that fostered the literature of courtly love lyric and romance. But while the literature appeared to erupt suddenly, the

⁴⁴ Paterson, op. cit., p. 338.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 314.

⁴⁶ W. L. Wakefield (1973) cited in Paterson, op. cit., p. 339.

⁴⁷ John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980) p. 43, note 6.

⁴⁸ Jennifer Ward (2002) cited in <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catharism>, accessed 15.05.2015.

⁴⁹ Paterson, op. cit., p. 333.

⁵⁰ Ibid., pp. 337 – 38.

culture it reflected was the beneficiary of a historical cultural legacy, classical remnants from Roman days. Courtliness had been the currency of social exchange in Aquitaine's ducal courts since at least the reign of Duke William IV, Fier á Bras from 963 to 995.⁵¹ Indeed, the earliest known troubadour William IX (1071-1127), or Guilhem de Peiteu his name in Occitan, was the "seventh count of Poitiers and ninth duke of Aquitaine."⁵² Turner gives a rich description of the influence of courtliness on those ducal courts during the twelfth century saying, it

was significant not only as a center of power, but also as a cultural center with a reputation for its highly civilized atmosphere. Shining as a centre of fashion and culture, the court attracted visitors from the Aquitainian aristocracy. ... [where] courtliness, the ethos of courtiers, was infiltrating chivalry, the traditional values of a warrior aristocracy, marking a new sophistication.⁵³

These were the intellectual, philosophical and cultural influences that created a distinct "emotional community"⁵⁴ and produced courtly love poetry.

In their creative works, troubadours were simultaneously reflecting the courtly culture around them, as well as using their songs and poems as didactic material in the social discourse of ideas about urbanity, emotions and love. The *cansos* portray a complex set of emotions consistent with the ethics and values of courtliness and ennobling love, constitutive of a distinct emotional community in Rosenwein's terms of a "constellation—or sets—of emotions."⁵⁵ The dominant practices of courtliness and

⁵¹ Turner, op. cit.

⁵² Frede Jensen, ed., *Troubadour Lyrics: A Bilingual Anthology*, vol. 39 (New York: Peter Lang, 1998) p. 24.

⁵³ Turner, op. cit., p. 24.

⁵⁴ Rosenwein, op. cit.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

ennobling love in the south and chivalry in the north played a defining role in the emotional differences between the two cultures, influencing attitudes towards women, femininity and masculinity and gender roles.

Differences in attitude and obedience towards “papal theocracy” further separated the ideological and emotional worlds of the north and the south. Operating under the pious Christian teaching that enforced women’s deference to men and the ideology of sex as sinful, the atmosphere of many northern courts was harsh, austere, “restrained and earnest” according to Turner.⁵⁶ In particular, the royal court of the devout King Louis VII (reigned 1137 – 1180) “governed only by bread, wine, and the simple joys of life”⁵⁷ that Eleanor of Aquitaine found difficult during her marriage to Louis. Northern France came under the strict morality of Christian theology; regardless of some women’s lordly status, they were considered inferior to men, dangerous corrupting influences that should be kept under strict control.

Southern women freely joining men in witty and flirtatious conversations would have shocked visitors from northern France or England, who feared the skill of ladies with words, their ability to apply verbal weaponry and sexual wiles for plotting and intriguing.⁵⁸

Enjoying the amusement and fun of musicians and entertainers of all kinds was prohibited by the Church which it cautioned decent people to avoid.⁵⁹ In comparison to northern women, those in southern Occitan courts had more respect and freedom, courts had a

⁵⁶ Turner, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

⁵⁷ Laurence Harf-Lancner cited in Burns, “Performing Courtliness,” p. 397.

⁵⁸ Linda Paterson and Geoffrey Koziol cited in Turner, *op. cit.*

⁵⁹ Turner.

festive atmosphere and were places of merriment, celebrating life and the joy of love.⁶⁰ Where northern courts denied and sublimated the erotic under Church imposed theological restraints, Occitan courts embraced and played with the erotics of ennobling love under the civilising restraints of courtliness; the juxtaposition between restraint and passion so evident in lyric.

The troubadours: women's public relations agents?

The name troubadour springs from *trobar*, a verb meaning “to find or to invent, i.e., to compose a literary work”.⁶¹ As the authors of the *cansos*, the troubadours were part of Occitan society, not a class apart. There can be a tendency to romanticise the troubadours as members of a “rarefied artistic social circle”,⁶² refined poets and romancers of women strumming lutes while singing under their lover’s balcony in rose-scented moonlight. But who were the troubadours? What kind of people were they? What was their role at court? And for whom were they writing?

Although the earliest troubadour Guilhem de Peiteu was a duke, not all troubadours were aristocrats or clerics. They were by no means a homogeneous group.⁶³ Their social backgrounds were quite diverse.⁶⁴ Some were of noble birth while other came

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 28.

⁶¹ Jensen, ed., op. cit., p. 1.

⁶² Caroline A. Jewers, “Loading the Canon: For and Against Feminist Readings of the Trobairitz,” *Romance Quarterly* 41.3 Summer (1994): p. 138.

⁶³ I. Kasten (1986) and A. H. Schultz cited in Kay, op. cit., p. 112.

⁶⁴ Zumthor, op. cit., p. 14.

from the bourgeoisie, while others from various clerical groups according to Kasten and Schultz.⁶⁵ They were also knights, artists, travelling minstrels and liegemen.⁶⁶ As Alfonsi explains, the troubadours made their living through their poetic works while also being part of daily court life.⁶⁷ Like all social groups there was a variety of cultural background, education and skill with no discrete category between troubadours who composed and *joglars* who performed, as often they were “the same person”⁶⁸ like today’s singer-songwriter. The term *joglars* described a wide variety of “entertainers, from singers, instrumentalists, jesters and skilled court conversationalists to clowns, acrobats, jugglers and imitators of bird song; some were respectable, others damnable scum” according to Paterson.⁶⁹ Troubadours were both professional and amateur, some were itinerant while others were residential and “paid retainers” that required them to perform other duties at court.⁷⁰

In summary, troubadours were a relatively diverse group with various levels of education and skills who performed a variety of roles at court. Some were living ‘hand to mouth’ while others, like clerics, were contracted by the aristocracy to write didactic texts on courtly love. Kay explains their literary contribution to courtly life:

Medieval poets didn’t live on royalties any more than most scholars do, but they exchanged their literary production for inclusion within a courtly life-style in much the same way as academics use their writings as a means of admission to a professional élite.⁷¹

⁶⁵ I. Kasten (1986) and A. H. Schultz cited in Kay, op. cit., p. 112.

⁶⁶ Paterson, op. cit.

⁶⁷ Alfonsi, op. cit., p. 397.

⁶⁸ Paterson, op. cit., p. 111.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 113.

⁷¹ Kay, op. cit., p. 1.

The heterogeneous mix of troubadours raises questions over how it was possible for such diversity to produce the thematically cohesive love *cansos*. In the wake of the autobiographical assumption, and given different levels of rank, formal education and life experience, it would seem the troubadours were adhering, at least in part, to the ethics of courtliness. As Paterson states, “Occitan poets evidently did not find the need to express the concept of ‘chivalrous’ or ‘knightly’.”⁷² Regardless of rank, all troubadours were under the same obligations to adhere to the code of courtly conduct, and charged—in theory—with bringing forth the better person inside the man, as I have argued, the reconstructed male of courtly love mystique.

While recognising the centrality of courtliness in daily court life and its didactics on the subject of love more generally, the question remains as to why women feature as subjects of the *cansos*. Lazar argues that there was a close partnership between the noblewomen and the troubadours in the regions of langue d’oc, the areas that “acted as catalyst and disseminator of the new code”.⁷³ This partly explains why women feature in the *cansos*, but is insufficient to reveal the level of women’s status implied by their veneration in lyric. Early historians read troubadour adoration as praising the status ‘inherent’ in feminine virtues. These qualities were supposedly endowed with magical powers capable of making men lose their reason while simultaneously—and paradoxically—transforming their moral characters. Troubadour declarations of what appeared to be passionate sexual/affective love in early criticism created courtly love’s

⁷² Paterson, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

⁷³ Lazar, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

mystique leaving an enduring legacy to romantic love. Indeed, in his recent biography of Eleanor, Turner also reflects this mystique when he says, “[a] concept of spontaneous passionate love was arising in the twelfth century”.⁷⁴ It seems it was unimaginable for early historians, graduates of misogynist education systems, that the troubadours could have been addressing women as persons with authority and lordly powers, as territorial landowners with the wealth and power to grant economic and social favours.

Women’s erotic or seigneurial powers?

The status of aristocratic women and its relevance to theorising courtly love has been a contested issue in academia. The historiography of that scholarship shows how critical viewpoints have changed overtime. Many early theories have a common theme of women’s power, but it is constructed around their psycho-sexual attractions as objects of male desire and/or spiritual superiority to men, rather than their seigneurial powers derived from their role as territorial lords.

Boase outlines a number of these theories. In the gender reversal of vassalic service and “[t]he feudal contract”, women are treated as an overlord with a troubadour declaring “an oath of allegiance to his lady”.⁷⁵ However, theoretical emphasis remains firmly on women as objects of amorous love, not in recognition of their lordly power. Another theory comes closer to acknowledging women’s power in that, when husbands or male

⁷⁴ Turner, op. cit., p. 158.

⁷⁵ See Claude Fauriel (1846), Eduard Wechsler (1909), H. J. Chaytor (1912), C. S. Lewis (1936) and W. T. H. Jackson (1960) cited in Boase, op. cit., pp. 89 – 90.

relatives were away on crusade, noble women acted as the “feudal suzerain” (or overlord) in their place, “thus facilitating the transference of feudal concepts of love.”⁷⁶ However, in this case women’s power is conditional on men’s absence, they act for men, not for themselves.

Another theory, based on social mobility linked with the decline of feudalism, argues that men from the “lower nobility ... comprising *ministeriales* and court officials” including troubadours, earned their place at court through “courtesy, valour and personal merit”, an aspect of which was showing admiration for aristocratic women.⁷⁷ While this references courtliness and perhaps lending weight to its transformational power, it does not explain the eroticism of lyric poetry. Another theory argues that the scarcity of women lessened the chances of knights marrying resulting in women being romanticised in love poetry,⁷⁸ and seems to take us back to the autobiographical assumption. In a similar vein and “heavily charged with Romanticism”, it has been argued that knights in training had little hope of ever marrying as they outnumbered women within the domains of medieval castles, and so lyric poetry served as an outlet for male frustrations by idolizing women’s sexual/affective powers and proposed spiritual superiority.⁷⁹

The reluctance to give credence to the seigneurial powers of noblewomen in mainstream criticism is present in the work of Duby. According to Kimberly A. LoPrete

⁷⁶ See Chaytor (1912) and Jackson (1960) cited in *ibid.*, p. 90.

⁷⁷ See Maurice Valency (1958) and Erich Köhler (1964) cited in *ibid.*, p. 90.

⁷⁸ See Herbert Moller (1958 - 59) cited in Boase, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

⁷⁹ See Violet Page (1884) in *ibid.*, pp. 24 and 90.

and Theodore Evergates in *Aristocratic Women In Medieval France*⁸⁰ Duby argued, in a sequence of essays that began in the 1960s, that during the eleventh century a major restructuring of the aristocratic family designed to counter fragmentation of wealth, descent through the male line was established whereby “eldest sons inherited virtually the entire patrimony”.⁸¹ This meant the youngest sons were virtually disinherited and women “became objects of exchange between male lineages”; they were effectively restricted to their chambers, deep within the castles, only appearing on formal or ritual occasions to be shown off as the possession of husbands whose status they improved.⁸² In line with Duby, Jo Ann McNamara and Suzanne Wemple writing in the 1970s argued that, following the family restructuring that eroded women’s property rights, they were barred from the exercise of civic powers.⁸³ McNamara and Wemple claim this marked a significant change for women in Western Europe, as prior to this restructuring, there were “no really effective barriers to the capacity of women to exercise power; they appear as military leaders, judges, castellans, [and] controllers of property.”⁸⁴ However, these theories have since lost traction in the light of new research about women in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.

Until quite recently knowledge about women’s roles in medieval society has been impeded because, as women have been largely excluded from the historical record, there

⁸⁰ Kimberly A. LoPrete and Theodore Evergates, “Introduction,” *Aristocratic Women in Medieval France*, ed. Theodore Evergates (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999) p. 1.

⁸¹ Duby cited in *ibid.*

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ Jo Ann McNamara and Suzanne Wemple cited in *ibid.*

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, *op. cit.*

appeared to be a lack of documentary evidence about their contribution to public life. But according to LoPrete and Evergates, historians have not made the most of the extensive and wide-ranging original historical material that is available.⁸⁵ They argue traditional “social models of structural anthropologists” methods of research relied too heavily on studies of literature with a misogynist bias and “mental attitudes” rather than detailed studies of what women were doing in everyday life; the events or rituals they attended, the documents they signed, and the positions they held.⁸⁶ Attention to documents that record medieval life such as “the voluminous collections of ecclesiastical charters, title-deeds of ecclesiastical institutions” as well as “chronicles, episcopal letters, and poetry ... administrative registers, notarial acts, and baronial letters” has resulted in a wealth of information about the extent of women’s involvement in social and political life.⁸⁷

This wider approach to research provides fresh material for theorising courtly love. Kelly maintained that women in the medieval period had many more social, sexual and political freedoms than women in ‘The Renaissance’ that followed, and this was particularly true of Occitania’s aristocratic women. Kelly argues that courtly love represents the “liberation of [women’s] sexual and affective powers ... [that] made women the gift givers while men did the service ... must have had some social reference.”⁸⁸ While it has been usual in mainstream criticism to figure lyric as representative of women’s sexual/affective powers, in effect it takes us back to the autobiographical assumption

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 1 - 2.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ Kelly, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

bypassing the power of their lordly status which potentially positions them with men.⁸⁹

The “social reference[s]” for women’s power can be found in the records of their social and political activities. Records of the use of matronymics are revealing. According to British medieval historian David Herlihy, during the tenth to twelfth centuries Occitania’s use of matronyms was twice that of Northern France and Italy, and three times that of Germany and Spain.⁹⁰ Use of the mother’s name is evident on charters for “vassalic or fidelity oaths”⁹¹ indicating women’s control over property. But most intriguing is the use of the mother’s name, rather than the father’s, on oaths relating to honour duels. This means the mother, not the father, was present at the duel in order to identify one of the duellers as her son,⁹² something historically considered the domain of men. Herlihy examined whether the elevated position of women in courtly love reflected the status of ‘landed’ aristocratic women as seen in the use of matronymics. His research showed that matronymics are

rare from the eighth century to the middle tenth, become ever more common during the latter half of the tenth century and reach its peak frequency in the early eleventh. Its incidence then falls off, though it remains relatively high through the twelfth century.⁹³

Courtly love developed towards the end of the eleventh century reaching its peak in the twelfth century, declining in the first half of the thirteenth. As the peak incidence of matronymics occurred in the early part of the century prior to the development of courtly

⁸⁹ There is no doubting the eroticism of troubadour lyric, however, I offer a different explanation for lyric’s eroticism in chapter 8 on ‘ennobling love’.

