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***WOMAN and LOVE in MEDIEVAL COURTLY LITERATURE:  
the REAL and the FICTIONAL***

**MA THESIS**

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine the formal and thematic interaction of the poetry of medieval Arabs with Western literature through the Troubadour poets in France. In the love poetry of Arabs, where divine love is the central theme, the poet's muse is sometimes described as an unattainable divine being, sometimes as a very beautiful woman with earthly qualities. This attitude to woman observed in the poems of Arab writers has had a significant influence, firstly on the Troubadour poets of Southern France, then through the French and the Italian writers on the English. In tracing this influence the present study also tries to draw attention on the paradoxes and dilemmas inherent in the presentation of courtly love and the image of the woman which arise from the unrealistic conditions of life in medieval Europe. In medieval Christian societies "woman" was seen either as Eve, the temptress to be avoided by men or as Virgin Mary, the unreal, unattainable noble and virgin lady who could not be a wife and a beloved but a divinity to be adored. The present study argues that the courtly love poetry that had its sources in Arabic and Troubadour poems foregrounds the irreconcilability of fact and fiction concerning the medieval European man's approach to the concepts of love and the "woman".

In building this argument the study will analyze first the love poetry of three early medieval Arab poets namely: Ibn Hazm, Ibn Quzman and Ibn Arabi, who are considered the leading figures of Arabic literature; and then *The Knight's Tale* of Geoffrey Chaucer and *Le Morte Darthur* of Thomas Malory as the two most well-known chivalric love romances of British medieval literature.

## ÖZET

Bu çalışmanın amacı, Ortaçağ Arap şiirinin Fransa'daki Troubadour şairleri aracılığıyla, Batı edebiyatı ile olan etkileşimini teknik ve konu bakımından incelemektir. Arap aşk şiirlerindeki ana tema ilahi aşktır. Şaire ilham veren kadın figürü bazen ulaşılmaz ilahi bir varlık, bazen de dünyevi özelliklere sahip güzel bir kadın olarak tasvir edilir. Aşk ve kadın tasvirinin konu olduğu Arap edebiyatının bu özelliklerinin, ilk olarak Güney Fransa'daki Troubadour şairleri, sonrasında ise Fransa aracılığı ile İtalyan ve son olarak da İngiliz yazarları üzerinde önemli etkileri görülmektedir. Bu çalışma aynı zamanda, Ortaçağ Avrupa'sındaki yaşam koşulları ve 'courtly love' şiirlerindeki kadın imajının tasviri arasındaki ikilem ve çelişiklere de dikkat çekmeye çalışır. Ortaçağ Hıristiyan toplumunda kadın hem erkeklerin kaçındığı baştan çıkarıcı Havva, hem de, eş veya sevgili olmaktan uzak, ulaşılmaz kutsal bakire Meryem olarak görülürdü. Ortaçağ Avrupa'sı erkeklerinin gerçek ve kurgusal düzlemlerde kadın ve aşk anlayışlarının bu zıtlığı, kaynağında Arap ve Troubadour şiirlerini barındıran 'courtly love' şiirleri sayesinde gözler önüne serilmektedir.

Bu tartışmayı oluştururken, öncelikle Ortaçağ Arap şiir edebiyatının önde gelen temsilcileri olan üç farklı şair; Ibn Hazm, Ibn Quzman ve Ibn Arabi'nin aşk temalı şiirleri incelenecek ve sonrasında Ortaçağ İngiliz romans edebiyatının önemli eserleri arasında yer alan Geoffrey Chaucer'ın *Şövalyenin Hikâyesi* ve Sir Thomas Malory'nin *Arthur'un Ölümü* ele alınacaktır.

## INTRODUCTION

The aim of this thesis is two-fold. First it tries to show that Troubadour poetry, as the predecessor of the courtly love tradition in Europe, plays a major role in the conceptualization of love in the literature of Europe in the following ages, and that the Western understanding of love was modelled to a great extent after the love poetry of the Arabic poets of Al-Andalus. Spanish Orientalist, Julian Ribera (1858-1934) is among the pioneers of this argument. Roger Boase in his book *The Origin and Meaning of Courtly Love* refers to Ribera's ideas and says, "Ribera maintained that the principle of Troubadour music was learnt from the Arabs" (1977, 29); by this, he is referring merely to melody and rhythm. In another source, Boase again quotes the Spanish scholar saying "the word *trobar* might derive from the Arabic verb *taraba*, [which means] to sing to play music; to be moved by joy of grief; to fill with delight" (1994, 458). Secondly, by analyzing relevant sections of the poetry of major Arabic writers of the period, *The Knight's Tale* of Geoffrey Chaucer, and *Le Morte Darthur* of Sir Thomas Malory, the thesis seeks to display the paradoxes and contradictions inherent in the expression of divine and secular love and the role of the woman in the courtly love literature of medieval Europe.

