

## ***“L’Amour Bourgeois”*: Romantic Love as a Political Construct**

By Jesse Katen

### **Introduction**

Our society is convinced that romantic love is one of the most important elements of our lives and that it is one of those ultimate sources of happiness. While this may even be true, I believe that an analysis and historical tracing of this concept will find that it is not a natural or universal truth. Rather, it is a creation of society—a construct with specific political and economic purposes. We see this concept first appear in the Middle Ages with the inception of the practice of courtly love. I plan to argue that this concept of courtly love has remained with us throughout the centuries, but that its purpose changes to suit the economic conditions of its historical contexts. It is tied to both feudal and capitalist cultures and to their corresponding patriarchal structures. Romantic love is a complex establishment dependent upon defined roles. These clearly defined roles serve to enforce dominant perceptions of gender and, in a patriarchal society, this means that males will be privileged. I advocate for thinking about romantic love in the present context by seeing it as bourgeois love—constructed by the bourgeois class of the capitalist system to enforce the patriarchal arrangements upon which capitalism is dependent.

I understand that I am speaking about unimaginably complex subjects in this relatively short essay. However, I think that the general ideas may be seen and understood well enough to intrigue the reader into examining the issues I have tried to bring to light. It is my hope to create a broad and general framework for future scholarship (for myself and others) that will be able to further explore these concepts which are of such huge importance for our society.

### **Part I - *L’amour Courtois* in Feudal Europe**

In this part, I aim to show that the feudal system of medieval Europe posed a unique problem in society that was solved by the construction of the institution of courtly love. During this period, the economy was largely agrarian and status and wealth were mainly determined by the possession of land, the

most highly valued commodity. An entire class of people, the serfs, was thought of as little more than mere extensions of the land they worked and upon which they lived. That land, I might add, was owned by members of the nobility and had probably been granted to the nobles by the king in exchange for a promise of allegiance and the assurance of social order. The land became an inherited property and maintained a largely fixed and immobile system of social and economic class. Therefore, we refer to the social status of medieval people as ascribed. One's station in life was determined by the circumstances into which one was born. The children of serf parents would remain a serf for life and work the land of the noble family into whose service he or she was born. A noble child would inherit the elevated status of his or her family and would likely retain that status throughout his or her life. Thus, the defining characteristic of the medieval feudal social structure is this concept of ascribed status. The problem posed by this concept of ascribed status is a lack of social motivation for excellence in the endeavors of medieval men, especially in the noble classes, as their status and wealth was virtually guaranteed by the feudal system. I would argue, then, that courtly love arose as a cultural phenomenon, beginning probably in the twelfth century, to fulfill a cultural need to motivate and inspire members of the noble classes.

In his classic book, *Love in the Western World*, Denis de Rougemont claims that courtly love arose as a reaction to the abuses of the custom of marriage during the twelfth century. He says, "It is well known that the nobles in the twelfth century made of marriage simply a means of enriching themselves, either through the annexation of dower estates or through expectations of inheritance."<sup>1</sup> Medieval marriage, then, was merely an institution based upon self-enrichment and political motives; in general, it was not at all about love. According to Rougemont, this view of marriage held by medieval nobles led to dissatisfaction with their wives if their political and economic aspirations were not realized as a result of the marriage. This dissatisfaction often resulted in attempts to annul the marriage to allow the noble to remarry another woman in hopes that the new marriage will yield better gains.<sup>2</sup> Another scholar, Christopher Brooke, in his *The Medieval Idea of Marriage*, writes that most often, it was the need for sons able to carry on the dynastic name that was the motivation behind marriage and that a wife's failure to produce male

offspring was a reason a marriage may be brought to an end. He writes:

An ardent desire for legitimate heirs brought the kings and nobles of Europe themselves to seek monogamy, and a curious alliance of dynastic ambition, nature, and Christian teaching resulted. But nature will not produce an unbroken flow of sons strong and fortunate enough to resist the chances of this fleeting world.<sup>3</sup>

As a result of this concern and the feeling of urgency in regard to producing viable male heirs, many nobles ended their marriages through annulments. Often these dissolutions sought were based upon fabricated claims of having uncovering knowledge that the marriage was incestuous.<sup>4</sup> The man was then free to marry another woman. According to Brooke, “. . . there seems to be an extraordinary tangle of personal and political grounds for changing wives . . .”<sup>5</sup>