⁹⁰ David Herlihy, “Land, Family, and Women in Continental Europe, 701-1200,” Women in Medieval Society, ed. Susan Mocher Stuard (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1977) p. 17.

⁹¹ Paterson, op. cit., p. 221.

⁹² Herlihy, op. cit.

⁹³ Ibid., p. 18.

love, and was high during the century it came to prominence, it suggests a level of enculturation of women's power and authority within Occitan society. Herlihy concludes that

in Southern France, home of courtly love, there does seem to be a correlation between the work of troubadours in lauding ladies and the kind of community reputation reflected in our matronymics.⁹⁴

Like Herlihy, Flori argues that the troubadours were enhancing and spreading the reputation of Occitania's high noble women.⁹⁵

Occitan's women also had some choice about whether or not to marry and what type of husband they wanted, if they chose to marry; a custom that gradually increased during the twelfth century but was often undermined by family pressures according to Paterson.⁹⁶ And Swabey also states that choice of a marriage partner "rarely favoured noblewomen".⁹⁷ Nevertheless, once married, women had particular economic advantages and independence that worked in their favour with a direct bearing on their status and financial well-being.⁹⁸ Swabey argues that Occitan's diminished practice of male primogeniture meant women could inherit family wealth.

Male primogeniture was not the norm, inheritance being frequently shared between siblings. This created not only a fragmentation of resources with an emphasis on interdependency and less polarization of wealth, but also elevated the status of women who, since they could inherit property, were able to exercise more power and authority than in other parts of the country.⁹⁹

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 23.

⁹⁵ Flori, op. cit.

⁹⁶ Paterson, op. cit., p. 229.

⁹⁷ Swabey, op. cit., p. 13.

⁹⁸ Paterson, op. cit., p. 224.

⁹⁹ Swabey, op. cit., p. 57.

Research by literary historian of French R. Howard Bloch shows Occitan women had the right to own and control land, and manage property transactions independently.¹⁰⁰ Dating from the time Aquitaine “was part of the ancient Roman region of Gaul,” women’s property rights ensured their greater liberty than their sisters in northern Europe.¹⁰¹

Herlihy explains this was made possible through

the peculiarly favourable provisions of the Visigothic and Burgundian laws, which placed no juridical restrictions on her freedom to administer her own property, to share in the administration of the family property or, as a widow, to assume administrative control over it. The principle of community property in Visigothic law likewise served to increase the personal wealth of the widowed woman.¹⁰²

But Paterson concludes, “[t]he hypothesis that an increase in Occitan women’s power to control and dispose of property gave rise to Courtly Love is unconvincing.”¹⁰³

However, there are multiple social referents involved in courtly love’s construction, no single referent on its own is sufficient in my view; the role of didactic literature on courtliness in the civilising process must be accorded along-side noblewomen’s status, social and political power. Paterson also claims that control over their own property along with the dowry system, “gave Occitan and Catalan women as a whole a considerable degree of economic independence.”¹⁰⁴ In fact, a small number of Occitan women had great political and economic power as rulers over vast “allodial

¹⁰⁰ R. Howard Bloch, Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western Romantic Love (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991) p. 186.

¹⁰¹ Turner, op. cit., p.11.

¹⁰² Herlihy, op. cit., p. 23.

¹⁰³ Paterson, op. cit., p. 52.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 225.

estates ... wield[ing] power in their own right for decades”.¹⁰⁵ Cheyette leaves us in no doubt about the military might and capability of Occitan noblewomen.¹⁰⁶ And according to Verdon, some women “presided over law courts, as countess, viscountess, vicar or abbess, or even at seigneurial [sovereign authority] level.”¹⁰⁷ Appropriating the accoutrements of male authority and power through the use of “seals”, some of these women “represented themselves as armed equestrians” prepared to defend their lands against hostile seizure.¹⁰⁸ Evergates concludes that aristocratic women had lordly powers equivalent to men.

The pivotal position French aristocratic women occupied in lordly families assured their continuing participation in the “male” domains of controlling property, dispensing justice, enforcing peace, and waging war. Neither the formation of territorial principalities nor the growing powers of the French kings prevented aristocratic women from exercising the same lordly powers as their male peers, even though they did so less frequently than men.¹⁰⁹

Having examined the many possible social, cultural and political referents in the construction of courtly lyric, let us turn now to the noble women, the beneficiaries of Occitan’s favourable laws who fulfilled the roles and responsibilities outlined above.

Eleanor of Aquitaine and Occitania’s lordly women

The most notable of Occitania’s lordly women was Eleanor of Aquitaine (1124—1204). Turner emphasises Eleanor’s place as a powerful person stating, “[n]o other medieval

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 221.

¹⁰⁶ Cheyette, op. cit.

¹⁰⁷ Verdon cited in Paterson, op. cit.

¹⁰⁸ B. B. Rezak (1988) cited in *ibid.*, p. 222.

¹⁰⁹ LoPrete and Evergates, op. cit., p. 5.

queen's history comes close to matching Eleanor's extraordinary story".¹¹⁰ But her ambition and political reach have historically been ignored in favour of stories about her beauty, her 'feminine wiles' and myth making about her alleged sexual indiscretions, with some declaring she was "an essentially frivolous woman".¹¹¹ These attitudes parallel a similar obsession, apparent in the work of some historians, with women's sexual/affective allure as the source of troubadour adoration. Competing explanations—for example that women's political power might have been a basis for the texts that praised them—are rarely countenanced. Wheeler and Parsons describe Eleanor's reputation as follows:

She is identified as the greatest heiress in Christendom, marrying and being crowned queen of France at thirteen; bemoaning an unexciting marriage to Louis VII; riding bare-breasted to the Crusades; dallying scandalously with her uncle at Antioch; returning to France to divorce Louis; fighting endlessly with her second husband Henry II of England; poisoning his mistress Rosamund Clifford; presiding as his lieutenant in Aquitaine and holding "courts of love" to encourage and engage in amatory liaisons; enduring imprisonment as a rebellious (and perhaps cross-dressing) queen; dominating her sons and their politics almost to her last breath.¹¹²

Eleanor's role in the patronage of courtly love is widely known,¹¹³ but until quite recently, her place in political life has largely been ignored by traditional historians.

In her search for information about Eleanor's role in history, historian RáGena C. DeAragon found scant historical facts about her in nine textbooks on Western civilisation, and factual errors that were "disturbing."¹¹⁴ Flori maintains medieval chroniclers focussed

¹¹⁰ Turner, op. cit.

¹¹¹ Jane Martindale, cited in Turner, p. 3.

¹¹² John Carmi Parsons and Bonnie Wheeler, eds., Eleanor of Aquitaine: Lord and Lady (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003) p. 1.

¹¹³ Flori, op. cit.

¹¹⁴ C. RáGena DeAragon, "Do We Know What We Think We Know? Making Assumptions about Eleanor of Aquitaine," Medieval Feminist Forum 37.1 (2004): p. 14.

on men and their power, they were not interested in women but were obligated to mention Eleanor due to her marriages to French and English royalty.¹¹⁵ However, in “light of their own often macho prejudices” their interpretations of Eleanor’s role in political history are unreliable according to Flori.¹¹⁶

Eleanor was one of the wealthiest, most powerful and influential women in medieval European history. Her wealth amassed through her own inheritance and through marriage to French and English royalty. Eleanor reigned as queen and wife of two kings for a total of sixty-seven years, sometimes for long periods on her own as king’s regent in England. Indeed, her wealth and income, social and political influence, personal ambition and determination to exercise her power made her the equal of men, both in her own estimation, and in real terms. Eleanor’s importance to the culture of Aquitaine and her patronage of courtly love make her iconic in the history of women’s power and status in Occitania. An overview of her life is warranted in giving context to women’s lordly power, and also some insight into her love life in keeping with the first chapter.

Eleanor was the granddaughter of Guilhem de Peitieu, she was born into a dynasty of Aquitanian dukes who, because they could “trace their origins to the Carolingian rulers, considered themselves the equals of kings”.¹¹⁷ Eleanor’s mother Ancor was the daughter of the viscount of Châtelleraut, a region north of Poitiers that he ruled as lord.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ Flori, *op. cit.*, p. 273.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 274.

¹¹⁷ Turner, *op. cit.*, pp. 2 – 3. In her review of Turner’s biography of Eleanor, Bonnie Wheeler describes it as the most historically reliable book in the field.” (*Speculum* 88.2, April 2013, p. 257.) Accordingly, I have used it as my primary source.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

Ancor died when Eleanor was six, and she was later orphaned at thirteen after her father died. Upon his death, Eleanor inherited Aquitaine and the right to rule over it. Aquitaine was “the largest territorial principality in France”, a massive region beginning “just below the River Loire to the Pyrenees and extending eastward from the Atlantic coast into the Massif Central.”¹¹⁹ Just prior to his death, Eleanor’s father, fearing she would be easy prey for unscrupulous men in search of wealth, arranged her marriage to the son of Louis VI, the reigning king of France.

Shortly after their marriage King Louis VI died, and so at the tender of thirteen, Eleanor became queen of France after her husband was crowned Louis VII in his father’s place, he was just fifteen years old. Soon after, she accompanied Louis on the Second Crusade taking the role of primary councillor to Louis.¹²⁰ But the marriage was not a happy one. In *Eleanor of Aquitaine* Marion Meade says Eleanor considered Louis “incurably dull”, that he “resembled a monk” who had “utterly no interest in sex”.¹²¹ Turner interprets Eleanor in similar ways, saying her unhappiness was made worse for being away from her beloved homeland. She hated the social and cultural life in the north which was ruled by the Church, and to the pious, austere atmosphere of Parisian courts, so different to the gregarious merry courts of her childhood in the south.¹²² Making the situation worse for Eleanor was her grandfather’s reputation as a womaniser which

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid., p. 2.

¹²¹ Marion Meade, *Eleanor of Aquitaine: A Biography* (New York: Penguin Books, 1991) p. 107. See also Turner 2009 and Swabey 2004.

¹²² Turner, op. cit., p. 52.

tarnished her in French minds.¹²³

Turner argues that as well as her sexual and cultural dissatisfactions, Eleanor was frustrated by the restrictions placed on her exercise of power as Queen of France by Louis. He also took control of ruling Aquitaine, landholdings that more than doubled his own, although she never lost her claim to her inherited territories. After fifteen years, Eleanor wanted a divorce (not a term used during the period) and realised that after having two daughters, her ‘failure’ to produce a son could “push Louis in the direction of a divorce”;¹²⁴ this worked in her favour. On the basis of consanguinity—meaning the couple shared a common ancestor within the past four generations—their marriage was declared “invalid”.¹²⁵ Within a month, Eleanor remarried.

This time Eleanor, then twenty-eight, chose her own husband in a secretly arranged marriage without referring to family or others for council, something “almost unheard of in her time”.¹²⁶ Interestingly, she had met her second husband, Henry Plantagenet, during his visit to Louis’ French court in “August 1151”, when something transpired between them.¹²⁷ Eleanor did not expect to marry for love according to Turner, but she hoped for a marriage that would be a shared partnership. Taking control of her life in a strategic move, she secretly arranged an alliance that ensured the maintenance of her territorial lands and seigneurial power. Henry, Eleanor’s junior by nine years, was duke of

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid., p. 100.

¹²⁵ Ibid., p. 104.

¹²⁶ Ibid., p. 108.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

Normandy and count of Anjou, and the merger with Aquitaine was both practical and “the culmination of two centuries of Angevin pressure.”¹²⁸ They married in May 1152, and two years later in November 1154 Henry became king and Eleanor, queen of England; the union produced nine children, three girls and five boys.

Although Eleanor was wealthy in her own right, her marriage to Henry increased her wealth many times over. As well as revenue from her own duchy of Aquitaine, Eleanor’s income was topped up from the exchequer, and numerous land holdings from Henry of “some twenty-six properties scattered over thirteen English shires, ranging from single manors to income from prosperous towns, as well as some lands in France” and other sources too numerous to list here; her wealth was the equal of England’s “richest earls or barons.”¹²⁹ Apart from her physical assets Eleanor had an annual payment of approximately “£415”, roughly twice that of the average baronial income;¹³⁰ equivalent to many millions in today’s currency. Like her male contemporaries, Eleanor had the resources to be a powerful patron, “able to purchase the loyalty of grateful courtiers, the prayers of monastic institutions, and the praise of writers.”¹³¹ Eleanor was a patron to William Marshal, paying a ransom for his return following his capture in an ambush.¹³²

¹²⁸ Richard Benjamin cited in *ibid.*, p. 109.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 165 – 66.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Marshal,_1st_Earl_of_Pembroke, accessed 13.08.2016. William Marshal’s statue adorns the entrance to the House of Lords in recognition of his status as the epitome of chivalry and his political role in the formation of England’s Magna Carta that marked the beginning of democracy in England, and to which he was a signatory. He was selected as protector for Eleanor’s nine-year-old son Henry III and appointed regent of England. Both David Crouch in *William Marshal: Court, Career and Chivalry in the Angevin Empire 1147 - 1219* and Georges Duby in *William Marshal: The Flower of Chivalry*, speak of Marshal in glowing terms as representing the epitome of chivalry’s ideal.

