

European College of Liberal Arts

Syllabus for Winter 2010, BA Core Course

FORMS OF LOVE

Seminar leaders: Tracy Colony, Geoff Lehman, Laura Scuriatti, Judith Tønning

Lecturers: The above, plus Elie Assis (Bar Ilan University), Richard Barber (Boydell & Brewer), Mark Edwards (Christ Church, Oxford), Manuele Gragnolati (Somerville College, Oxford), Simon May (Birkbeck College, University of London),

Introduction

It is undeniable that love has been and still is a distinctive and fundamental value in Western cultural tradition (amongst others) – a value whose meaning has undergone numerous changes throughout different historical moments, but which has constantly defined interpersonal relationships and social, as well as political, behaviour in Western culture. Indeed, we can say that specific definitions of love are both the products and the producers of different conceptualizations of human nature, of gender identity and of social and political systems.

This course focuses on classical antiquity, early Christian and medieval traditions. In these periods the experience of love was privileged as one of the highest forms of interpersonal relationship and as a way of understanding the relation between human beings and the divine. Accordingly, this experience has been the subject of many different philosophical, theological and psychological discourses which attempted to understand a phenomenon which, by its very nature, seems to exceed conceptualization. In this course we will investigate these traditional discussions on the theme of love in order to develop a conceptual vocabulary and a framework for our own questioning. Although the texts in the course are presented as far as possible in chronological order, the historical development of the concept of love is not the ultimate focus of the course, but, rather, a background on the basis of which we may be able to critically question and investigate this topic, also in the light of its meaning and significance in contemporary society. To this purpose the course is further supported by a variety of Thursday special seminars where we often depart from the specific historical context and adopt a more theoretical and contemporary perspective on each week's themes.

Throughout the term we will consider the interrelationship among forms of love, as expressed in a range of literary and religious texts. The progression of the course will be primarily driven by this interrelationship, specifically through the sequence and juxtaposition of texts we read. Plato's *Symposium*, with its various speeches in praise of love, opens up a range of perspectives on, and interpretations of, love that are relevant to many of the other texts we read later in the term. Following Plato, the focus in weeks two to four is on Christian texts, works that introduce something apparently absent in the *Symposium*: love as *agape* ("the fatherly love of God for man, as well as man's reciprocal love for God" and, by extension, the love of one's fellow human beings). Furthermore, in reading parts of the New Testament, Augustine's *Confessions*, and other religious texts, we will

examine the relationship between this new ideal of *agape* and a Christian notion of eros as a yearning for God. From week seven onwards, we will read literary texts whose form and language were deeply innovative; in this part of the course our investigation will also involve the analysis of the way in which specific concepts of love give shape to different literary forms, and, in turn, we will reflect on how the literary tradition which these texts have produced propagated and, so to say, 'naturalized' ideals of love and of the individual, which we may recognize also from our contemporary perspective.

In weeks six and seven, dedicated to lyric poetry, we address first the mystical tradition, in which the yearning for the divine coexists, in poetic expression, with physical, earthly desire, and then the medieval tradition of secular love poetry and song. In certain ways almost indistinguishable from mystical religious poems, these secular songs also embody another ideal of love, one grounded in the interpersonal and the individual, the courtly love of the troubadours. In week eight, we consider texts in which this courtly ideal finds narrative expression, and sexual love finds affirmation in quasi-religious terms. In the final weeks of the course, we look at Dante's *Vita Nuova* and *Divine Comedy*, and at the way he brings many of the strands running throughout the course together – plenitude and yearning, the sensual and the spiritual, the individual and the universal, the earthly/physical and the divine – in texts oriented around the transformative power of love.

Week 1: Plato

January 11- January 15

Monday and Wednesday: Plato, *Symposium*

Lecturers: Tracy Colony (Monday)

David Hayes (Wednesday)

Thursday seminar: *Symposium* or *Phaedrus*

Plato's *Symposium* is composed of a series of speeches dedicated to the praise of *eros*. The culmination of this series is Socrates' depiction of his encounter with Diotima and her account of the nature of *eros*. Through the symbolism of its dramatic setting and its philosophical reflection on the nature of the erotic this text develops an understanding of *eros* which has been one of the most influential in the Western tradition. We begin the course with this text in order to refer back to the previous semester and to lay an important foundation for the many later treatments of love which will both appropriate Plato and move beyond him.