Denis de Rougemont argues that it was these abuses of the institution of marriage that led to the advent of courtly love. Evidently, the dissolutions of marriages that were unsatisfactory to medieval nobles caused controversy and clearly upset the family of the woman who was no longer desired. Rougemont explains,

In order to counteract these abuses, which led to much quarrelling and to warring, courtly love established a *fealty* that was independent of legal marriage and of which the sole basis was love. It was even contended—for example, in the famous judgment delivered by a court of love in the house of the Countess of Champagne—that love and marriage were incompatible.<sup>6</sup>

Thereby, in the eyes of Rougemont, the unemotional and political aspects of the medieval institution of marriage led to the development of a separate institution based upon love. I agree and allow him that point, but I think that an examination of courtly love and its dynamics allows for a more in-depth understanding of its role in feudal society.

First of all, it is important to understand how courtly love worked and how its dynamics can be characterized. As its name suggests, courtly love found its place mainly among the noble and

royal classes of medieval society, as between a knight and a lady. It is also essential to know that courtly love is a highly idealized construct. In his analysis of the romantic tale of *Tristan and Iseult*,<sup>7</sup> Rougemont describes the relationship between the two lovers as such:

The love is *mutual* in the sense that Tristan and Iseult 'love one another', or at least, believe that they do. Certainly their mutual fidelity is exemplary. But *unhappiness* comes in, because the love which 'dominates' them is not a love of each for the other as that other really is. They love one another, but each loves the other *from the standpoint of self and not from the other's standpoint*. Their unhappiness thus originates in a false reciprocity, which disguises a twin narcissism.<sup>8</sup>  
[Emphasis his]

So through Rougemont's analysis of romantic literature of the medieval period using *Tristan and Iseult* as an example, we can see that the highly idealized love affairs characteristic of courtly love are further defined by exclusivity and fierce loyalty. The beloved is objectified and idealized by the lover. The lover thus creates a false image and understanding of the beloved and bases an intense love upon it. What is particularly meaningful, though, is that these relationships took place outside the institution of marriage. In fact, Rougemont writes that, "As has been said, this loyalty was incompatible with the fidelity of marriage."<sup>9</sup> Thus, courtly love is also defined by its aspect of secrecy. The vows of fidelity taken as part of the marriage ceremony are compromised and overridden by the intense loyalty brought about by the love of the idealized other in a courtly romance. I believe this phenomenon demonstrates two things: first, that marriage was emotionally unsatisfying to the courtly classes, and second, that marriage's continued existence explains that it served a purpose other than as an institution based on love. In this sense, marriage was necessary as an institution for self-enrichment through political and economic gain (i.e., marriages designed to unite kingdoms or merge territory), however, courtly love must have served a different purpose.

Answering the question of the function of courtly love becomes easier if we consider yet another aspect of it: the unfulfilled longing. Rougemont tells us that ". . . the rule of courtly love did not allow a passion of this kind 'to turn into reality', to result in the 'full possession of his lady'."<sup>10</sup> Therefore, a

fundamental component of the courtly love relationship is the longing and fantasy that consumes the mind of the lover, without being realized. Rougemont means to explain that the man could never take “possession” of his beloved, either in marriage or in owning her heart. Thus, in courtly love, the beloved lady must remain aloof and seemingly disengaged. That is to say, remain as something unattainable for which he must strive and fight for in order to impress her in the hopes that one day he will “win” her. This is explained in detail in a medieval treatise written on the institution of courtly love by Andreas Capellanus:

Indeed the man who is so wanton that he cannot confine himself to the love of one woman deserves to be considered an impetuous ass. It will therefore be clear to you that you are bound to avoid an overabundance of passion and that you ought not to seek the love of a woman who you know will grant easily what you seek.<sup>11</sup>

It would seem from this statement that the purpose of courtly love is to pursue a single woman who the lover knows will not easily give in to his advances. Capellanus also details some of the workings of courtly love in his twelve rules.<sup>12</sup> Some things these rules reveal include that the behavior of the lover is to be governed by the attributes of suffering, selflessness, modesty, respect, and tireless service to the lady. In addition, Capellanus warns that the secret love affairs of others should never be disclosed. In another set of rules governing the actions of the lover, Capellanus states that love always depends upon jealousy and that every act of the lover should be inspired by the beloved.<sup>13</sup> According to Capellanus, the woman may give in to the affections of her lover and consummate the relationship with sexual relations in order to maintain the relationship: “Love may also be retained by indulging in the sweet and delightful solaces of the flesh, but only in such manner in such number that they may never seem wearisome to the loved one.”<sup>14</sup> I believe him to be warning that the relationship should never become routine, but remain spontaneous and exciting, especially for the lady involved, who is the object of the man’s desire.