Marshal was a rare example of everything chivalry represented, and this so impressed Eleanor that she asked him in 1168 to join her military service in Poitou where she gave him “horses, arms, money, and fine clothes”.¹³³

Eleanor’s wish to exercise political power and authority became a reality in her role as queen of England. Henry was confident of her ability to rule, and made her his regent,¹³⁴ leaving her in charge of England during the first difficult years of becoming king and his long absences on crusade.¹³⁵ In fact, during Henry’s reign of thirty-five-years he spent under thirteen of them in England, during which he had faith in Eleanor’s capacity to represent royal sovereignty and authority.¹³⁶ John of Salisbury considered Eleanor and Henry’s power to be “interchangeable” and his “[l]etters ... authored in Archbishop Theobald’s name reveal Eleanor acting as authoritatively as any Anglo-Norman or Angevin monarch.”¹³⁷ Surviving charters signed by Eleanor,¹³⁸ though small in number, show “her offices as queen and duchess”

in governing her own duchy of Aquitaine and her two husband’s kingdoms. Almost 200 documents issued by Eleanor are known, only 20 or so from her marriage to Louis VII and about 160 as wife and widow of Henry II.¹³⁹

However, Eleanor’s role as Henry’s regent began eroding after the first ten years or so due to her own absences in Anjou and Maine acting in Henry’s place. Contributing to

¹³³ Ibid., pp. 166 and 186.

¹³⁴ Ibid., p. 150.

¹³⁵ Ibid., p. 152.

¹³⁶ Ibid., p. 150.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid., p. 319, note 19. Turner informs us that Eleanor’s surviving charters are from her “own documents, that remained uncollected as part of the Plantagenet *Acta* Project, chair, Sir James Holt”.

¹³⁹ Ibid., p. 18.

Eleanor's diminished role was the increase of sovereign government through the growing professionalisation of England's administration ¹⁴⁰ of which the education in courtliness for positions in ministry played a major role.

During the first sixteen-years of their reign, neither Eleanor nor Henry attended to matters in Aquitaine and by 1167 "the Poitevin nobles' threatened revolt".¹⁴¹ It was agreed Eleanor should return to Aquitaine to provide regent authority and political stability. In fact, their marriage had been in decline, so they agreed to a "mutual ... unofficial separation without undue rankor", and in 1168 Eleanor took up residence in Poitou.¹⁴² Some have argued the separation resulted from Henry's liaison with Rosamund Clifford but according to Turner the timing of such is inconsistent with this argument.¹⁴³ Henry had always had affairs, and as Turner points out, Eleanor had always accepted "that aristocratic husbands were habitually unfaithful" and she accepted it as part of marriage.¹⁴⁴

For the next half decade and for the first time since her 1137 departure from Aquitaine to marry Louis, Eleanor thought she would at last exercise legitimate power over her principality in her own right.¹⁴⁵ But as Turner explains, the situation was not as it appeared.

The longer she resided in her native duchy, the more she identified with her nobility, who resented her husband's infringements on their traditional liberties. She came to see that she held only a shadow of power, while Henry kept for himself the essential elements,

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 173 – 74.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., p. 184.

¹⁴² Ibid., p. 185.

¹⁴³ Ibid., pp. 184 - 85.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 204.

military force and money, and his continued interventions made her tenuous position clear. More and more, the couple's political partnership was fraying. In Eleanor's years at Poitiers, she grew more involved with her sons as they approached manhood, and she worked to ensure Richard's succession in Aquitaine.¹⁴⁶

Henry also faced resentment and anger from his own sons for despite granting them territories, he refused to part with the accompanying riches and the power to rule. Turner tells us volatile relationships between fathers and sons was not unusual for the period, and as was the custom of "aristocratic mothers" at the time, Eleanor took the side of her sons, but unlike other mothers, it was with the use of force.¹⁴⁷

What followed was a clear demonstration that Eleanor played by the same rules as men, and was prepared to use her political power to advance her cause. She encouraged and helped orchestrate the 1173-1174 rebellion of young Henry and Richard the Lionheart, raising an army in trying to wrest power from Henry II. It was a bold, brave, tenacious move, "near unimaginable to contemporaries" and unique in history according to Turner; it was reported by the medieval "chronicler Ralph Diceto", as the only case up to that time of a "queen rebelling against her royal husband."¹⁴⁸ Although the rebellion was eventually quashed, Eleanor and her son's challenge posed the greatest opposition to Henry's "authority ... throughout his domains ... that he would face until his last days."¹⁴⁹

The revolts' eventual failure resulted in Eleanor's imprisonment for fifteen years in Chinon Castle, England.¹⁵⁰ Why Henry chose prison when he could have had Eleanor

¹⁴⁶ Turner.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ralph Diceto cited in *ibid.*, p. 205.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

executed for treason is a mystery. Did he still have feelings for her? Or was he wary of her power and concerned not to cause further dissent from Eleanor's political allies? Turner argues Henry "could not risk putting her to death, since his complicity in Thomas Becket's murder was already costing him heavily."¹⁵¹ Whatever the reason, Eleanor was not daunted.

Following her release after Henry's death in 1189, then in her seventies, she launched into a new life working to support the reign of her two remaining sons, "achieving the political influence that she always had craved."¹⁵²

Eleanor was a woman who fought for the freedom to make her own choices in life, expecting to find partnership in her two marriages; when that proved impossible, she dared to challenge them and go her own way.¹⁵³

Eleanor's remarkable life was perhaps made possible due to her extraordinarily strong constitution and mental stamina. During the period of her reign, she survived eleven pregnancies and deliveries at a time when women routinely died in childbirth. Nine of her children grew to adulthood, and she outlived all of them bar one, living to eighty at a time when average life expectancy was just thirty years for the lay population, and perhaps a decade more for people of Eleanor's rank.¹⁵⁴

Although Eleanor lost her mother very early, shaping her sense of personal power as a woman, was the legacy of a strong female dynastic heritage, kept alive through the

¹⁵¹ Ibid., p. 2 – 3.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 29.

custom of story-telling about the lives and adventures of female ancestors.¹⁵⁵ Cheyette discusses this practice in his biography of Ermengard of Narbonne, a contemporary of Eleanor's, reporting that

almost every great Occitan dynasty ... could name the matriarchs of their near or distant past, women whose lives were as charged with intrigue, ceremony, and warfare as those of their male contemporaries.¹⁵⁶

Turner argues Eleanor grew up with stories about her female ancestors who “sometimes succeeded in grasping power in the turbulent tenth and eleventh centuries”.¹⁵⁷ According to Turner many noble “women confronted and abandoned ineffectual or adulterous husbands, governed as deputies for weak or absent spouses or for minor children, and claimed lordships as their own hereditary right.”¹⁵⁸ Among the stories of the “earlier duchesses of Aquitaine,” Eleanor heard about “her grandmother Philippa of Toulouse,” wife of William IX and even earlier ancestors such as “Emma, a tenth-century duchess, or the eleventh-century duchess Agnes of Burgundy,” third wife of the duke William the Great.¹⁵⁹ Paterson names the many women who “wield[ed] power” and “ruled lands in their own right or on behalf of absent husbands or minor children”:

Agnes of Burgunday, grand-mother of Guilhem, the first troubadour, played an active and ambitious role in government and politics; Guillemette, viscountess of Nîmes, governed on behalf of her son Bernard-Aton; Adelaide of Toulouse administered the estates of her son Viscount Raimon-Roger of Carcassonne in conjunction with Bertrand de Saissac. A number, such as Adelaide of Carcassonne (1002) or Philippa of Poitou (turn of the eleventh century), took over from their husbands who went on pilgrimage or crusade.¹⁶⁰ ... Viscountess Ermengard ruled Béziers and Carcassonne after the death of her husband

¹⁵⁵ Turner, p. 11.

¹⁵⁶ Fredric L. Cheyette cited in *ibid.*, p. 14.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*,

¹⁶⁰ Molinier, Kasten and J. Verdon cited in Paterson, *op. cit.*, p. 221.

and also after her son's majority, only retiring after twenty-five years. The troubadour Raimbaut d'Aurenger's mother governed her own lands before and after her marriage. Ermengard of Narbonne ruled the city, which she inherited in 1150, in her own right for nearly sixty years, despite being twice married and having to fight off challenges from turbulent vassals and her own suzerain Alfons-Jordon of Toulouse.¹⁶¹

In her 2016 book *Women's Networks in Medieval France*, historian Kathryn L. Reyerson studies the life of Agne de Bossones, her social status, her big family and property assets, her charitable and philanthropic work, and her networking as a link into the lives of other women in Montpellier (part of Occitania).¹⁶² Collectively, all the women listed above arguably represented models of female self-empowerment, authority and power to successive generations of medieval women.

In the way that many aristocratic women fought for their rights as individuals and supported each other in that endeavour, there is a strong sense of a woman's—perhaps even a feminist?—community thriving in Occitania. In the light of new research methods illuminating the extent of women's roles and powers, this idea has some traction. We know Eleanor had the support and protection of her “maternal Châtelleraut relatives” throughout her life and reigning years, as the “purely patrilineal family model did not yet prevail in the region”.¹⁶³ Ermengard of Narbonne ruled for sixty years “without sharing

¹⁶¹ Kasten cited in *ibid.*, pp. 221 – 22.

¹⁶² Kathryn L. Reyerson, *Women's Networks in Medieval France: Gender and Community in Montpellier, 1300-1350*, The New Middle Ages (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016). Reyerson gives a selection of other works on women in the medieval period including “Francine Michaud and Andrée Courtemanche on Provence, Marseille and Manosque, respectively, Christiane Klapisch-Zuber on Florence, and Stanley Chojnacki on Venice inaugurated a historiographic bonanza that now includes Isabelle Chabot on Florence, Rebecca Winer on Perpignan, Marie Kelleher and Dana Wessell Lightfoot on the Crown of Aragon, Stephen Bensch on Barcelona, Cécile Béghin-LeGourriérec on women and the economy in Languedoc (Montpellier, Alès, and Mende), Susan McDonough on witness testimony in Marseille that reveals much about women, and, most recently, Lucie Laumonier on many dimensions of the late medieval family and solitude in Montpellier that treat women” p. xxi.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

power with her husband”, but is barely mentioned in “the viscounty’s documents.”¹⁶⁴ There is a lot more to be discovered about these noblewomen and their role in shaping medieval history.

Did Occitania’s aristocratic women know their contribution to society was under-recognised and under-recorded in documents during their lifetime? Was the oral tradition of keeping female heritage alive a conscious strategy in fostering women’s power, and a buffer against being written out of history? Given how women’s social roles and power in politics and government have historically been underestimated in Occitania, these questions seem highly relevant. While they are beyond the scope of this research, it appears Occitania’s noblewomen had real seigneurial power and status that is reflected in the *cansos*, which in turn, formed part of the ideology of courtly love. Linked with the theme of masculine submission, women’s power and status in lyric later became a metaphor for equality in romantic love that perhaps unconsciously, continues to operate for contemporary women.

In praise of lordly women

If aristocratic women were aware their contribution to society was under-represented, patronage of lyric may have provided a valuable source of public relations. Kay raises an important point about status, that it is not synonymous with rank. Status does not

¹⁶⁴ Cheyette cited in *ibid.*, p. 14.

automatically derive from rank which is “mechanically conferred by heredity or marriage, whereas status is a cultural construct which admits of negotiation.”¹⁶⁵ Given the social and political power of the women presented above, it seems highly feasible that they were active, both privately and publicly, in negotiating their social status at court, one avenue being troubadour lyric.¹⁶⁶ References to women’s status as lords appear throughout the *cansos*. However, “troubadours both attribute, and deny, status and authority to the *domna*,” while at the same time “they both disavow, and claim status for themselves”, an ambiguity emblematic of courtly lyric according to Kay.¹⁶⁷ This inconsistency creates confusion and is a major obstruction to finding any singular meaning in lyric.¹⁶⁸

Nevertheless, there are many examples of songs referencing the *domna* as a lord. The courtesy in all the following poems and songs reflects the code of courtliness. Bernart de Ventadorn I, makes a clear reference to a woman as a lord.

Worthy lady, I ask nothing of you except that you take me as your servant,
For I will serve you as one does a good overlord, whatever the reward might be (vv.49-52)¹⁶⁹

Again, in the fifth and sixth stanzas of Bernart’s *Gent estera que chantes* (XXXVII) he makes direct reference to the lady as a noble lord, using the language of fealty and sworn oaths just as a vassel would address an overlord:

V. Lady, the loveliest that was ever born and the best I ever saw, I take up
my position with bowed head (or: in your service?), kneeling down and

¹⁶⁵ Kay, *Subjectivity in Troubadour Poetry*, p. 12.

¹⁶⁶ A discussion of how women negotiate their social status is taken up in chapter 8.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 115. All poem quotes referenced to Kay are her translations.

standing up, in your noble lordship. You have even given me generously (nobly? freely?)
a courtly pledge – I daren't say what it was – that could
sweeten my imprisonment for me.

