

# Courtly Love

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# Courtly Love

- The romance of Courtly Love practiced during the Middle Ages was combined with the Code of Chivalry. There were strict rules of courtly love and the art of courtly love was practiced by the members of the courts across Europe during the Middle Ages. The romance, rules and art of courtly love allowed knights and ladies to show their admiration regardless of their marital state. It was a common occurrence for a married lady to give a token to a knight of her choice to be worn during a Medieval tournament.
- There were rules which governed courtly love but sometimes the parties, who started their relationship with such elements of courtly love, would become deeply involved. A famous example of a relationship which was stirred by romantic courtly love and romance is described in the Legend of King Arthur, where his Queen, Guinevere fell in love with Sir Lancelot. Many illicit court romances were fuelled by the practice and art of courtly love.



# Question

- How would you feel if your husband or wife gave a “token” of love to someone else?
- If you were King Arthur and Lancelot was wooing your Guinevere, what would you do?

# The Origins of Courtly Love

- The origins of Courtly Love were believed to be in Aquitaine in France in the 12th century and spread to other European countries. The art of courtly love was practiced in English courts from the 1300's to the 1500's. During this period of time marriages were arranged and had little to do with love. A successful marriage was perceived as one that brought material advantages to the participants and their families. As love was clearly unrelated to marriage the requirement for romance could be gained outside marriage - as long as the rules relating to chastity and fidelity were strictly adhered to.



# Question

- If you were forced into a loveless marriage by your parents for material gain or standing, would it be reasonable to have a “love” in the sense of courtly love?
- Where would you put the line or limit for this kind of extramarital relationship? Could it become physical?

# The Rules of Courtly Love

- The violence and wars of the Middle Ages were tempered by the Rules of Courtly Love. The following rules and elements of Courtly Love during the Middle Ages were written by the 12th Century Frenchman, Andreas Capellanus:

- Marriage is no real excuse for not loving
- He who is not jealous, cannot love
- No one can be bound by a double love
- It is well known that love is always increasing or decreasing
- That which a lover takes against the will of his beloved has no relish
- Boys do not love until they arrive at the age of maturity
- When one lover dies, a widowhood of two years is required of the survivor
- No one should be deprived of love without the very best of reasons
- No one can love unless he is impelled by the persuasion of love
- Love is always a stranger in the home of avarice
- It is not proper to love any woman whom one would be ashamed to seek to marry
- A true lover does not desire to embrace in love anyone except his beloved
- When made public love rarely endures
- The easy attainment of love makes it of little value; difficulty of attainment makes it prized
- Good character alone makes any man worthy of love

# Question

- Have you as 17 and 18 year olds reached the “age of maturity” required to love?
- Should love be kept secret? Why or why not?
- Imagine wooing your lover for twenty years before he or she notices you. Is love really better when it is harder to attain?

- If love diminishes, it quickly fails and rarely revives
- A man in love is always apprehensive
- Real jealousy always increases the feeling of love
- Jealousy, and therefore love, are increased when one suspects his beloved
- He whom the thought of love vexes eats and sleeps very little
- Every act of a lover ends in the thought of his beloved
- A true lover considers nothing good except what he thinks will please his beloved
- Love can deny nothing to love
- A lover can never have enough of the solaces of his beloved
- A slight presumption causes a lover to suspect his beloved
- A man who is vexed by too much passion usually does not love
- A true lover is constantly and without intermission possessed by the thought of his beloved
- Nothing forbids one woman being loved by two men or one man by two women

**The above rules of Courtly love demonstrate how playing this game could lead to all kinds of problems within the court circle.**





# Question

- Do you think jealousy helps or hurts love?
- Is it possible to think about a loved one all of the time?  
Is it healthy?
- How might these rules for love become problematic in a society like a royal court?

# Courtly Love Poems and Songs

- The ideals of courtly love was publicized in the poems, ballads, writings and literary works of various authors of the Middle Ages. Geoffrey Chaucer, the most famous author of the Middle Ages, wrote stories about courtly love in his book Canterbury Tales. The Miller's Tale describes the art of courtly love. Geoffrey Chaucer exhibited courtly love for the beautiful Blanche, the wife of John of Gaunt. Whereas his marriage to Phillippa de Roet was seen as a good but practical match. The wandering minstrels and troubadours of the Middle Ages sang ballads about courtly love and were expected to memorize the words of long poems describing the valour and the code of chivalry followed by the Medieval knights. The Dark Age myths of Arthurian Legends featuring King Arthur, Camelot and the Knights of the Round Table further strengthen the idea of a Knights Code of Chivalry and Courtly Love.



# Watch the claymation version of the Miller's tale.

- The Miller's Tale" is the story of a carpenter, his lovely wife, and the two clerks (students) who are eager to get her into bed. The carpenter, John, lives in Oxford with his much younger wife, Alisoun, who is something of a local beauty. To make a bit of extra money, John rents out a room in his house to a poor but clever scholar named Nicholas, who has taken a liking to Alisoun. Another scholar in the town, Absolon the parish clerk, also has his eye on Alisoun.
- The action begins when John makes a day trip to a nearby town. While he is gone, Nicholas convinces Alisoun to have sex with him, and hence begins their affair. Shortly afterward, Alisoun goes to church, where Absolon sees her and immediately falls in love. He tries to win Alisoun's sexual favours by singing love songs under her window during the full moon and taking a part in the local play to try to get her attention. Alisoun rebuffs all his efforts, however, since she is already involved with Nicholas. [Wikipedia]
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=86Y62CIF3II>
- First minute, 3:17-5:06, 6:06-7:17, 8:40

# Miller's Tale Questions

- Chaucer's tale about courtly love is satirical, meaning that it pokes fun at the conventions of courtly love. In the tale, how has courtly love fallen from its originally higher ideals?

# Implications of Courtly Love

- What practical effect did the convention of courtly love have on the situation of women in the Middle Ages? Very little, if we are to believe social historians, who point out that there is no evidence to show that the legal and economic position of women was materially enhanced in any way that can be attributed to the influence of *fin' amors*. In a broader cultural context, however, it is possible to discern two long range effects of courtly love on western civilization. For one thing, it provided Europe with a refined and elevated language with which to describe the phenomenology of love. For another, it was a significant factor in the augmented social role of women. Life sometimes has a way of imitating art, and there is little doubt that the aristocratic men and women of the Middle Ages began to act out in their own loves the pattern of courtly behavior they read about in the fictional romances and love lyrics of the period. The social effect was to accord women preeminence in the great, central, human activity of courtship and marriage. Thus women became more than just beloved objects--haughty, demanding, mysterious; they became, in a very real sense, what they have remained ever since, the chief arbiters of the game of love and the impresarios of refined passion.



# Question

- In the bellringer we discussed how media affects our lives. Are you surprised that media affected people in the renaissance period in similar ways? Why or why not?
- Have women, as this passage suggests, really become the “chief arbiters of the game of love”? If so, is this a real kind of power?

# Work Cited

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