In Book Two of Capellanus’ treatise, in a chapter entitled “How Love, When It Has Been Acquired, May Be Kept,” he provides some insights that help to support my argument. His advice is that since lovers must work very hard to prevent their

love affair from being disclosed to the public, one must resort to other means to appear desirable and lovable to the beloved. This is mainly by being seen as a valued and respected person. For example, he says “. . . if the lover is one who is fitted to be a warrior, he should see to it that his courage is apparent to everybody, for it detracts very much from the good character of a man if he is timid in a fight.”<sup>15</sup> He goes on, “Furthermore, a lover should make every attempt to be constantly in the company of good men, and to avoid completely the society of the wicked.” Lastly, it is important to note that Capellanus also advises, “He ought to give a good deal of attention to acting toward all in such fashion that no one may be sorry to call to mind his good deeds or have reason to censure anything he has done.” It is clear, that courtly love serves as a significant and powerful motivator to pursue excellence, build a positive reputation, and win the respect of others in medieval courtly society. I find that this is the role of courtly love—to serve as a strong motivator in a system where one’s status is thrust upon them at birth.

In the feudal system, marriage and courtly love both had their separate purposes to fulfill and did so in their own ways. Marriage, its monogamy, and the sacred nature of it all, as emphasized by the Church, were adopted by the royals and nobles once they saw the potential of marriage as a contract of economic and political benefit.<sup>16</sup> I do not accept as sheer coincidence then that the mid-twelfth century saw both the Church assume authority over “the issue of marriage, its validity, and its qualities”<sup>17</sup> and the virtually unprecedented advent of the system of courtly love. At the same time that the nobles and royals accepted ecclesiastical control over the institution of marriage because they saw the economic and political value of marriage,<sup>18</sup> courtly love was born as a mechanism by which those of the courtly classes could both escape their emotionally unfulfilling political marriages and find inspiration to excel at their endeavors and aspire to a station of more respect in the feudal world. Thus, both marriage and courtly love were institutions integral to the functioning of feudal society.

## **Part II – “*L’amour Bourgeois*” in the Capitalist System**

With the coming of the Enlightenment and the end of the feudal system in Europe, we of course see a radical transformation of a wide variety of values, including social, cultural, economic,

and political. The political theorists of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries assembled ideas supporting a new economic order based upon concepts such as individual achievement, the promise of opportunity for all citizens, and the right of citizens to own property. These ideas were radical in the sense that they were a reaction to, and a rejection of, feudalism and its supporting system of ascribed status. The new liberal theorists promised a system of achieved status, in which social and economic power and influence could be sought and achieved by anyone as long as they were willing to work hard to succeed in the new capitalist system. Liberalism promised equality of opportunity in the sense that people were no longer forced to remain for their entire lives in the class in which they were born. Now, they had the ability to dream and the opportunities to realize those dreams. This is not to say, however, that this promise was freely extended to all human beings. Rather, this is also an epoch defined by the oppressive institutions of patriarchy and slavery. For my purposes here, I wish to focus on the patriarchy of capitalism, for I believe it to be the benefactor of the construction of romantic love. My claim is that the rising bourgeois class adopted the concept of courtly love from its feudal origins and adapted it to suit their purposes and their ambitions within a capitalist system.