Week 2: The New Testament I (Agape)

January 18- January 22

Monday: Gospel of Matthew

Wednesday: 1 Corinthians 13, 1 John

Lecturers: Simon May (Monday)

Judith Topping (Wednesday)

Thursday seminar (all sessions): St. Francis of Assisi, *Fioretti & Rule*, *Rule of St. Augustine*, *Carmina Burana*

These sessions examine the wellsprings of the Christian belief in Christ's life, death and resurrection as an implicit response to Platonic *eros*. The early gospels and apostolic letters are read as a declaration that the unattainable Good has come down to Earth in bodily form, and has therein revealed that the human desire for the Good is not isolated, but a response to God's desire for them. The consequence is that now the appropriate form of love is no longer primarily *eros* but *agape*: Humans no longer need to desire what is unattainable, but to pass on the overflowing love God has already shown to them.

Thursday session:

One of the characteristic expressions of this paradigm shift is the monastic movement, whose aim is to act out this principle of plenitude in worldly conditions of scarcity. By renouncing the basic human aspirations to property, sexual/familial fulfilment and freedom of choice, those who take the monastic vows of poverty, chastity and obedience seek to demonstrate that fulfilment and generosity do not rely on earthly goods, but have an overflowing source in God's love and care. In the contemplative/hermitical life, the focus is on the superfluity of all earthly ties and relations; in the active life (here exemplified by St Francis), the focus is on love and care for the sick, poor, weak and underprivileged.

That this life is a precarious and highly ambitious pursuit can be seen in cases where it 'tips over' into bawdiness and dissoluteness, as in the *Carmina Burana*, which originated in the monastic milieu.

Week 3: The New Testament II (Christian Eros)

January 25- January 29

Monday: Gospel of Matthew, Romans 8, 1 Corinthians 13-15, Apocalypse of St John

Wednesday: Amiens Cathedral

Lecturers: Judith Topping (Monday),

Geoff Lehman (Wednesday)

Thursday seminar: Individual sessions

Saturday midnight: Essay submission deadline

The discussion thus far has bracketed an important dimension of the Christian understanding of love. For although it is true that Christianity sees itself as acting out of a plenitude already received, it also sees itself as declaring a fundamental lack or incompleteness in the world and in each individual: If humans are made in God's image and their deepest desire is a response to God's desire (as Christ's manhood is understood as showing forth), then they remain essentially incomplete until they are united to God after death or in the eschaton. Christianity, as it encounters us in passages of the gospels and the letters, as well as in the Apocalypse of St John, is a call to keep alive desire for joy beyond a world of immediate pleasures.

The Cathedral of Notre Dame in Amiens, built in the 13th century, embodies the fullest expression of the Gothic style. The architecture of Amiens Cathedral is shaped throughout by the characteristically Gothic emphasis on light, both as a metaphor of divine love and as a crucial aspect of the literal experience of sacred space. Furthermore, the cathedral functions metaphorically as a representation of the kingdom of heaven, and also of the Virgin Mary, to whom Amiens and other similar monuments were dedicated. This association with a Christian *eros* is, however, primarily developed through the architectural form of the building itself, as well as through the particular kinds of experience it offers to those who enter it. Many of these ideas also find iconographic expression in the building's sculptural program, particularly in the eschatological imagery of its central portal.

Week 4: Augustine

February 1 – February 5

Monday and Wednesday: Augustine, *Confessions*

Lecturer: Mark Edwards (Monday and Wednesday)

Thursday seminar: Individual sessions

Augustine is a pivotal figure in the development of a Christian engagement with *eros*; some argue that he introduces a synthesis of *eros* and *agape* in the concept of *caritas*.

Week 5: State of the World Week (no Core Course classes)

Week 6: Erotic Mysticism

February 15 - February 19

Monday: Song of Songs

Wednesday: Origen, *The Song of Songs: Commentary and Homilies* (selections), John of the Cross, *The Spiritual Song*, Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermons on the Song of Songs* (selections), Teresa of Avila, *Meditations on Song of Song*

Lecturers: Elie Assis (Monday)

Common session (Wednesday)

Thursday seminar: Individual sessions

Saturday midnight: Essay submission deadline

Religious *eros* is arguably most intensely experienced (and, in any case, literarily most fully expressed) in mysticism. These lectures will focus specifically on the mystical tradition that springs from interpretations (mystical and/or eschatological) of the Song of Songs.

