

Andreas Capellanus (late 12th cent.) De Amore (1184-86)

A Treatise on Courtly Love (Excerpts)

[The work is divided into three books; the first begins in the manner of an academic lecture, with attention to definitions and etymology.]

What is Love?

Love is an inborn suffering proceeding from the sight and immoderate thought upon the beauty of the other sex, for which cause above all other things one wishes to embrace the other and, by common assent, in this embrace to fulfill the commandments of love. . . .

From Whence Love is Named?

"Love (*amor*)" is derived from the word "hook (*amar*)", which signifies "capture" or "be captured." For he who loves is caught in the chains of desire and wishes to catch another with his hook. Just as a shrewd fisherman tries to attract fish with his bait and to catch them on with his curved hook, so he who is truly captured by love tries to attract another with his blandishments and with all his power tries to hold two hearts together with one spiritual chain or, if they be already united, to hold them always together. . . .

What is the Effect of Love?

This is the effect of love: that the true lover can not be corrupted by avarice; love makes an ugly and rude person shine with all beauty, knows how to endow with nobility even one of humble birth, can even lend humility to the proud; he who loves is accustomed humbly to serve others. Oh, what a marvelous thing is love, which makes a man shine with so many virtues and which teaches everyone to abound in good customs. . . .

What Persons are Suited for Love?

[The author goes on to specify the requirements of a lover -- girls must be at least 12, boys 14, though for true love men must be at least 18 years old and under 60 (after that age, though copulation is possible true passion is lacking); women must be under fifty. Age, blindness and excessive passion are all bars to true love.]

Blindness impedes love, for a blind man cannot see that on which his mind can reflect immoderately. Therefore love cannot arise in him, as is adequately proven above. But I recognize that this is true only of the moment in which love is acquired, for I do not deny that love can endure in a man who acquired love before he went blind.

Too great an abundance of passion impedes love, for there are those who are so enslaved by desire that they cannot be restrained by the bonds of love; those who after deep thoughts of their lady or even having enjoyed the fruits of love, when they see another immediately desire her embraces, forgetting the services received from their former lover and revealing their ingratitude.

[Since love is often acquired by fluency in speech, Andreas next provides his readers with a series of sample dialogues, suitable to the various classes -- plebian (gentry), noble, and most noble.]

First Dialogue

A plebian (gentleman) speaks with a woman of the same class.

[He greets his lady and praises her beauty; she replies that he is trying to flatter her, since she is not beautiful:]

The woman says: Your words seem to be false, since I do not have a beautiful figure. Yet you extol me as more beautiful than other women.

The man says: The custom of the wise is never to praise their own beauty . . . And if you think yourself not beautiful, then you should consider me a true lover, since your beauty seems to me to be greater than that of all other women; love makes even an ugly woman seem beautiful to her lover. . .

The woman says: Although, your virtue is greatly to be praised, I am young and I shudder at the thought of the embraces of old men.

The man says: Certainly old age is not to be blamed . . . *[he explains that his many years have enabled him to do more noble deeds than would be possible for a young man.]*

Third Dialogue

A plebian (gentleman) speaks with a woman of the higher nobility

The man says: If a man of the middle class seeks to join himself in love with a women of the higher nobility, he ought to have a multitude of good qualities, for in order for a lower-born man to be worthy to seek the love of a higher born woman, he should be filled with innumerable good qualities, and an infinite number of good deeds should extol him. . . .

. . . Thus if, after a long period of proof, he is found worthy of love, a woman of the higher nobility may choose a plebian (gentlemen) as her lover. . .

[A sample dialogue is given; the man begs the lady to accept his service as a lover. The lady says that she is not pleased that he ranks so far beneath her.]

The man says: I admit that I ask to be loved, for to live in love is sweeter than anything else in life. But your words show clearly that you refuse to love me and that this is because of the lowness of my inferior rank, even though I have great virtue. . . The aforementioned distinction of classes does not prohibit me from being numbered among the superior classes or to ask the rewards of a higher class, provided that can justly object to me on the grounds of my character . .

The woman says: Although virtue can ennoble a plebian, yet you cannot change your rank to the extent that a plebian is made a great lord or vavasor, unless he is granted that by the power of the prince, who as he pleases may add nobility to good morals. By right then you are denied advancement to the love of a countess. . . Moreover, you claim to be numbered among the knights, yet I discern in you much that is contrary and harmful to that state. For knights by their nature should have thin and graceful calves and a foot of moderate size, longer than it is wide, as if it had been formed with a certain touch of art. I see that your thighs on the contrary are fat and round and your feet are huge and as wide as they are long.

The man says: If for his manners and integrity a commoner is worthy of being ennobled by a prince, I do not see why he should not be worthy of a noble woman's love. For if moral integrity alone makes a man worthy of being noble and only nobility is considered worthy of the love of a noblewoman, then it follows that only moral integrity is worthy to be crowned with the love of a noble lady.