### **The Bourgeois Family**

First, it is important to examine the relationship between the patriarchy of feudalism and the patriarchy of capitalism. In *The Radical Future of Liberal Feminism*, Zillah Eisenstein makes clear that one must view patriarchy as an evolving and changing system that is defined by the economic and political systems of the time. She says,

Patriarchy alters itself in order to preserve itself, and these changes reflect real political struggles. This conception of patriarchy focuses on it as a dynamically changing political system rather than a static one. The changes and process one sees are part of the system of patriarchy and actually define it.<sup>19</sup>

I wish to adopt this particular view of patriarchy, for I see patriarchy supporting the system of capitalism and also that the concept of romantic love is a particular support of capitalism. Eisenstein also illustrates the connection between feudalism and capitalism in terms of patriarchy, as a thread that continues

throughout various historical contexts. She sees this thread as the distinction between public and private space and the relegation of women to the private space and elevation of men to the political power of the public realm.<sup>20</sup> Women have been expected to assume a role in the private space of the home while men were able to participate in public society and its discourses of power. This private/public distinction existed both in feudalism and in capitalism. Eisenstein goes on to assert that under feudalism “Woman was characterized as the *private property* of her father or her husband in the family”<sup>21</sup> (emphasis hers). This feudal concept of the woman as the property of the male in charge of her, whether he is her father or husband, was carried through into the formation of the capitalist family.

I find that this becomes clear through an examination of the institution that Marx would call the “bourgeois family.” In Marx’s theory, the bourgeoisie is the ruling class in the capitalist system. The bourgeoisie class owns the means of production in capitalism and exploits the labor of the proletariat class. In Marx’s view, only the bourgeoisie benefit from the ideology of liberalism and have done so at the expense of the wage-laboring proletarians whose work yields profits to the bourgeoisie. In *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Friedrich Engels articulate their thoughts on the bourgeois family:

Abolition of the family! Even the most radical flare up at this infamous proposal of the Communists.

On what foundation is the present family, the bourgeois family, based? On capital, on private gain. In its completely developed form this family exists only among the bourgeoisie. But this state of things finds its complement in the practical absence of the family among proletarians, and in public prostitution.

The bourgeois family will vanish as a matter of course when its complement vanishes, and both will vanish with the vanishing of capital.

Do you charge us with wanting to stop the exploitation of children by their parents? To this crime we plead guilty.<sup>22</sup>

Thus, in this particular passage, Marx ties a critique of the bourgeois family to a critique of private property. Thus, in his eyes, capitalism results in an oppressive family structure that works to exploit women and children. He says shortly thereafter,

The bourgeois sees in his wife a mere instrument of production. He hears the instruments of production are to be exploited in common, and, naturally, can come to

no other conclusion than that the lot of being common to all will likewise fall to the women.

He has not even a suspicion that the real point aimed at is to do away with the status of women as mere instruments of production.<sup>23</sup>

Here, Marx specifically claims that capitalism reduces the role of women to a mere “instrument of production,” a commodity to be used for personal gain. In *The German Ideology*, Marx writes about the family when he says, “. . . the nucleus, the first form, of which lies in the family, where wife and children are the slaves of the husband. This latent slavery in the family, though still very crude, is the first property . . .”<sup>24</sup> It is significant, also, to note that Marx continues to say that “Division of labour and private property are, moreover, identical expressions . . .”<sup>25</sup> Thus, the synthesis of these statements is that capitalism functions, at least in part, by a family structure that enforces a sexual division of labor. Society is divided up into microcosmic family units in which the woman is relegated to the home and expected to bear and rear children. The woman is therefore treated as a commodity, a good with use-value in that she is both the property of her husband and an instrument of production, producing his children and being exploited for her reproductive labor. For bourgeois society, marriage is an institution designed to give birth, if you will, to another family unit. Marriage is a relationship of exploitation, homologous to the larger picture of exploitation in society: that between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat.

### **Marriage in Early Capitalism**

At this point, I think it would be wise to consider the nature of marriage in early capitalism. When I speak of early capitalism, I mean to discuss capitalism as it existed from the Enlightenment to the mid-twentieth century when women began to enter the work force, seek their own careers, and become financially independent. As I will show, this greatly complicated the bourgeois family; however, I will discuss that in the section on later capitalism. For now, a look at marriage in capitalism up to this point will present us with an institution which many women entered into out of need.