VI. Lady, I love you truly, freely (nobly?), with a good heart, and I style
myself your vassal whenever anyone asks me to whom I belong.¹⁷⁰

The last sentence of verse V seems to confuse meaning by adding a flirtatious element; how is this to be interpreted? If the purpose of courtly lyric is the 'respectful' seduction of women, then the secrecy of—"I daren't say what it was"—suggests the erotic. But if, as appropriate to courtliness, his purpose is praising a lordly woman then his declaration of the generous courtly pledge could be designed to provoke other men in the competitive verbal jousting between troubadours, and their quest for patronage. Or the semantic confusion could be a deliberate ploy to keep everyone guessing, thereby adding to the fun and entertainment at court. As we know from Kay, troubadour lyric demands to be read on multiple levels.¹⁷¹

In his seven stanza poem, Arnault Daniel meditates on his experiences with the joys and sorrows of love. In this second stanza he chooses a wealthy *domna*, making it clear his choice is primarily economic. Although her attractiveness has not gone unnoticed, acknowledgement of a noblewoman's physical attributes is within the confines of courtliness.

II. Anyone who loses all his property at once needs to look out for a rich/powerful lord to make good his losses for a poor lord wouldn't be worth an egg. For this reason I have made my choice of her, and in doing so, I didn't have my heart or my eyes closed! And I promise you, Love, if you win her for me to observe a truce towards all other women from outside her abode.¹⁷²

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., pp. 116 – 17. I am not clear whether or not the bracketed additions are Kay's.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., p. 17. I offer a possible explanation for this erotic ambiguity in chapter 8.

¹⁷² Ibid., p. 12.

Common to lyric are references to “Love”, like the above, as an entity or third ‘person’ with the power to grant the poet’s wish if he adheres to love’s ‘courtly’ moral code. Another example of this theme is a song by Bernart de Ventadorn; the last sentence leaves us in doubt as to whether “Love” is a metaphor for the lord, or a reference to courtly love.

Alas, how I am dying of longing! For often I am so absorbed in longing thoughts that robbers could carry me away without my having an inkling of what they are doing. By God, Love, you find me an easy conquest, with few allies and no other lord but you.¹⁷³

In the next example from “Peire Vidal’s *Atressi co.l perilhans*” in stanza six of nine, he uses praise to gain a favour:

VI. For I sincerely desire to ask the favour of her who is the epitome of all good qualities; and the first setback, for which I repeatedly sigh and weep, in no way makes me despair of the rich help which I have long awaited. And if it pleased her to assist me, I would be more blessed with joy than all other loyal lovers.¹⁷⁴

To the contemporary mind, use of the term “loyal lovers” has a sexual connotation which was not the case in medieval times, when it had a much broader meaning encompassing the love shared between political friends and “the love of man and lady”.¹⁷⁵

Cheyette explains the meaning of “*druht*” which, while it translates as lover (perhaps giving credence to the autobiographical assumption), had “nothing to do with erotic or sentimental relations between men and women.”¹⁷⁶

“Druht” is derived not from Latin ... but from an old Germanic source, Frankish “druht,”

¹⁷³ Ibid., p. 25.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 34.

¹⁷⁵ Cheyette, op. cit., p. 175.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

Old English “dryht,” Old Norse “drott.” In all these ancient languages ... [i]t was the word for “war band,” and to Old High German, medieval Latin, French, and Occitan it gave the meaning “faithful friend,” in the sense of one who had sworn fidelity.” The poetic meaning it gained as “lover” testifies to the emotion that was believed to infuse such military and political relationships.¹⁷⁷

Cheyette also points out that “drut” was first used in political documents of Occitania dating from 1065, well prior to its earliest extant use in courtly lyric.¹⁷⁸ The following quote is an example of the word “lover” in a song by Rogier purportedly addressed to Ermengard of Narbonne:

Of all the lovers I am the most faithful,
for to my lady I say nothing nor do I
command her to do anything;
I ask neither kind favors nor pretty
pretence;
however she is toward me
I am her lover and pay court to her
secretly, discreetly, quietly.¹⁷⁹

As Ermengard was married, use of the word lovers (“*drutz*” in the original song) combined with the element of secrecy gives the impression of adultery. But another interpretation is that Rogier, by his declaration of selfless devotion is paying homage to the noble personage of Ermengarde as a friend and ally, while also demonstrating his skill in the virtues of courtliness. We must remember his song is for public performance, he may even be singing directly to Ermengarde in the audience, and so the discretion of his final line appears ironic, unless we view it as a message about discretion and courtly diplomacy.

Regardless of lyric’s multiple readings leading to ambiguity of meaning, there is

¹⁷⁷ See Du Cange and Glynnis M. Cropp (1975) cited in *ibid.*

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 1776.

¹⁷⁹ Derek E. T. Nicholson (1976) cited in *ibid.*, p. 175. It is unclear who translated this poem. Cheyette references Nicholson, *Peire Rogier*, p. 61 in its note 94, p. 232 but does not say directly that Nicholson is the translator.

no doubting that women's status features in this medieval social discourse. It is perhaps comparable with women's issues today in contemporary culture where some women have status and political power, and others do not, and where some men are pro-feminist, and others are not. The *cansos* can be viewed as simultaneously producing and representing social discourse, where feminist views compete for ideological space in the hegemony of patriarchy. Indeed, the troubadours may have been using ambiguity as a mechanism for negotiating the politics of these two ideological spaces, allowing the author to hide his true allegiance in the public arena of court while playing with new forms of gender premised on women's power.

Conclusion

Occitania was a microcosm of the ideology and principles of courtliness and individualism that would later become 'The Enlightenment'. Occitan's culture was a shining example of the civilising influence of courtliness. It was also the repudiation of the masculine warrior ethic of chivalry and the politics of force practised in northern France and the rest of Europe. Measures to control male aggression and violence along with a de-emphasis on feudal practices led to a reduction in subjection across all levels of society. Occitans thrived in the relative peace and harmony which afforded more time and resources for social, cultural and educational activities, enhancing personal development and quality of life.

Occitania's noblewomen benefitted from its progressive property laws that supported their independence and power. They were significant stakeholders and

participants in its governance through membership of powerful aristocratic families, and in many cases as wealthy territorial lords in their own right. Noblewomen's wealth and power meant they could influence their social status, and the development of a refined civil courtly culture, through patronage of the arts. The emotional and practical largesse of the ducal courts of Aquitaine and Poitiers produced a fervour of intellectual, philosophical and artistic creativity effecting a psycho-emotional environment conducive to the birth of 'courtly love'. Troubadours were both recipients of this cultural sophistication and key participants in its development and promulgation. In the enlightened world of Occitania's courts, they had the freedom to play with ideas about social and gender relations, marriage and love, and the role of the emotions and affect in the cultivation of urbanity and the joy of love, as principles for living.

Thus far I have highlighted the cultural and semiotic differences between chivalry and courtliness, and interrogated the latter for the historical origins of the 'reconstructed' male of contemporary romance culture. The transformation of masculinity represented in lyric was the effect of practicing courtliness, rather than a metamorphosis effected through the love of a troubadour for his *domna*, as read by early traditional historians and literary critics. However, the problem remains of how to explain the flagrant erotics of courtly lyric in the context of the restraints of courtliness that gave vent to the autobiographical assumption, and is the subject of chapter 8.

CHAPTER 8

'Ennobling' Love & the Political Uses of the Erotic

Throughout courtly lyric the virtues of courtliness are assembled against the destructive forces of instinct, impulse and passion, alongside the use of reason against anarchy in service to civility and peace-making. And yet many troubadour songs and poems are intense renderings of consuming passion and emotional paroxysms, something of a paradox at the heart of courtly lyric. Beyond the sexual politics of the autobiographical assumption, how can the politics of courtliness and respect for women be reconciled with what appears to be the flagrant eroticism of troubadour lyric? In the current contemporary questioning of romantic liaisons, can the erotic evocation of the *cansos* lyric form be explained by ennobling love—in which everything depends on the power of its language to interpellate?

On its own, courtliness is not enough to account for the erotics in troubadour songs and poems. Alongside courtliness, we need to consider the amatory linguistics of 'ennobling love', the appellation given to another convention from the same medieval period. It was a form of exaggerated aristocratic speech used to honour and flatter royalty and dignitaries. I argue that ennobling love's rich effusive, emotional vocabulary infused the verse *cansos* with erotic ontological substance and vitality. This was interpreted as a

powerful visceral experience by early scholars, making it tangible and validating its historical authenticity. Speaking through the ‘naturalness’ of the corporeal this discourse reads as a sensual, intoxicating and exalting kind of sexual/affective love which I argue, was a legacy in the construction of the psycho-emotional and erotic potency of ‘falling in love’. The literature and studies of romantic love have parallels with the literature and studies of ennobling love where it is deemed as having a special quality or power to transform; ennobling love transforms by conferring nobility. But where does this power come from, and how does it operate in the courtly context?

Despite its apparent erotics, ennobling love was not sexual/affective love as we understand it today, it had a social function embedded in power politics at court; as Anna Kartsonis argues, “there are more uses of the erotic than just erotic ones.”¹ The historical fascination with lyric centres on what Kay describes as “a fundamental paradox of Occitan love poetry”, that in a culture where men dominate, noblewomen in lyric apparently have a higher status than men.² Occitania’s aristocratic women I contend, became participants in ennobling love in the twelfth century through the socio-political status and power attending their roles as territorial lords—as the term *domna* suggests. Accordingly, the troubadours were *responding* to noblewomen in a similar vein to that of noblemen; acknowledging their nobility and elevated social position in their own quest for recognition and advancement in plying their trade. Rather than historically authentic love

¹ C. Stephen Jaeger, Ennobling Love: In Search of a Lost Sensibility (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999) p. 21.

² Kay, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

affairs, the love *cansos* are consistent with the forms of public, social and political love stemming from courtliness and ennobling love.

However, when women emerge in the discourse of ennobling love it does not obliterate the existing misogynist one, but takes up a textual position in parallel creating ambiguity and contradiction around gender and status for which the verse *cansos* are renown. One possible explanation for lyric's "fundamental paradox" is that it reflects this parallel discourse where noblewomen compete for space in political debate through their patronage of lyric. This evinces a reality that social change, then as now, does not occur spontaneously but presents as a number of competing discourses over time.

Burning with passionate 'virtue'

The sweetness of your sacred love abundantly refreshes and soothes the ardour of my breast every hour, every minute; and the beauty of your face, which I constantly dwell upon in loving thoughts, fills all the channels of my memory with desire and an immense joy, and in my heart the beauty of your goodness and your appearance enriches me as with great treasures.³

This passage from the eighth-ninth century reads as a passionate declaration of (hetero)? sexual desire.⁴ However, it is a prime example of 'ennobling love'; the highly sensual and erotic language of this passage is a public address from one man "Alcuin ... tutor and favourite" to another, Charlemagne his king.⁵ What is so striking in this example of a

³ The tutor Alcuin cited in Jaeger, p. 2. Jaeger is the major theorist on the subject of 'ennobling love'; all searches for works on this subject referred back to Jaeger. Accordingly, his work is used extensively in this chapter.

⁴ While this reference, and the one about 'Cordelia' further on, are chronologically and culturally removed from the period in question, they speak to the long history and cultural development of the language and politics of ennobling love.

⁵ Jaeger, op. cit.

male-to-male discourse is the parallels between the elevation of a man onto a metaphorical pedestal, in the same way as the troubadours were said to place the *domna* in a male-to-female discourse; the parallels are compelling. Those parallels and their political implications are examined throughout this chapter, beginning with a description of ennobling love.

The above passage about love is not love in the way it is often represented today. The etymology of enoble is the French *ennolbir* meaning “[t]o give the rank of nobleman [sic] to (a person)”, “[t]o impart nobility to (a person or thing)”, and “[t]o impart a higher character to (a person or thin); to dignify, elevate, refine” as well as “[t]o render famous or illustrious.”⁶ If we apply the love word to enoble—‘ennobling love’—it refers to an honourable and “charismatic” type of love in medieval discourse reserved for royalty and the aristocracy tied to career aspiration and the hope of financial reward.⁷ Like courtliness, ennobling love was tied to civility and political ambition. It was performed in public by addressing a noble or dignitary through highly elaborate, eloquent speech emphasising their nobility, hence to (en)noble. Being noble involved a charming and magnetic form of self-presentation that Jaeger argues was the realm of exceptional persons: “The greatest kings had it along with abbots, bishops, courtiers, and the most humble saints.”⁸ And as I argue, also queens, noblewomen and other women of religious or pious note.

This is quite separate from the realm of Eros and the physical intimacy commonly

⁶ <http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.flinders.edu.au/accessed> 07.06.2017.

⁷ Ibid., p. 4. There is no reference in the OED for ‘ennobling love’.

⁸ Ibid.

associated with both courtly love and romantic love. The concept of honour tied to love sounds anachronistic to the modern ear, especially in the context of the prevailing politics of sexual liberation and the supposedly emancipated sexual relations between western women and men today. The situation “becomes clearer” Jaeger explains, “if we put the question of sexuality to one side and ask about the social function of ennobling love.”⁹ As a medieval discourse and practice, ennobling love was different to forms of sexual, romantic or married love, according to Jaeger, because “it links politics, the social life, and the emotions”, a vital linkage in “peace-making, treaty-making, and treaty-keeping”.¹⁰

Jaeger describes it as

a spiritualized love that responds to the “virtue,” the “majesty,” the charisma, the saintliness, of the beloved, to some inner force of authority or amiability or sanctity. It occurs in various sites of aristocratic life. ... It is also important to stress that charismatic love is a genuine mode of loving. At a king’s court love and devotion are never, or hardly ever, separable from ambition and material rewards. Still, there was a mode of loving that flourished in the presence of concentrated authority, power, or divine force, a love that was or could be heartfelt even when mixed with awe or terror or conniving ambition.¹¹

Alcuin’s declaration of ardent love and admiration we saw in the opening quote was part of the political economy of ennobling love and as noted by Jaeger, Alcuin was later promoted to “abbot of Tours.”¹² Jaeger gives other examples of the link between honouring majesty and personal reward; the first is from the eighth-ninth century, the last two are from the twelfth century during the period of courtly lyric:

The court poet Theodulf pined for Charlemagne’s son, Charles: “My eyes thirst for the sight of you with unquenchable longing, and the lofty love in my breast desires you.” He

⁹ Jaeger, op. cit.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. ix.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 4.