But that objection which you put to me about my flabby legs and big feet is not very reasonable. It is said that in the frontier regions of Italy, there lives a certain count who has finely shaped legs, descended from a line of counts, illustrious ancestors, who in the sacred palace of the Holy See rejoices in elevated offices and shines with every sort of beauty and abounds in riches; yet it is said that he is devoid of virtue; all good customs fear him and every depravity finds its dwelling place in him. On the contrary, there is a king in Hungary who has very fat legs and big feet, and is almost entirely destitute of beauty. And yet he has such shining virtue he is worthy to receive the glory of the royal crown and almost the whole world resounds with his praises. And so you should not ask about my legs and my feet, but what virtues I have acquired by my own deeds . . . You should learn to object not to one's legs but to one's morals, since in objecting to legs you seem to be objecting to divine nature.

[Book II ends with a discussion of various sorts of lovers -- clergymen may engage in love, but it is forbidden to nuns. Avoid greedy women. Prostitutes should be shunned. Peasants rarely love; they copulate like beasts; moreover, they should not be instructed in love, since it would distract them from their labors. If one should by chance fall in love with a peasant woman, praise her elaborately and then "if you come upon a convenient place, do not hesitate to take what you want by force."]

Andreas next gives instructions on how love may be retained. Then he provides various judgements delivered by Courts of Love, presided over by Countess Marie of Champagne, Queen Eleanor of Aquitaine, and other noble ladies of the time. In Book II the Countess of Champagne had been asked to settle the problem of whether love is possible between a man and wife. She replied in a formal letter, that love between husband and wife is impossible and that jealousy is absolutely required by love.]

Thus, our judgement, which has been pronounced with great moderation and is supported by the opinion of many great ladies, should be to you an indubitable and eternal truth.

The year 1174, the Kalends of May [i.e., May 1], the Seventh of the Indiction.

[Her ruling is cited in the following decision:]

XVII. A Knight was in love with a lady who was already in love with another; he received some hope to be loved in the following manner -- that if she was ever deprived of the love of her present lover, then certainly this knight would have her love. After a brief time the lady married her lover. The aforesaid knight then demanded that she grant him the fruit of the hope granted to him, but she refused, saying that she had not lost the love of her lover. In this case the queen answered thus: "We do not dare oppose the decision of the Countess of Champagne, who in her decision decreed that love can exercise no power over husband and wife. Therefore we recommend that the aforesaid women grant the love that she has promised."

[Book II concludes with a set of rules for lovers (an expansion of a set of rules given earlier; these, Andreas says, were brought from King Arthur's court by a Breton Knight. (The story of how he obtained the rules is a brief romance.)

The Rules of Love

1. Marriage is no excuse for not loving.
2. He who is not jealous can not love.
3. No one can be bound by two loves.
4. Love is always growing or diminishing.
5. It is not good for one lover to take anything against the will of the other.
6. A male cannot love until he has fully reached puberty.
7. Two years of mourning for a dead lover are prescribed for surviving lovers.
8. No one should be deprived of love without a valid reason.
9. No one can love who is not driven to do so by the power of love.
10. Love always departs from the dwelling place of avarice.
11. It is not proper to love one whom one would be ashamed to marry.
12. The true lover never desires the embraces of any save his lover.
13. Love rarely lasts when it is revealed.
14. An easy attainment makes love contemptible; a difficult one makes it more dear.
15. Every lover turns pale in the presence of his beloved.
16. When a lover suddenly has sight of his beloved, his heart beats wildly.
17. A new love expells an old one.
18. Moral integrity alone makes one worthy of love.
19. If love diminishes, it quickly leaves and rarely revives.
20. A lover is always fearful.
21. True jealousy always increases the effects of love.
22. If a lover suspects another, jealousy and the effects of love increase.
23. He who is vexed by the thoughts of love eats little and seldom sleeps.
24. Every action of a lover ends in the thought of his beloved.
25. The true lover believes only that which he thinks will please his beloved.
26. Love can deny nothing to love.
27. A lover can never have enough of the embraces of his beloved.
28. The slightest suspicion incites the lover to suspect the worse of his beloved.
29. He who suffers from an excess of passion is not suited to love.
30. The true lover is continuously obsessed with the image of his beloved.

31. Nothing prevents a woman from being loved by two men, or a man from being loved by two women.

[Book III is a palinode -- advising the reader to reject love on the grounds of religion, good health (copulation weakens the body and lovers' sleeplessness and tendency to ignore eating have a deleterious effect), and the fact that women, Andreas says, are so awful. The book ends with an extended misogynistic tirade.]

Trans. (often freely) from Andreae Capellani regii Francorum, *De amore libri tres*, ed. E. Trojel, Copenhagen, 1892.

For a full translation see Andreas Capellanus. *On love*, ed. with an English trans. by P.G. Walsh, London, 1982 [PA 8250.A236 D413 1982].