Let us imagine the prevailing image of the homemaker wife prior to the feminist movements of the 1960's and '70's. She does not labor for wages in the work-force, but rather assumes the duties and responsibilities of the home, including preparing

meals, tidying up and cleaning the home, raising the children, and looking after the basic domestic needs of her husband and children. With no marketable skills and therefore no ability to effectively pursue a career, there were little opportunities for employment available to such women. Because of this, women were essentially forced into oppressive marriages out of economic need. I turn to Zillah Eisenstein for her understanding of the work of early feminist Elizabeth Cady Stanton. She says of Stanton's views on marriage that "The marriage contract itself shows that these relations [between the sexes] are ones of domination and subordination . . . The man gives up nothing and the woman gives up everything."<sup>26</sup> Eisenstein further explicates the position of Stanton's idea of marriage in saying that "As long as marriage remains the sole object in women's lives and is only one among many choices for men, women will remain dependent on marriage in a way men are not."<sup>27</sup> By this dependence, it is largely meant that women were essentially completely dependent upon their husbands for sustenance. Marriage was thus the only means of survival for many women, who were systematically prevented from being economically self-supporting.

My point here is that although the new language of the Enlightenment period and the capitalist economic order promised opportunity, freedom, individualism, and the possibility for achievement, women were largely excluded from access to these. These new values were reactions to the fixed status mode that helped to define the feudal system. As I have discussed in Part I, marriages in medieval society were mostly arranged to accomplish political and economic goals. In bourgeois society, although many structures of feudalism were dismantled, a sexual division of labor lingered and was enforced by the institutions of the family and marriage. In adherence to the bourgeois promise of individualism, marriage was now about choice in the sense that it was an articulated fact that one could choose his or her mate and enter a marriage of his or her own accord and for their own reasons, of which love was to be an important one. However, what this view does not take into account is that the social and economic conditions of early capitalism prevented women from exercising any of the personal autonomy held in high esteem by liberals, for they were virtually forced into marriage out of merely trying to survive.

#### **Later Capitalism and the Perfection of "*L'amour Bourgeois*"**

Due probably to the social changes catalyzed by the work of feminist activists and thinkers in the 1960's and '70's, many women began to reject the expectation that they be reduced to roles as wives and mothers in life and sought to define their own individuality. With the theories of liberal feminism, women were finally demanding the promise of liberalism which had been contradictorily denied to them previously. In pursuing higher education and professional positions, women finally had the self-sufficiency that would save them from the limits that marriage had previously placed upon them. No longer were they forced to marry a husband out of economic need. However, it is important to make clear that cultural sentiments do not easily die and that not all women were able to fully reject the ideologies that had previously inspired them to fantasize about meeting a wealthy and hard-working husband. Thus, contemporary society presents us with an eclectic mess of ideas and manifestations. One trend, however, is clear. Marriage is no longer primarily an institution of economic need, and therefore needs another meaning in order to attract women to commit to it and thus subject themselves to its nature as an enforcer of the sexual division of labor. I argue that although it has remained a popular and nearly universal phenomenon in our society since its inception, romantic love is enjoying a new resurgence. This observation is shared by Stephen Seidman in his book, *Romantic Longings: Love in America, 1830-1980*, when he explains, "Victorian marriages were said to be arrangements that aimed at social and economic security; the goal of modern marriage was said to be to secure personal happiness and companionship."<sup>28</sup> In *The Family in the Modern Age* by Brigitte Berger, she says,

We hear relatively little about the once widely-endorsed proposition that men marry for romantic reasons and women for security—tendencies once held to provide a fortunate matrix for childrearing in the nuclear family with the man offering security to the woman who, in turn, appeals to him on an emotional basis. In this day and age it is no longer possible to argue that modern women marry for security . . .<sup>29</sup>

I find that this transformation completes the bourgeois adoption of the concept of courtly love and its adaptation to reinforce the system of patriarchy in capitalism. This can be illuminated by examining exactly how the concept of courtly love was altered in its adoption by bourgeois society.

The similarities between courtly love of the medieval period and romantic love as seen today can be seen very easily as these sentiments appear in our culture in songs, television, films, and in what we call “common knowledge” or “human nature.” First of all, we see an idealization of the beloved. We have all heard, either through songs or proverbs, the sentiment that one’s lover “sees the best” in them. This idealization often also extends into an idealization of the future together. The sense of suffering is also maintained in bourgeois love. When one is not with their beloved, they often express pain and unbearable longing. The exchange of gifts as tokens of affection is common today, as it was with knights and their beloved ladies in the Middle Ages. The expectation of men to impress others with physical strength or wealth and women with a carefully cultivated beauty remains alive today. In addition, the idea of exclusiveness and jealousy remain virtually unchanged and I believe this can be traced to the language of referring to one’s beloved in terms of possessiveness—“she is his,” for example. One often hears among young men that it is not acceptable to pursue a woman who is involved with a friend, for she “belongs” to him and is “already taken.” This idea of possessiveness and jealousy is particularly interesting because it recalls the language of Marx and Engels who saw bourgeois marriage as the reduction of a woman to a status as the private property of her husband.