Week 7: The Medieval Love Lyric

February 22 - February 26

Monday: Poetry of al-Andalus: the *muwashshaha*, Ibn Zaidun, Moses Ibn Ezra; Provençal Poetry: William IX of Aquitaine, Bertran de Born, Arnaut Daniel; Sicilian Poetry: Giacomo da Lentini, Pier della Vigna

Wednesday: Francesco Petrarca, *Canzoniere*

Lecturers: Geoff Lehmann (Monday)

Laura Scuriatti (Wednesday)

Thursday seminar: individual sessions

In many ways, the medieval love lyric grew from the same tradition that mystical religious poetry did. As a musical form, rooted in an oral, performance-based practice, it also travelled Europe, crossing linguistic boundaries. We will read a selection of these love songs and consider the ways in which their expression of an individual, person-to-person love helped give birth to one of the principal modern conceptions of love, epitomized in written literary form in the sonnets of

Petrarch's *Canzoniere* (Book of Songs). Petrarch worked on the *Canzoniere* most of his life (from 1335 until his death in 1374), producing nine different versions consisting of sonnets, songs, madrigals and ballads. The dominant presence of the beloved Laura, to whom most of the lyrics are dedicated, and the poet's love for her, however, also become a poetic tool enabling the author to delve into a dialogue with himself, portraying, rather than just the story of a passion for a woman, the tormented struggle of the modern individual, torn between ideal and reality, whose actions and thoughts are fraught with contradictions and uncertainties.

Week 8: Courtly Love

March 1 - March 5

Monday and Wednesday: Gottfried von Strassburg, *Tristan* (selections), Thomas of Britain, *Tristan*

Lecturers: Geoff Lehman (Monday)
Laura Scuriatti (Wednesday)

Thursday seminar (special session): Richard Barber on Arthurian literature

Many of the ideas about love expressed in medieval lyric poetry and song also appear in the context of narrative poems originating in northern Europe in the 12th and 13th centuries. The form of love developed in this literary tradition, a love oriented towards a specific individual who at the same time remains in some essential sense unobtainable, has generally been referred to since the 19th century as 'courtly love'. The tale of Tristan and Isolde existed in numerous versions, both courtly and popular, from throughout this period, although its origins are considerably earlier. The adulterous relationship between the two principal characters, a person-to-person love that is both passionately physical and, arguably, in some sense ultimately unfulfillable, is the focus of the Tristan narrative and embodies the ideals and paradoxes inherent in the notion of courtly love. The texts of Thomas of Britain and Gottfried von Strassburg, both extant today in incomplete form, are the two principal courtly retellings of the story that have come down to us.

Week 9: Dante I

March 8 – March 12

Monday: Dante Alighieri, *Rime* (selections), *Vita Nuova* (selections)

Wednesday: Dante Alighieri, *Divine Comedy* (*Inferno* and *Purgatorio*, selected cantos)

Lecturers: Laura Scuriatti (Monday)
Tracy Colony (Wednesday)

Thursday seminar: Individual sessions

Saturday midnight: Essay submission deadline

Dante's *Divine Comedy* presents divine love as the animating principle of the universe. Although human beings are animated and shaped by this love, they also possess free will and the possibility of misunderstanding or forgetting this ultimate source of human capacities. The *Divine Comedy* is a poetic illustration of the ways in which love can become alienated from its source and also how divine love can also re-orient and reanimate desire to its fullest possibilities.

Week 10: Dante II

March 15 – March 19

Monday and Wednesday: Dante Alighieri, *Divine Comedy* (*Inferno* and *Purgatorio*, selected cantos)

Lecturers: Tracy Colony (Monday)

Manuele Gagnolati (Wednesday)

Thursday seminar: Individual sessions

Week 11 – No teaching

Saturday midnight: Final paper submission deadline

Written Requirements

Students will be asked to write 4 essays, 3 of which of 5-7 pages long; the last essay is longer (10-12 pages) and should be written on the basis of one of the previous essays, which will function as draft. Students may also decide to frame a new question for the final paper, provided it has been discussed and approved by their seminar leader.

The deadlines for submission of the essays are: Saturday midnight of weeks 3, 6 and 9. The deadline for the final paper is Saturday midnight of week 11. Each student will receive a tutorial of half an hour for each essay. The tutorial for the final paper will take place in the Spring Term.

Grading

Essays: 15% each

Final paper: 25%

Participation (including Thursday seminars): 30%

Your seminar leaders should inform you of your participation grade at the end of each rotation.

General Guidelines

Regular attendance and serious preparation for the AY core are essential. Please make sure you sign the attendance sheet before each lecture begins. According to college regulations, over 15% overall absences will result in academic probation. (See the Student Handbook for a description of college policies at:

http://www.ecla.de/fileadmin/common/Student_Handbooks/ECLA_Student_Handbook_2009-10.pdf).