¹² Ibid., p. 2.

became bishop of Orleans.

Bebo of Bamberg, former tutor of Henry II, despaired ... that “mere words can express, most beloved emperor, how much I love you” – a prelude to requesting a promotion.

Meinwerk of Paderborn showed Henry II “the flames of his intimate love,” and was promoted to bishop of Paderborn.¹³

The similarity in values between courtliness and ennobling love are compelling: these two conventions support and reinforce each other in maintaining court sociality, civility and diplomacy; both depend on the exercise of restraint and deference for success.¹⁴ Court subjects were expected to perform public displays of exalting love as a show of their allegiance, regardless of their true feelings, and in return honour was bestowed on them.¹⁵

Failing to confer honour in appropriate situations was considered a terrible violation of protocol with dire consequences.¹⁶ For just as demonstrations of ennobling love brought prestige and material reward, withholding it could mean disgrace and economic loss as exemplified in Shakespeare’s ‘King Lear’. During “a solemn public forum charged with destiny for the kingdom” King Lear’s youngest daughter Cordelia, refuses to make an appropriate declaration of love to her father; instead stating, “I love your majesty, [a]ccording to my bond; nor more nor less” thus “putting on public display[,] a denial of his royalty.”¹⁷ This “is a little like knocking his crown off his head” says Jaeger, and in response the king “disowns Cordelia and strips her of her dowry”; both

¹³ Ibid. Jaeger does not give dates or references for these quotes.

¹⁴ Indeed, these two discourses endure in contemporary times in the pomp and ceremony of royalty, and the language of aristocratic address like “Your Majesty” and “Your Royal Highness”. In our judiciary and high government office “Your Honour” and “Your Excellency” are everyday forms of address, as is “The Honourable Member” or “The Honourable Minister” at Parliament.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 1.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 3.

¹⁷ Ibid.

have been dishonoured and their “worth” diminished in the eyes of the court.¹⁸

However, there was a time when, as a woman, Cordelia could not have bestowed ennobling love on her father, or been a recipient of it herself. With its origins in antiquity in the ideals of friendship and love in Latin literature from Cicero, Ovid and scripture, ennobling love was an exclusively homo-social practice between men.¹⁹ According to Jaeger, it is not until the end of the eleventh century that women appear as participants in its discourse.²⁰ Prior to this historical moment the love between women and men was a private matter, there was “no public discourse ... in which women’s love was ennobling.”²¹ Women were regarded as licentious and corrupt, vile seducers tempting men away from moral conduct to carnality, as depicted in this poem by Hildebert of Lavardin (c. 1055 – December 18, 1133), a member of “the Loire Circle of Poets”:

A frail thing is woman, constant only in crime,
never on her own does she desist from harm.
Woman is an insatiable flame, extreme madness, unmitigated catastrophe ...
Woman’s intimacy is the worse the closer it is,
She invites crime by her attentions, her voice, her hand.
Consuming all things, she is consumed by every vice,
and preying on men, she makes herself the prey ...
A woman deprived Paris of his sense and Uriah of his life,
David of virtue, Solomon of his faith ...²²

This was written during the early stages of courtly lyric and highlights that there was a double discourse about women operating at the same time, as in other historical periods.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. x.

²⁰ Ibid., pp. ix and 6 – 7.

²¹ Ibid., p. 6.

²² Heldebert of Lavardin cited in *ibid.*, p. 84.

Women 'become' virtuous

In his discussion of how women became part of ennobling love's discourse, Jaeger points out that the type of elevated discourse of *fin'amor* did not suddenly appear in medieval Occitania, but was a continuation of a much older custom. He argues there was a strong "tradition of prais[ing] high noblewomen" from antiquity to the end of the ninth century, when it suddenly stops until the latter part of the eleventh century, when literature venerating women reappears.²³ The twelfth century saw this discourse "transferred from men to women [and] taken over into the literature of courtly love."²⁴ The intervening years saw an attack on woman's character as ruled by her conniving sexuality and corrupting force on men, particularly husbands.

Watch out for your own wife, let her not corrupt your mind with temptations! On your knees, hands, neck and cheeks she will press sweet kisses mingled with soft words, practised at spiking her prayers with poison ...²⁵

On and on this tirade goes for another 15 lines.

The significance of the historical moment when women's love becomes virtuous is accentuated by the previously historical male exclusivity and gendered politics of virtue. This is evident in its etymology, as Jaeger explains "ennobling love turns on virtue, and inscribed in the word itself is gender exclusivity: **virtus** is strictly for **viri**, who are the sole possessors of **virility**",²⁶ the hallmark of chivalrous masculinity. The concept of

²³ Jaeger, op. cit., p. 87.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 82.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 83.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 82. Bold emphasis in original text. OED says 'virtue' is borrowed from French 'vertue', accessed 17.1.2018.

“woman as a moral force” in the literature of courtly love that appears at the same time with their improved social and political status in court society is closely linked according to Jaeger.²⁷ He also says, “[i]t is important to note that at the same time woman becomes virtuous, she also becomes a poet.”²⁸ The freedom of the medieval female voice to express lived experience has parallels with contemporary women’s reading, writing and theorising the romance, a voice that gains legitimacy when situated in women’s greater social power and economic freedom, as was the case with Occitania’s noblewomen. However, Jaeger’s analysis of women’s entry into the discourse of ennobling love stays within the confines of literature.

Zumthor argues that in creating the innovative *cansos*, the troubadours drew on a number of features present in “the practices and customs” of their environment, such as “rhythms, melodies, and verse patterns” and troubadour “imagination and sensitivity”.²⁹ However, these features alone are not enough to account for what he describes as the depiction of *fin’amor* (or pure love) which he says is “silhouetted against a background of strongly sexualized (though often implicit) eroticism.”³⁰ Both Jaeger and Schultz argue against reading sexual content in the passionate renderings in various forms of literature and texts from the twelfth century. The articulation of passion and strength of feeling was a marker of “an exalting, distinguishing, “honouring” mode of relating lover to beloved”;

²⁷ Ibid., pp. 87 – 88.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Zumthor, op. cit., p. 15.

³⁰ Ibid.

a mode Jaeger defines as “passionate friendship”.³¹ Jaeger gives one such example in the bond that developed between Richard Lionheart and his enemy, Philip Augustus of France with whom Richard “fell in love” during his father’s (Henry II) 1187 crusade in France.³² This passionate bond resulted in a cessation of fighting as reported by the chronicler, Roger of Hovedon at the time.

Richard, Duke of Aquitaine, son of the King of England, remained with Philip, the King of France, who so honoured him for so long that they ate every day at the same table and from the same dish, and at night their beds did not separate them. And the King of France loved him as his own soul; and they loved each other so much that the King of England was absolutely astonished at the vehement love between them and marvelled at what it could mean. ... It seemed that the affection of mutual love between them was so strong that it could not be broken, nor could they ever betray their love.³³

To the contemporary mind, this love has a sexual/affective quality which goes to the difficulties in understanding ennobling love in the context of “passionate male friendship”³⁴ and by extrapolation, passionate friendship between women and men.

I propose that if ennobling love is the affirmation and celebration of male virtue in the context of royal and aristocratic power, noblewomen also emerge in its discourse as a response to feminine virtue in the context of their social status, courtly and seigniorial, not their sexual/affective, powers. While Alfonsi (1986), Zumthor (1995), Keen (1996), Jaeger (1999), and Schultz (2006) acknowledge the importance of courtly love for its influence on behaviour in medieval court society, Duby takes the argument further. In *France in the Middle Ages* (1993), he claims the culture of courtly love was integral to

³¹ Jaeger, op. cit., p. 17.

³² Ibid., p. 11. Richard was the son of Eleanor of Aquitaine.

³³ Ibid., pp. 11 – 12.

³⁴ Ibid.

power relations at court and establishing the state.

Courtly love proved an extremely effective means of strengthening the state. In fact, it was so influential that no study of the progressive rationalization of power can afford to ignore it, although at this period it is only documented in literary works, often centered on the theme of “fine amour,” [sic] or refined love.³⁵

This ties the politics of courtly love, i.e. the elevation of women, deferential masculinity, the themes of social love and female ennoblement to the politics of power and governance. Indeed, in her edited book *The Cultural Patronage of Medieval Women* (1996), professor of French June Hall McCash argues that women’s role in patronage of the arts and the promulgation of courtly love had more relevance in medieval politics than previously understood.³⁶

The previous chapter put the case that troubadours were “lauding” aristocratic women in the *cansos* in response to their status and power. But Jaeger’s analysis of women’s emergence in ennobling love focusses on their sexual/affective powers, beauty and feminine virtues, reiterating the autobiographical assumption of Continental criticism. Cheyette argues that the socio-political context of troubadour poetry is crucial to its interpretation, as “issues of power—especially the power of women—are rarely far beneath the surface” of courtly lyric.³⁷ However, Jaeger offers no analysis of women’s power as a corollary of men’s in ennobling love’s discourse. Medieval scholar Caroline Walker Bynum points out that Jaeger does not give an “historical analysis” of women’s

³⁵ Ibid., p. 200.

³⁶ June Hall McCash, ed., *The Cultural Patronage of Medieval Women* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996).

³⁷ Cheyette, p. 141.

entry into ennobling love.³⁸ While Jaeger argues women enter ennobling love's discourse from the end of the eleventh century, increasing throughout the twelfth century—dates consistent with the onset and flourishing of courtly lyric—there is no analysis of the social and political power of Occitania's aristocratic women as a possible reason for their entry into this ennobling discourse, and their representation in courtly lyric. Bynum notes Jaeger's examples of women's ennobling love in Latin literature in the form of letters and other documents (citing the love letters between Heloise and Abelard, among others), but those letters were of a private love not the public display of praise and adoration characteristic of ennobling love. In addition, medieval historian John Gillingham argues that Jaeger's emphasis on what "members of the clerical elite thought about love" does not reflect everyday aristocratic behaviour.³⁹ Indeed, Jaeger shows little interest in the vernacular literature of courtly lyric, despite his contention that women emerged as participants of ennobling love "in both the courtly and the monastic spheres."⁴⁰

Jaeger describes ennobling love as "primarily a way of behaving, only secondarily a way of feeling", and that it was "primarily a public experience, only secondly private", placing it within the realm of mandatory court practice and "ceremonial behaviour".⁴¹ He argues against interpreting the language of ennobling love "as an indication of an illicit erotic attachment" between men, and excludes the terms homosexual or homoerotic which

³⁸ Caroline Walker Bynum, "Book Review: Ennobling Love: In Search of a Lost Sensibility by C. Stephen Jaeger," Common Knowledge 9.3 (2003): p. 542.

³⁹ John Gillingham, "Book Review: Ennobling Love: In Search of a Lost Sensibility by C. Stephen Jaeger," The English Historical Review 115.463 (2000): p. 932.

⁴⁰ Jaeger, op. cit., p. 6.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 6 and 42.

are, he says, “colored by the erotic.”⁴² Instead Jaeger uses Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s term “homosocial”,⁴³ meaning non-sexual or non-romantic relationships between the same sex; in this case, between men at court based on friendship or mentoring. Sedgwick argues that male homosociality, like heterosexuality, has been part of the patriarchal system in the oppression of women. Applying the term in the context of ennobling love, Jaeger states that use of the term homosociality

sets sexuality to one side, eliminates its automatic inclusion, while holding it in readiness. The discourse of male-male love displays on its surface sexuality vanquished and banished. Sexual desire and sexual intercourse can infiltrate it secretly, but they do not govern it from their position of hiding.⁴⁴

However, when women enter this discourse, sexuality *is* an “automatic inclusion”; this is significant in view of how this sexual inclusion becomes the basis of Jaeger’s theory of how romantic love came into being. Indeed, he argues that virtuous love had to manage the baseness and passions of carnal desire which created what Jaeger calls “the dilemma of romantic love”.⁴⁵ This is the conceptual template where men become virtuous through the transformative power of erotic love—central to the ideology of romantic love—but one that continues to fail due to the destructive forces of desire and sex.

A gendered double standard?

Despite Jaeger’s rejection of erotic interpretations of ennobling love between men, when

⁴² Ibid., p. 15.

⁴³ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick cited in *ibid.*

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Jaeger, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

women enter the frame he sexualises the female-male interaction, displacing public power with private libidinous desire, anchoring the interaction to heterosexuality, reinforcing its normativity. Jaeger argues the female-male interaction created “tensions between sexuality and an ideal of virtuous love”.⁴⁶

What I will call “the romantic dilemma” arises out of the attempt to reconcile virtue with sex. It became acute from the end of the eleventh century on, when women emerge in the discourse of ennobling love, and *a kind of love joined naturally with sexuality asserted its ability to ennoble*. Virtue and sex formed a precarious union; it was constantly falling apart, showing its destructive nature, crushing those who claimed its ennobling force. From the High Middle Ages on, the romantic dilemma created a great literature of romantic love, rich in ambiguities, full of tragic, destructive passion.⁴⁷

Jaeger’s explanation of how “naturally” ennobling love joined with sexuality in the context of women, is troubling. For Jaeger, ennobling love takes on a heterosexual construction, not a heterosocial one, thereby creating a double standard. While arguing that ennobling love “flourished in the presence of concentrated authority, power, or divine force”,⁴⁸ there is no analysis of women’s power that might account for their entry into the convention of ennobling love. Jaeger argues the female-male interaction becomes sexual/affective, or at the very least, had to deal with suspicions arising from the reality of heterosexual relations, that was not the case between men.