It is also telling to examine what changed between romantic love as it existed in the medieval world and how it exists now in a capitalist setting. This is its nature as an extra-marital institution. Today, romance and romantic feelings are seen as necessary precursors to the formation of the long-term relationships that lead to marriage. In addition, the intense sexual desire characteristic of extra-marital courtly affairs is now a component of the romantic love that defines romantic relationships of the present period. Thus, what we see is the collapse of what were two distinct operations under feudalism—that is, marriage and courtly love—into one institution under capitalism. The same feelings that were fostered during courtly romances are now the same that our current society accepts as leading towards marriage. We even refer to the early period of a relationship as “courting,” which is clearly an allusion to the behavior of courtly lovers. Although I realize that this particular courtship process was popular in early capitalism as well, it takes on a new importance in later capitalism when women, as financially autonomous individuals, can afford to

become choosier and hold prospective husbands to any standards they wish to set and therefore the process of finding an appropriate mate and winning their affection becomes a more prominent component of romance. The new ability on the part of women leads to a vision of equality in romance. This vision, however, is merely an illusion.

While it may appear that men and women enter into modern romance as equals in search of an equal and mutually beneficial partnership, the meaning of romance, by virtue of its nature as a support for a patriarchal formulation of marriage, is tainted by a history of social, cultural, and political motives—all of which have sought to create the seductive and deceptively beautiful construction that seeks to silently perpetuate inequality and disempowerment. In other words, the roles within romantic love that have become ingrained in the minds of both women and men from the time they are children affect, influence, and determine their behavior as actors in the institution of romance. For example, it is particularly fascinating to notice what I call the “princess phenomenon.” Everywhere in the culture that is created for young girls by capitalism seems to be the idealization of the princess identity. This is especially so at the present moment. Through media from fairy tales to animated films, even to toys, games and “playing pretend,” the image of the princess is glamorized—she is always beautiful, with ravishing clothes and a palatial home. However, the happiness and completeness of this princess is dependent upon the presence of the complementary handsome prince. In *Sleeping Beauty*, the beautiful young maiden is rescued by a kiss from a prince who then claims her as his wife. In *Cinderella*, the prince falls in love with the girl at first sight, tirelessly searches for her and eventually saves her from the home of her wicked stepmother. The dolls that are marketed to girls can often be purchased along with miniature homes or kitchen sets, inspiring them to dream of their own future and a kitchen of their own. The toys of little boys are often militaristic and value physical strength, brute force, and violence as manifestations of bravery. It is important not to forget the medieval inspirations of childhood fantasy. “Beautiful princess” and “handsome prince” (both in their fairy tale context and in later incarnations such as the Prom court) hearken back to a medieval world that is idealized and romanticized. Our culture takes its cue as to what romance should look like from medieval notions of courtly love, decontextualizes it from its extra-marital placement, and

composes a new fantasy in which the brave male rescues the helpless and submissive female and carries her off into marriage to “live happily ever after.”

My argument here is that we all know that gender roles are taught to children from the time they are born. In contemporary society, gender roles are inextricably linked to our ideas of romance and the ideal romantic relationship, for individuals of each gender are taught to be attracted to what the society dictates are the ideal characteristics of the opposite sex. Our society also values romance and the romantic relationship for their roles in securing marriage for it is the fulfillment of the dream and the satisfaction of the torturous longing that defines our culture’s vision of love. Marriage is now the culmination of the romantic conquest, for in it, the modern man is finally able to possess the desired woman in a way that was not possible when the feudal conceptions of love and marriage prevailed. As stated by Marx, “Life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life.”<sup>30</sup> When individuals enter institutions, they must conform to the roles prescribed by the institution. Cultural ideals about marriage may have changed but the realities have not. It is still women who are primarily responsible for raising children and the role of mother is another that is romanticized and idealized for women from the time they are girls. Women are still judged for their beauty and emotional gentility, while men are still judged for their physical and economic strength. Men take joy in their ability to comfort a crying wife or girlfriend while the girlfriend takes joy in being comforted by the stoic and reasoned man. Men view it as their responsibility to “provide” for their families and tie it to their notions of masculinity. Women view their responsibilities more as to be emotionally receptive and available to the needs of her children and husband and each gender values the traits of the other and the dynamics are inherently unequal for they privilege the male, just as they have done for centuries. Men and women are complementary, but they are complementary because they have been deliberately constructed to be such. In romance, we do not see individuals living their own lives, we see individuals living within generic roles that have been prescribed for them.