Admit women to the gentleman’s club of love-as-a-public-phenomenon, love-as-a-source-of-virtue, love-as-an-exalting-and-prestige-giving-force, and the smooth surface of innocent erotic discourse is shattered. It was invaded by irony, double entendre, ambiguity, and shame. Its magic cloak of invulnerability lost its powers, and gentlemen in love with women had to ward off dishonour and suspicion in the ordinary ways, something they were spared when their only object of desire was some quintessence of male virtue. Love and its expression were free to rise to ecstasy, as long as chastity was

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid. Emphasis added.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 4.

their grounding.⁴⁹

The idea that the erotic discourse between men was “innocent” is questionable, as is the conjecture arising from the autobiographical assumption which coloured early theories of courtly love.

In the tradition of early Continental criticism, the theorisation of masculine submission as the ‘ennobling’ *effect* of a powerful amorous love, puts the cart before the horse. It does not take into consideration the level of medieval misogyny which appears to ‘magically’ dissipate under the allure of women’s virtuous beauty, something that gave such potency to courtly love’s mystique. The men of that era were not suddenly transformed mentally and psycho-emotionally into worshipping lovers of women due to their virtue and allure. As argued previously, men were gradually educated in the forms of proper courtly conduct through the civilising movement of courtliness, and its particular type of urbane social love.

Occitania’s noblewomen had the power and wealth to grant material favours, and it is not unreasonable that like their male counterparts, they too were subject to ennobling love. Jaeger’s account of how “*a kind of love joined naturally with sexuality asserted its ability to ennoble*” replicates the patriarchal conceptual template that has historically dominated scholarship, literature and fiction with far reaching effects on the narrative of falling in ‘romantic’ love. As Schultz points out, viewing [hetero]sexual love as an ennobling force has “a long scholarly tradition”.⁵⁰ This tradition viewed the force of

⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 157 – 158.

⁵⁰ Schultz, op. cit., p. 166.

heterosexual love—in and of itself—as the catalyst for transforming troubadour behaviour causing them to submit willingly to the ‘trials’ of love. This tradition is exemplified here by Denomy:

What is it then that makes Courtly Love to be Courtly Love? What is it in the troubadour conception of love that distinguishes it from that of the ages that preceded them? The first essential characteristic is two fold and inseparable, --the ennobling force of love and the elevation of the woman loved to a place of superiority above the lover.⁵¹

This quote naturalises the power of erotic love, encapsulating the narrative that heterosexual love has ‘magical’ transformative powers, qualities emblematic in romance literature and culture. According to Denomy, the power resides *in* embodied love, there is no analysis of men’s self-restraint through urbanity, or women’s seigniorial power as a possible reason for their elevation.⁵²

In Cheyette’s discussion of the appropriation of feudal oaths into the poetic vocabulary, he emphasises women’s power, saying troubadour poetry “accepted ... [and] enlarged upon ... the power of women”, but maintains the context was erotic.⁵³ He argues that troubadour poetry was part of “a continuum of linguistic use” associated with oaths of fidelity and service.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, Cheyette eroticises those oaths, maintaining that when

the language of power relations—of loyalty and faith, of treason and deceit—[is] used in what are *clearly erotic contexts* we have ... a projection of those relations of power and status into the world of intimacy. But by that very move we have likewise a counter-reflection of the force of sexual longing back into the world of power, an eroticization of

⁵¹ Alexander Denomy, “An Inquiry into the Origins of Courtly Love,” *Mediaeval Studies* VI (1944): p. 176.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Cheyette, *op. cit.*, p. 165.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 176 – 77. Some examples of these oaths in troubadour poetry appeared in the previous chapter.

the ideology of faith and loyalty.⁵⁵

But do the oaths of fidelity and fealty come under the banner of ennobling love? Crouch says Andreas Capellanus⁵⁶ linked ennoblement “with the act of knighting”⁵⁷ suggesting these feudal oaths were part of the practices of ennobling love. For Cheyette, courtly lyric’s “eroticization” is founded on “sexual longing”, but without historical evidence of erotic relations between *domnas* and troubadours, and the dangers posed by such relations, the apparent “erotic contexts” necessarily reside *exclusively* in the poems and songs, and need explanation.

Returning to the example of ennobling love between Charlemagne and Alcuin in the opening verse quote in this chapter, the easy assumption is that it refers to erotic love until we know it is a male-to-male interaction, which presents two possibilities: is it a homoerotic interaction or does it speak of a non-erotic love between men? Boswell opens the door to the former possibility, saying that during the medieval era homosexuality went through periods of acceptance and rejection by the Church and society.⁵⁸ However, the latter possibility is more likely in this case because as Boswell points out, Charlemagne was against sodomy (homosexuality was not a term used during this period) and “threatened unspecified punishments” for its practice.⁵⁹ This makes it highly unlikely that Charlemagne was engaging in a homoerotic exchange, but which at the same time could

⁵⁵ Ibid. Emphasis added.

⁵⁶ Capellanus was a twelfth century chaplain and the author of *De Amore* (About Love).

⁵⁷ Crouch, op. cit., p. 43.

⁵⁸ Boswell’s study focusses on male homosexuality because as he says, women have been dealt with only “peripherally” by historians and there was a dearth on information about female homosexuality, p. xvii.

⁵⁹ Boswell, op. cit., p. 177.

have had a different meaning for Alcuin; Boswell alludes to Alcuin's homosexuality when he says that Alcuin's "own inclinations disposed him to treat homosexuality leniently."⁶⁰ All this demonstrates the difficulties in assessing meaning in the *cansos*. However, given the above and knowing the political context of the verse quote under discussion, the latter possibility seems the more likely; it was an example of the erotics of ennobling love rather than of sexual relations.

So the question remains; why assume the erotic content in the male-to-female examples of ennobling love are sexual? Accordingly, referring back to Cheyette's above quote, rather than the language of power being used in "the world of intimacy"—bearing in mind that the *cansos* were performed in public—I contend that as part of a historical "continuum of linguistic use", the aristocratic language of ennobling love brought the erotic into the context of women's lordly power, in parallel with men's. In Jaeger's and Cheyette's accounts, the erotic linguistics of ennobling love are interpreted as heterosexual desire only when applied to women, in the same way as early historians' autobiographical assumption. But as Jaeger points out, it was principally a behavioural practice rather than an emotional experience;⁶¹ for some it may have been a convenient cover for genuine feelings of amorous desire, but this exists apart from the political function of ennobling love which was as relevant in the male-to-female discourse as in the male-to-male.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 178, note 31.

⁶¹ Jaeger, op. cit., p. 6.

While more recent studies of courtly love take account of women's power, the emphasis for many remains on the erotic. In this quote that addresses the complexities, paradoxes and ambiguities on the subject of adultery, Lazar gives a concise summary of the current position in much scholarship.

The love songs of the troubadours are certainly not to be considered as actual testimonies of real love affairs or frustrated amorous adventures, although some underlying ties with a historical reality might have existed, known only to the songwriters and hidden from our inquiry behind many layers of disguising devices and verbal games: euphemisms, puns, conventional signs, ambiguous expressions, mannerisms, etc. It is therefore within the fictional framework of the poetic texts that we have to define and understand the erotic-sexual language and imagery. Whether the married lady of the songs is historical or fictional does not alter the fact that the nature of *fin'amor*, as poetically articulated in the *cansos*, remains adulterous beyond any doubt.⁶²

On the issue of adulter, Zumthor argues that “[t]he “sincerity” question is not worth asking” and leads to “a discourse that is an end in itself.”⁶³ However, as the issue of adultery has left such an enduring legacy to romantic love and goes to the position and power of medieval Occitania's noblewomen, and gender politics more widely of that time and place, it remains pertinent to the study of falling in love.

It seems timely then to ask whether the “erotic-sexual language and imagery” of the *cansos* can be understood in terms of the erotic-sensual linguistics of ennobling love. The theme of ennobling love pervades courtly literature with early criticism (Lewis 1936, De Rougemont 1939, Denomy 1953, Moller 1960) identifying it as a positive force in the elevation of women and the devoted love of poets. But for these theorists ennobling love is imbedded in sexual/affective passion as a transformative force. In much the same way

⁶² Lazar, “*Fin'amor*”, p. 72.

⁶³ Zumthor, op. cit., p. 15.

as with the politics of romantic love, ennobling love has been figured as a natural, innate love arising from within the body as an inherent response to nobility and virtue, rather than as a political discourse of power with rules of conduct tied to personal distinction and professional advancement.

Ennobling love was not erotic love as we know it today, but its influence on the use of language to convey deep embodied emotion, whether genuine or fabricated, has been absorbed by romance culture. For Jaeger, Cordelia's violation of court etiquette marks the "historical [fictional] moment" when ennobling love began its historical metamorphoses from a public display of veneration into a private experience of romantic love.⁶⁴ But there is a further problem with ennobling love as the basis of romantic love, that perhaps goes to romantic loves' historical lack of felicity. The hierarchical, power-based 'constitution' of ennobling love with its politically motivated flattery and lip-service is irreducible, making it problematic as the basis for intimate love; indeed, it both mimics and conceals the unequal power in gender relations through masculinity's objectifying reverence for women. Adoration is a poor substitute for love, and when used in service to personal ambition—like economic benefit or winning a woman's heart—is inconsistent with the conditions of love. Shakespeare's Cordelia knew a thing or two about love; namely, that it is corrupted by power and must be given freely before it constitutes love.

Speaking through the body: hearing the erotic

⁶⁴ Jaeger.

The body is the materiality of nobility in the discourse of ennobling love; it must be radiant and its presence should arouse and inflame those in attendance to honour its personage through erotic—non-sexual—eloquence. As Schultz argues “the material and efficient causes of courtly love ... downplay the importance of sex while highlighting ... the efficacy of nobility and courtliness.”⁶⁵ This does not exclude the possibility of some, or even many, troubadours having amorous feelings for a *domna*, or those feelings being reciprocated. However, in the unlikelihood of actual adulterous relations and the absence of any proof of such, if what we imagine to be the sexual elements can be put to one side, can the libidinous quality found in many songs and poems be explained by ennobling love? As we will see, ennobling love’s intimate emotive power is generated through vivid descriptions about the body using metaphor and hyperbole; the use of exaggeration for rhetorical impact or a figure of speech to emphasise a point, an argument, or a feeling, which the troubadours used to great effect.

From the end of the eleventh century and throughout the twelfth there was a significant shift in gender politics, when women entered the previously male domain of instruction in virtues and moral development.⁶⁶ “The remarkable turnabout” says Jaeger “is not only the reversal of the moral valence on woman, but the insistence on the equality of man and woman”.⁶⁷ Marbod of Rennes (ca. 1035-1123) archdeacon and schoolmaster makes the case for equality:

For, being the same creature, we live under the same conditions,

⁶⁵ Schultz, op. cit., p. 98.

⁶⁶ Jaeger, op. cit., p. 90.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

And there is nothing which we do not bear in common,
Being in all things alike except for the distinction of sex.
We are conceived in the same way, we eat the same foods,
Dress alike, our sadness and tears are moved
By the same feelings, we judge with like intelligence
What is good what is evil, what is just, what is sinful,
And our mutual sentiments flow with equal eloquence ...
All these things man and woman can do in common.⁶⁸

There was no gender divide in the articulation of virtuous love during this period according to Jaeger. Baudri of Bourgueil (c. 1050-1130), abbot of Bourgueil then bishop of Dol-en-Bretagne uses the same language for both men and women: “I love you vehemently, more than I let you know. I love you vehemently, because you are so vehemently lovable” and “... I love you vehemently and without deceit; I love you vehemently and will love you completely, I enfold you and you alone in the depths of my being”; the first quote addressed a man, the second addressed a nun.⁶⁹

During the shift in gender politics, Jaeger argues that the married woman came in for particular honour in her role as wife and mother.⁷⁰ Can the *cansos* eroticism be understood as an adaptation in the mode of ennobling love that is *particular to married noblewomen*; a form of ennobling love by men to women in the courtly manner, expressing the power politics at court through the medium of *fin'amors*? Being married also conferred honour upon men, who were counselled to find a wife who epitomised virtue and courtly behaviour.⁷¹ This was different to the previous “generation or two” when, for instance, “Queen Emma offered “conqueror” qualities to a warrior husband.”⁷²

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Jaeger, pp. 96 - 97.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 90.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

It seems possible that the troubadours were honouring *domnas* (married lordly women) as paragons of virtue, courtliness and nobility through the medium of the *cansos* adapted from the discourse of ennobling love.

Eroticising the corporeal with sensual poetic language, emphasising the material substance of a dignitary's nobility and virtue is fundamental to the homosocial male-to-male politics of ennobling love; themes of physical contact through touching, embracing, and kissing or longing to do so, are common. Jaeger gives many examples of what appear to be amorous content in letters, religious and educational texts between men in the twelfth century. This example is from a letter written by Anselm of Bec welcoming two novices into his community.⁷³

My eyes eagerly long to see your face, most beloved; my arms stretch out to your embraces. My lips long for your kisses; whatever remains of my life desires your company, so that my soul's joy may fill in time to come. ... You have come, you have set me on fire; you have melted and fused my soul with yours; this soul of ours can now be rent asunder, it can never be separated.⁷⁴

It is "preposterous" Jaeger argues, to imagine this letter represents "an illicit erotic attachment" especially as the letter is addressed to more than one person, people he had probably never met.⁷⁵ I tend to agree. But why sexualise the same sentiments when women are the subject of this discourse? Especially when Jaeger tells us that heterosexuality and homosexuality had no meaning during that historical period and "gender was a matter of indifference" in this mode of love.⁷⁶ Themes of physical contact, embracing and kissing

⁷³ Ibid., p. 14. "Anselm of Bec was a Benedictine monk, abbot, philosopher and theologian of the Catholic Church", also called "Anselm of Canterbury". <https://en.wikipedia.org/>, accessed 17.06.2017.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 17.

in the male-to-male discourse are evident in the *cansos*. In fact, the erotic rhetoric in that form tends to be stronger than that of the *cansos*, perhaps indicating caution on the part of the troubadours worried about raising suspicions of love affairs. It is not unreasonable, when we apply this ennobling discourse to women in a male-to-female context, to ask if the themes of hinted-at and longed-for corporeal possession within a heterosocial mode, represent an imagined quasi spiritual/physical union with female nobility in the same way as with male-to-male case?