In essence, what I have done is attempt to demonstrate the connections between the cultural practices and economic modes of society. During the high Middle Ages, at the height of the feudal system, we see the advent of a notion of courtly love. It involves a

highly idealized perception of the other within their respective roles with a corresponding sexual attraction. Medieval marriage, however, was more a means of accomplishing economic and political goals. With the demise of feudalism, the rising bourgeoisie class holds on to these notions of romantic love and, along with the exclusion of women from the workplace, use it to place women into their roles as wives and mothers and to essentially be reduced to a means of production which is her lot in the bourgeois family. This new formulation of romance collapses what had been two processes under feudalism—marriage and courtly love—into a single process I call bourgeois love. Therefore, this bourgeois family is supported by bourgeois love. In late capitalism, when patriarchy was threatened by the new economic autonomy of women, it altered itself as it tends to do, and began to rely primarily on the fantasy of romance to keep the institution of marriage and the sexual division of labor alive. The roles have been written for the individuals and they know how to assume them and the fantasy and romanticization of those institutions get them to do it willingly and while thinking they have their own happiness in mind. Marriage and the corresponding institutions that are its components, such as motherhood, serve to define the location of one's labor and the identity of one's life. The resulting dynamics are fixed and unequal, but are accepted because they are the result of an idea of romance that is inherently connected to economics and so valued that we take it as normal and natural. It is so normal and natural that it is even adopted by homosexuals who have been taught the same ideals of love—a fact that I will explore in future work. I argue that romantic love is not normal or at all natural. It is a construction, formulated at a specific moment in history, that will continue to exist as long as it still serves the system of patriarchy and male privilege. The very power of this construction is in its clandestine operations, its deceptive beauty, and its being taken for granted as the highlight of our lives.

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> Denis de Rougemont, *Love in the Western World*, Montgomery Beligion, transl. Revised and Augmented Edition (New York: Pantheon, 1956), 33.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 33-34.

<sup>3</sup> Christopher Brooke, *The Medieval Idea of Marriage* (New York: Clarendon Paperback, 1994) 125.

<sup>4</sup> Rougemont, 34.

<sup>5</sup> Brooke, 121.

<sup>6</sup> Rougemont, 34.

<sup>7</sup> It is literary works such as these that were referred to as romances. This is where the term 'romantic love' entered the social lexicon.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>11</sup> Andreas Capellanus, *The Art of Courtly Love*. Introduction, Translation, and Notes by John Jay Parry (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing, 1959), 149.

<sup>12</sup> The twelve rules are found in Capellanus, 81-82.

<sup>13</sup> These other rules are found in Capellanus, 184-186.

<sup>14</sup> Capellanus, 152.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> This claim is made by Brooke on p. 125.

<sup>17</sup> Brooke, 128.

<sup>18</sup> See Brooke's analysis of the two distinct views of marriage in the medieval world and the assumption of control by the Church once nobles allowed it on p. 126.

<sup>19</sup> Zillah Eisenstein, *The Radical Future of Liberal Feminism*, 1993 Edition, The Northeastern Series in Feminist Theory (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1993), 20.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>22</sup> Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, Introduction by Martin Malia (New York: Signet Classic, 1998), 71.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>24</sup> Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology*, edited, with an introduction by C.J. Arthur (New York: International Publishers, 2004), 52.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>26</sup> Eisenstein, 157.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>28</sup> Steven Seidman, *Romantic Longings: Love in America, 1830-1980* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 78.

<sup>29</sup> Brigitte Berger, *The Family in the Modern Age* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2002), 152.

<sup>30</sup> *The German Ideology*, 47.