In the following male-to-female examples, we see an emphasis on the body using evocative language, as well as themes on the status and courtliness of noblewomen and feudal service. The troubadour Guillem de Cabestany sings in *Lo dous cossire*:

Before the pain bursts into flame over my heart let Mercy descent into you,
My lady, and Love; may Joy return you to me, and keep away sighs and tears;
Let not Rank or Wealth bar me from you; all well-being is eclipsed for me
If Mercy does not prevail with you on my behalf.⁷⁷

We know Guillem's heart is not about to burst into flame, but the exaggeration on the corporeal suggests 'sexual' passion and plays on the erotic (as we currently understand it). But it is effective in conveying his great respect, loyalty and faithfulness for "My lady"; a noblewoman with the power of rank and status to accept or reject his courtly love and the renown and/or privileges he thereby hopes to secure. Again, in the next quote, corporeal themes are used to emphasise depth of embodied feeling, leaving us in no doubt as to the strength of his admiration for his lady's courtly virtue and devotion.

⁷⁷ Kay, op, cit., p. 58.

This love strikes me so pleasingly through the heart with a sweet savour that
I die a hundred times a day with pain, and come to life another hundred ...⁷⁸

The “sweet savour” of love is emphasised through hyperbole, as the love is powerful enough to cause his death and rebirth many times over.⁷⁹ Likewise below, Guillem de Cabestany sings about the worth of a woman in similar ennobling terms as men speak to each other. Just as Alcuin remarks about the beauty of Charlemagne’s face, de Cabestany speaks of his lady’s beauty which is not only physical but a metaphor for her ennobled status, spiritual attributes and courtly virtues:

every good quality is conferred on my lady, and God made her so attractive that she can envy no other lady her beauty; even if she were among her enemies, no one would claim ever to have seen such a beautiful lady: she possesses understanding, beauty and courtliness; no one can see her without saying this a hundred times better (than I).⁸⁰

In his song (*Ges pel temps fer e brau*), Peire Vidal sings about the effect a noble body, without reference to gender, has on him:

And the noble body, cheerful and dignified, is my warranty against all suffering. Lovely smile and sweet glance fill me with laughter and enjoyment.⁸¹

And from Bernart’s “Non es meravelha”, graphic descriptions of the physical effects of love flavour this next stanza with the erotic; its references to the corporeal are in keeping with the discourse of ennobling love and its hyperbole.

VI. When I see her, it is obvious in my eyes, my face, and
my color, for I tremble with fear like a leaf in the wind. I am more
witless than a child, I am so overwhelmed by love; and a lady can take

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 23.

⁷⁹ Was the reference to the love that “strikes ... so pleasingly through the heart” later appropriated for romance and St. Valentine’s day in the image of cupid firing his ‘erotic’ arrow through a blood-red heart?

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Kay, op. cit., p. 63.

pity on a man thus vanquished.⁸²

In both courtliness and ennobling discourse, the body is the locus of attention for elevating, honoring, magnifying and aggrandising the status, virtues and power of both aristocratic women and men.

As with the male-to-male expressions of ennobling love, the sensual descriptions of the *domna's* charismatic nobility, and the *physical affects* of that charisma on the troubadour's body and affectivity, gives lyric the impression of a powerful deeply-felt, emotional and embodied experience of 'transcendent' love. As Bloch observes, the language of the troubadour's songs and poems are a "style of expression ... capable of generating its own emotion".⁸³ According to Kay, hyperbole is the most common trope of troubadour composition, the others being "irony ... metaphor, metonymy and catachresis", all of which "make meaning elusive, subject to slippage, and resistant to univocal reading."⁸⁴

Regardless of there being no single reading of troubadours' creative output, historical interpretations have overwhelmingly adduced to heterosexual love under the influence of the autobiographical assumption and lyrics' sensual and provocative language. Lyric's eroticism can be viewed as mediated through ennobling love's linguistics and the use of corporeal metaphors linking the physical with the virtuous and the spiritual. Early historians read these corporeal metaphors as a libidinous frame of

⁸² Kay, "The Contradictions of Courtly Love and the Origins of Courtly Poetry: The Evidence of the Lauzengiers," pp. 214 - 15.

⁸³ Bloch, op. cit., p. 102.

⁸⁴ Kay, op. cit., p. 17.

reference, interpreting troubadour lyric as representing the heights of amorous passion and/or suffering. But as Kay asks, “[w]hat is hyperbole but a failure to represent ‘reality’?” Read as a unique, exceptional kind of ‘true’ amorous heterosexual love, this rendering of lyric through its later appropriation for romance developed into the core narrative of romantic love, the psycho-emotional erotics of falling in love.

All the above examples of ennobling love mediated through corporeal themes, exude sensuality and eroticism to the contemporary mind. Lyric implied a romantic subjectivity for early scholars, who were themselves already the subjects of its historicity through cultural artefacts; particularly for those first scholars interpreting lyric in the late 1700s, a century after Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* (c. 1594-1595). Early historians and literary critics were interpreting lyric retrospectively, importing contemporaneous meaning into terms whose historical meaning was quite different.

This importing of contemporaneous meaning is also applicable to ‘courtship’. In early criticism, the deferential behaviour of the poets was couched in the terms of courtship. As Kay argues, in much troubadour lyric courtly virtues are applied in maintaining “integrity in courtship, poetic expression, ... [and] courtly conduct”.⁸⁵ The term courtship is loaded with meaning in contemporary romance culture, as a time when traditionally, a man woos his sweetheart. This is reflected in the English Oxford *Living Dictionary* (of contemporary meanings), where courtship is designated as the “period

⁸⁵ Kay, *op. cit.*, pp. 51 and 54.

during which a couple develop a romantic relationship before getting married” and “[b]ehaviour designed to persuade someone to marry or develop a romantic relationship”.⁸⁶

However, pre-dating that definition, the OED’s first listing for courtship excludes romantic love. It is from Old English and refers to the art of courtliness, the “[b]ehaviour or action befitting a court or courtier; courtliness of manners” and “[p]ractice of the arts of a courtier; courtcraft; diplomacy, flattery, etc” (examples of such behaviour across a variety of human relationships are provided).⁸⁷ There is no mention of either ‘courtly love’ or the medieval period of the eleventh to thirteenth centuries in this dictionary. The development of the contemporary meaning of courtship is apparent in the OED quotes which progress from the art of being courtly, courtesy, courtiership, and ceremonial acts, to its association with romantic love in this gendered definition of “[t]he action or process of paying court to a woman with a view to marriage; courting; wooing”: dating from 1600 in Shakespeare’s *Merchant of Venice*, “Be merry, and imploy your cheefest thoughts to courtship, and such faire ostents of loue”; 1677 by T. D’Urfrey in *Madam Fickle* IV 41 “Follow me, and I’ll place you, where you shall, unseen, hear all their Courtship”; from 1711 is this quote by politician and writer, J. Addison from the *Spectator* No. 261:3 “The pleasantest Part of Man’s Life is generally that which passes in Courtship” and from 1839 Dickens’ *Nicholas Nickleby* xiv. 123 “A newly-married couple, who had visited Mr. and

⁸⁶ <http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.flinders.edu.au/accessed> 07.06.2017.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

Mrs. Kenwigs in their courtship.”⁸⁸

Like ‘courtly love’ was an imagined term from a culture six centuries removed from lyric’s creation, courtship was also not a term used during that historical period. Based on the historicity of courtliness and ennobling love and this analysis of their combined discourses and practices in courtly lyric as didactic entertainment, I view the process called courtship as the correct mode of courteous conduct for approaching, conversing with and engaging noblewomen in seeking their patronage, financial assistance and friendship as political allies.

Women’s political ‘uses of the erotic’

My use of the term ‘women’s political uses of the erotic’ is an extension of Lorde’s concept of “the erotic as power”, where she views the erotic as a connection with the deepest part of ourselves as a form of knowledge with the power to “guide [our] own destinies.”⁸⁹ It is used here in reference to the determination and tenacity of many Occitanian aristocratic women who used their power in service of their own social and political goals. Patronage of courtly lyric was an avenue through which noblewomen could increase their reputations and social standing. As stakeholders in the production of an art form, seigneurial women could influence representations of strong female subjectivity and identity that challenged gender roles and the hegemony of patriarchal

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Lorde, *op. cit.*, p. 54. Lorde’s concept of “the erotic as power” was discussed in chapter 2.

power.

Pertinent to this discussion of women's agency are questions raised in chapter 7. Did Occitania's noblewomen know their contribution was under-recognised in documents of their day? Was the oral tradition of remembering/memorialising their female heritage a conscious strategy in fostering women's power, and a buffer against being forgotten or written out of history? These questions beg others: were Occitania's aristocratic women active in promoting their emergence in the discourse of ennobling love, using their agency as lords to promulgate their own agenda through lyric? Given the historical material presented in the previous chapters on the politics of courtliness, the legal and property rights of Occitania's noblewomen that assisted in their wealth, and social and political power, all these suppositions seem plausible.

It becomes germane then, to question whether Occitania's noblewomen were active in promoting a discourse that raised their social standing and status. The difference between rank and social status is relevant here. As Kay points out, "status is a cultural construct which admits of negotiation" unlike rank which is given automatically through "heredity or marriage."⁹⁰ So a noblewoman (or man) could have rank through birth or marriage but no real social standing. Social status was established through personal agency in the pursuit of social, military and political engagement in the forming of allies, necessary to maintaining territorial property. Just like their male peers, aristocratic women needed political allies in protecting their wealth and power and were active in promoting

⁹⁰ Kay, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

themselves on a par with men of similar standing.

Clues for this political military standing are evident in use of the word *drut* in the *cansos*. Loyalty and generosity were lauded as the virtues of friendship between political allies. But one word in particular signified the political alliance, the Occitan or *langue d'oc* word *drut*. As Cheyette has pointed out, although *drut* translates as lover, it was not referring to erotic heterosexual relations.⁹¹ Instead, *drut* meant “the shared love of political allies”, a relationship of political fidelity and friendship between allies, not necessarily one of sexual union.⁹² This should make us cautious, from the position of our highly sexualised contemporary Western world, about putting contemporary meaning on ancient forms of love and their cultural significance in specific historical contexts. Given its meaning and the fact that *drut* was used in the *cansos*, it perhaps sheds more light on the status of the relationship between troubadours and *domnas*. Like aristocratic men, many aristocratic women were capable of extending favours to troubadours ranging from literary patronage, to armed support and economic reward. What, if any, evidence is there to support this conjecture?

Aristocratic women were in a prime position to influence the *cansos*. Patronage of the arts was generally expected of the aristocracy. It was one of the duties of many noblewomen under their auspices as head of housekeeping in baronial, ducal and royal households and castles.⁹³ Flori states that due to research by feminist historians, we now

⁹¹ Cheyette, p. 175. The word “drut” and its etymology was discussed in chapter 6.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Turner, op. cit., and Meade, op. cit.

know female patronage “was much more extensive than previously thought”.⁹⁴ Eleanor of Aquitaine was “one of the earliest and most influential of female patrons”⁹⁵ and many scholars argue she was the model for Guinevere and Iseult.⁹⁶ However, Eleanor was not alone as a charismatic personality who held court and gave patronage to artists; there were “three Queen Matildas” who came before her, as well as “the Empress Matilda” and many others.⁹⁷ Krueger maintains that regardless of male authors dominating “extant medieval texts”,

the extant record of women’s correspondence, lyric and narrative poetry, and devotional writing in Latin and in French is especially strong in Anglo-Norman and French culture, where examples of female patronage abound.⁹⁸

Noblewomen’s patronage is also evident in the “[n]umerous dedications to historical women” as well as “unidentified “dames” grac[ing] the Prologues and Epilogues of romances”, of which Krueger provides a list in her cited volume.⁹⁹ Through patronage, the contesting voices of aristocratic women could influence lyrics’ contents to reflect their seigneurial power in support of their own social and political agendas.

Women were educated to enjoy and promote the arts, as historian Schönback states, the education of aristocratic women in the twelfth century “was on average more refined than that of men”,¹⁰⁰ and according to Krueger, “[t]here is ample evidence that

⁹⁴ Flori, *op. cit.*, p. 280.

⁹⁵ Krueger, Women Readers and the Ideology of Gender in the Old French Verse Romance, p. 135.

⁹⁶ See Turner 2009, Meade 1977, and Markale 1987.

⁹⁷ R. C. De Aragon, and Wheeler and Parsons cited in Flori, *op. cit.*, p. 280.

⁹⁸ Krueger, *op. cit.*

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 135, and see note 8, p. 147.

¹⁰⁰ Schönback, quoted in Wechsler cited in Elias, The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations p. 249.

elite women were literate as readers”.¹⁰¹ What, then, did they read? While “pious works and didactic texts” feature as the largest proportion of medieval women’s books, “romances comprise the second largest genre owned and/or transmitted by women.”¹⁰² Noblewomen may also have had the leisure time for reading in contrast to their husbands, or other male relatives, who were often away, sometimes for years on crusades, leaving women in charge. Under those conditions, decisions regarding patronage—and many other matters—would necessarily have devolved to women, who had a greater role “beyond their household ... [to] act in the public sphere.”¹⁰³ Indeed, the need for women to take more authority and responsibility can perhaps be gleaned from the statistics of the crusades: there were seven major crusades and a number of minor ones between 1096 and 1291 (the period roughly marking the rise and fall of ‘courtly love’) which saw millions of men leave for the Holy Lands of which an estimated 1.7 million died.¹⁰⁴ There are parallels here with women being encouraged to step into traditional male roles during World War II, where they showed their capacity to be men’s equals, only to be forced to return to the domestic realm once the war was over, and men returned to their jobs.¹⁰⁵

As the *cansos* were not written in Latin but in the Occitan vernacular, the *langue d’oc*, it meant aristocratic women had direct access to the literature. Is it merely a historical

¹⁰¹ Krueger, op. cit., p. 133.

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 135.

¹⁰³ Turner, op. cit., p. 15.

¹⁰⁴ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crusades>, accessed 21.07.2016.

¹⁰⁵ During WWII the American Government had a campaign called “Rosie the Riveter” to recruit women into jobs vacated by men who went to war; this also happened in Australia and England. Women proved their ability to do all manner of work as well as men, but they were forced back to the domestic realm once men returned from war and wanted their jobs back. The documentary “The Life and Times of Rosie the Riveter” was produced in 1980 to tell the story of this moment in history when women were encouraged to work in the market place, <http://www.m.imdb.com> accessed 23.08.2015.

coincidence that the first portrayals of respectful male-to-female love in literature, was the artistic creation of a culture in which noblewomen were territorial lords with wealth, power and social status? It is interesting to note that, unlike the rest of Europe, Occitania had “a significant group of female poets” (around twenty-one *trobáiritz* or female troubadours), all of whom were from the aristocracy, and as Bruckner states “play[ed] with and against the masculine poetic system.”¹⁰⁶ This research suggests noblewomen’s status had a pivotal role in the ideology of ‘courtly love’ lyric which later became a metaphor for equality in romantic love. It is intriguing that the first literature to praise women was also the first written in the vernacular. This could suggest women’s involvement at the most fundamental level through patronage of an art form that both addressed their significance in society and made the literature accessible to all women.

This thesis ascribes, in part, the apparent sexual erotics of the *cansos* to the sensual, amatory and corporeal linguistics of ennobling love, and its use in the veneration of noblewomen’s seigneurial power and status. I propose a definition of the erotic specific to ennobling love that excludes sexuality while allowing for psycho-emotional and physical arousal as a response to the charisma, radiance and gracious bearing of nobility. In addition, I have argued that lyrics’ depiction of troubadour urbane subjectivity and submission was not the effect of ardent sexual longing but the love inherent in the conventions of courtliness and ennobling love, necessary to the veneration of noblewomen, which in turn, was necessary to success at court. This different reading of

¹⁰⁶ Bruckner, op. cit., p. 201, note 1.

courtly lyric changes its semantics and politics, subverting its mystique and the mysterious power of romantic love that continues to dominate Western romance culture.

While I think lyric has significant content relating to courtliness and ennobling love, it would be a mistake to take lyrics erotics too seriously. Despite the socio-political importance of these two forms of public social love and their underlying economics, the troubadour's articulation of these matters is highly sophisticated, nuanced, engaging, and often jocular in a rhetorical mode that refuses singular explanation; the troubadours liked to keep us guessing. As Kay argues, the troubadour's poetic achievement, "lies in the conjunction of passion with formal refinement, commitment with convention, referentiality with irony, concreteness with abstraction, seriousness with humour."¹⁰⁷ The perfect subterfuge perhaps for playing with the erotic and the suggestion/fantasy of intimacy with aristocratic women beyond the poets amorous reach. Just the sort of entertainment one needs to brighten a dull or fractious day, while being reminded of proper etiquette and easing tensions at court.

Conclusion

Ennobling love was first, and foremost, a social performance of veneration towards royal and aristocratic power largely motivated by court custom and personal ambition, rather than libidinous forces. The lordly power and patronage of Occitania's aristocratic women was one aspect of social life referenced in the troubadour's *cansos*. But while the medieval

¹⁰⁷ Kay, Subjectivity in Troubadour Poetry p. 212.

politics of ennobling love enlighten our understanding of courtly lyric, it is its erotic linguistics that played a major role in the construction of the psycho-emotional erotics of falling in love. The erotic hyperbole of ennobling love embellished on corporeal themes used to venerate aristocratic women, combined with masculine submission were the catalysts for assumptions about troubadour lyric that became a patriarchal conceptual template constructing the ideology of romantic love.

Much of courtly lyric's mystique derives from the troubadour's florid language that for early scholars, created the *impression* of strong amatory emotions, interpreting lyric as depicting an exceptional and authentic form of love between *domnas* and troubadours. In the history of courtly lyric scholarship, noblewomen's 'apparent' sexual/affective liberation, coupled with courtliness themes of urbane troubadour subjectivity and the erotics of ennobling love, created a powerful mythology of courtly love as a special 'true' kind of love that became part of the emotive poetics of romantic love, setting the psycho-emotional erotics of falling in love that has endured for centuries and persists in contemporary life.

CONCLUSION

In their 1990 edited book *Romance Revisited*, Jackie Stacey and Lynne Pearce ask whether the classic romance—by which they mean foundational—ever existed. It is at best questionable whether the classic romance, mistakenly associated with courtly lyric, ever existed. Instead, lyric depicted forms of medieval social and political love that had practically nothing to do with heterosexual/affective love as we know it today. Regardless, the *cansos* historical appropriation for romance has left a powerful lasting legacy on how falling in love, and being ‘in love’, is perceived and practised in contemporary romance culture. What we understand romantic love to be, how it is experienced, and the meanings ascribed to that experience are the substantial legacy of the discourses and practices of medieval courtly culture and society represented in lyric and romance.

The notion that a strong physical attraction and connection—commonly referred to as ‘chemistry’—is indicative of, or at least the beginning of, ‘true’ love, persists in contemporary romance culture, along with its associations with ‘soulmates’, destiny and living happily ever-after. From our earliest experiences of fairy-tales beginning ‘once upon a time’, the reader/listener is immediately transported to a more exotic and mysterious ‘other’ place; the domain of romantic love derived from courtly love’s mystique. Both courtly and romantic love have always been idealised and romanticised. Throughout history their erotics have taken precedence over other more utilitarian

attributes, creating a mystique about the power of amorous love to turn misogynist/brutish men into respectful lovers of women—a civilising transformation in stark contradiction to the realities of the lived experience for many women.

Central to this historical transformational narrative has been women's feminine virtues and sexual allure, men's submission and the erotic power of adulterous love; an idea that began in the 1600s with early literary and history criticism of the love *cansos*. The early interpretation of adultery helped create a mystique of a special kind of 'true' erotic and devoted heterosexual love, that was appropriated for Western romance as its central narrative, the psycho-emotional erotics of falling in love. In my view, adultery is inconsistent with the social and political position of medieval aristocratic women; it does not explain the extent of their sexual/affective agency and freedom as suggested by the amount and range of the troubadours' corpus. The adultery hypothesis lasted well into late modernity with profound effects on the representation of romantic love and falling in love in an inextricable conjunction between art and real life.

As such, the *cansos* have been fundamental to the creation of a inexplicable adult erotic 'otherness' that purportedly centres on the courting 'romantic heterosexual couple'; the submissive, adoring male trying to woo his silent, aloof *domna* who possesses a sexual potency with the power to subdue and civilise her suitor. The medieval period has long been romanticised by those studying it, without due consideration to medieval forms of love and the didactic function of medieval literature, or the power of Occitania's aristocratic women. Over time, the idea that erotic love has a magical transformative power gained traction from the fanciful notion of a 'real' enchanted medieval time when

men were honourable, women were treasured, and romance was born.

Some scholars argue that the singular interpretation of amorous content in the *cansos* has arisen from the separate study of literature apart from history. Methodologies examining literature and history in tandem show lyric has multiple meanings that reflect the culture and rituals of court life, that in the wider civilising context of its time, provided a didactic function through entertainment. Like songwriters and musicians today, the troubadours had a lot to say about the love of their contemporary times. They made social commentary on the world around them in the hope of distinction and patronage, as well as scoring political points, debating on contentious issues or just poking fun at people and life in general, in the sociality of Occitan courts.

This study has argued that medieval forms of love are a more likely source than adulterous affairs and that the *cansos* were part of medieval didactic literature, encouraged through the power, wealth and patronage of aristocratic women. Depictions of the *domnas* authority in the *cansos* came not from their sexual/affective powers, but from their status as territorial lords who the troubadours celebrated, cognisant of the material and career benefits that may ensue. The invention of courtly love's mystique was a construction founded on three elements: the first was the progressive treatment of noblewomen by the troubadours which I have argued was the effect of the civilising ethos of courtliness that produced the troubadours' urbane 'courtly' subjectivity and the 'reconstructed' male of romance. The second was the first-person subject position of lyric that gave rise to the "autobiographical assumption" of adulterous content, giving it a sense of historical reality. The third was ennobling love's sensual, euphuistic language that, embroidering on

corporeal themes, gave erotic power and romantic ontology to lyric. These three elements in courtly love's invention played a fundamental role in the narrative construction of the psycho-emotional erotics of falling in love which has left an indelible mark on romance culture in the West.

Across this vast reach of time, it would appear that many people in Western contemporary cultures continue to be inscribed as willing subjects of romantic love's ontology of a special 'magical' experience that, in its popularisation, produces its mundanity. Beginning with the interrelationship between medieval didactic literature and lyric, and its appropriation in more contemporary romance, romantic love's ideology has been passed on through its historical intertextuality and narrative reiterations in both high and low art, as well as in lived experience. This social and discursive process effected the seductive narrative of 'falling in love' and its psycho-emotional erotics, inscribing our constituted being, constructing our romantic subjectivity and ontology.

Unfortunately, lyric's erotics have overshadowed what was the didactic message of courtliness' love in the *cansos*—a message subsequently lost to romantic love's ideology. Lyrics' erotic mystique has taken precedence over the utilitarian attributes of courtliness and its central message: that love needs the fertile soil of personal cultivation in order to flower. The masculine submission so common to the *cansos* with its depictions of the sensitive, gentle man of romance can be viewed as the civilising ethos of courtliness required at court. This version of masculinity undermines the hegemony of the patriarchal norm and remains relevant to contemporary times. Founded on emotional control and restraint, civility, urbanity and love—these are qualities of the self-reflective, self-aware

and emotionally intelligent ‘reconstructed’ male of many women’s (perhaps optimistically feminist) dreams.

In contrast to courtliness, chivalry’s continuing presence in contemporary romance fiction and culture is troubling, as it comes with the disturbing subtext of women’s protection but is historically embedded in the use of male force, hierarchies of power and the inequalities of gender. Despite chivalry wearing the mask of courtliness it is in fact a product of militarism and thoroughly patriarchal masculinity, allied with the protection of men’s honour and often defended through violence. Exposing chivalry’s historical links with brutality and warrior constructions of masculinity may help to undermine its associations with romance for women and men. The dissimilar origins and purposes of chivalry and courtliness have interpretive semantic, semiotic and analytic implications for feminist theorisation of romantic love.

The psycho-emotional erotics of falling in love mythologises what we call the ‘chemistry’ of heterosexual attraction, privileging it as a natural, effortless and passive ‘falling’ into something like an enduring state of erotic bliss. This comes with unrealistic expectations that undermine, and is something apart from, human agency and its potential power. This is not the only way such love and feelings might be described and understood. We could, for example, reject this construction in favour of a politics of mutuality, founded on the understanding that love, including erotic love, requires work (sometimes hard psychological, emotional and spiritual work) and a willingness to be self-reflective in confronting our personal obstacles and fears; this was the message of courtliness. Nothing guarantees love—including its erotic form—other than our own agency in

striving to achieve it.

For women, romantic love stands in opposition to feudal marriage and its historical counterparts that exploited women; it represents the freedom to choose and the chance of an enduring union of erotic love—as such, it is revolutionary in impetus. Romantic love’s current ideology based on the unsustainable magic of falling in love is the problem at the core of contemporary feminist debates on romantic love. Can romances’ ideology be transformed and its cultural power appropriated for a feminist ideology consistent with the emancipation of women? This study suggests that making a distinction between love as a performative work in progress, and falling in love, may prove valuable. This means breaking the association between romantic love and the magical discourse of “falling in love”.

Women’s refusal to remain in unsatisfying relationships represents an evolving social movement that is fundamentally revolutionary, in the transformation of intimacy and women’s agency in changing gender relations. This research strongly indicates and supports what women have always known, that ‘romantic’ love, like other forms of love, is something you say and do. A re-conceptualisation of ‘romantic’ love as performative may prove beneficial for women in that revolution, by disrupting the patriarchal template that romantic love is founded on a mysterious power that enraptures, and disappoints, so many.

Romantic love has lost its way: it has become a hackneyed, routinized and stultifying practice through mass commercialisation. Can we combine the revolutionary

zeal from the performative politics of medieval didactics on love, with the gender-bending from the *cansos* to create a different understanding of romantic love? Rather than relying on the mysteries of chemistry and attraction, romantic ‘erotic’ love can be constituted through the performative and regenerative power of the saying and doing of love in effecting powerful human experiences of love. If, as Butler argues, we are constituted in language and hate speech can injure because we are vulnerable to language’s influence, then we are also vulnerable to “I love you” and love speech in general. Romantic love has always gotten its loving power from the performative practice of love speech, combined with erotic and affective practices of love. This would be better defined as the process of ‘growing’ not ‘falling in love’, but while its impetus may be subversive, its outcome is unknowable.

In the current context of women’s (relative) freedom to challenge men, and possibly discontinue dysfunctional relationships, intimate unions may yet continue to offer, as they have historically, rich opportunities for feminist intervention and (re)invention. If romantic love is effected performatively, then women have the social and political power to exert their agency in subverting its magical narrative and challenging the unrealistic expectations inscribed in its ideology; this may provide a hiatus for reimagining being ‘in love’ and (re)constructing erotic love in union with their intimate partners.

As to the question, is romantic love real? I think it is just as real as you can make it.

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