Arabic love poetry is a tradition that predates Islam but it is enriched through its contact with Islamic mysticism. After the conquest of the Iberian Peninsula by the Arabs the cultural exchange between the East and the West contributed to the multidimensional perspective and vision of religious mysticism Islamic and Christian alike. Major works of Arabic verse especially those produced between the ninth and the twelfth centuries point to the powerful influence of Islamic mysticism on the love poetry of Arabic writers. Among the most prominent Arabic poets is Ibn Hazm, whose book *The Ring of the Dove* is about love and its effects on the soul. Ibn Quzman who wrote his *Diwan* at the height of Arab governance in Al-Andalus has a special place in the literature of Al-Andalus. He was both the pioneer of a new form of strophic poetry, which was later used by the Troubadours and a wandering poet singing his poetry in knightly courts again like his successors, the Troubadours. Then comes the mystic philosopher and poet Ibn Arabi who immortalized his passion for his imaginary beloved in his book, *The Interpreter of Desires*. Central to the poetry of these Arabic poets is their preoccupation with 'love' and 'female beauty'. Ibn Hazm venerates woman in his love poems. For him the feminine figure is divine. He

expresses his love in terms of divine love. Ibn Quzman also glorifies his beloved in his poems but unlike Ibn Hazm, his descriptions of women are more earthly than divine. Although the style and language of Ibn Arabi from time to time gives the impression of one expressing earthly love, his main focus is always the love of God. Arabi describes his beloved as a reflection of God – and even God himself. In other words, Arabic poetry of the time intermingles earthly and divine love. Women are pictured as passive objects of love in the poems of Hazm and Arabi. They are always unattainable and idealized. The beloved is both a divine figure that must be worshipped and an object of desire which stimulates in the lover the emotions that lead to the attainment of transcendental love.

When we look at the works of the established courtly love writers of the Middle Ages in Europe, we can trace many similarities between Medieval Christian poets and Arabic Sufi ones. Their treatment of the theme of “love” and the “woman,” language they use in discussing these topics resemble one another. Medieval European writers idealize and glorify the female figure, and describe the power of love on the lover in ways very similar to the Arabic Sufi poets.

In this thesis I will follow a chronological sequence and discuss first the early medieval Arab understanding of love, particularly its depiction of the ‘woman’ within the Arabic-Sufi love tradition. Then I will try to show how European writers have reinterpreted these concepts to suit their societies and their own religio-cultural conventions, pointing out the contradictions and paradoxes that exist between fact and fiction in medieval Europe on these issues.

In the first chapter the conquest of Spain by the Arabs and the translation of Arabic texts into European languages are briefly discussed. In the second chapter the works of the three major Arabic poets of love are studied, keeping in mind the similarities and differences in their respective works. The third chapter focuses on the social and cultural conditions of Europe in the Middle Ages, and studies the position of women in the feudal Christian world. The possibility of love between a man and a woman either within or outside marriage is explored with reference to the historical texts of the times and the poetry of the Troubadours who focus on these issues. In the fourth chapter, the image of the courtly beloved in Medieval European literature is portrayed and its paradoxes are discussed



through the agency of Geoffrey Chaucer's Emily in *The Knight's Tale* and some key women figures in Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*.

After originating in Al-Andalus and being passed on to the Troubadour poets of France, the Eastern conception of the woman – at least with regard to poetry - and the focus on the theme of secular or divine love spread to other European countries, eventually reaching Chaucer and Malory. These men blended this idea of love and the woman's role with their own cultures and refashioned them after their own views. Chaucer's figuration of Emily, for example, perfectly fits the description of the conventional beauty of the courtly beloved, and the polarity between divine and earthly love is also maintained in the tale. Emily is portrayed as an idealized romance heroine, yet her role in the tale displays the status of a typical woman in medieval European society who lacks agency and independent will in the face of male dominance and control. She does not act as a fully formed individual; she is a beautiful object to be adorned and desired. Her presentation in the tale complements the typical frame of romance narratives: a courageous and combative knight lover and his appealing lady.

In the case of Malory, his female characters are delineated as much more powerful and strong willed figures. There is the bold and unfaithful Guenivere, for example, and the formidable Dame Lyonesse. Again the presence of the beloved complements the ideals of the chivalric world and the woman once more remains the object of man's sexual desire. Malory's female characters, however, use their social power, sexuality and even magic to manipulate men. They are not unattainable women figures; in fact, their aloofness depends on their own free will. Malory's female protagonists are free to love. What's more, they are passionate lovers and have the courage to express their feelings.

The last chapter thematically links the previous chapters which depict and analyze the theme of love and the image of the woman. It tries to show how the image of the unattainable, almost divine beloved in the love lyrics of Arabic poets becomes in Chaucer an idealized stereotype and a vivid person with will and agency in Malory. Both Chaucer and Malory in their different ways satirize how hypothetically medieval society treats the so-called 'all-important' ideas of love, sexuality, loyalty, faith between a man and a woman.

## CHAPTER I

### Arabs and the West

#### I. The Encounter of Cultures Through Translations

Arabic poetic tradition, particularly in the way that it conflated divine and earthly love, strongly influenced the courtly love tradition that flourished in the Middle Ages. In the Islamic life and literature women had been venerated either as mothers or as the inspiration of transcendental love for men. The image of the woman, in the medieval European literature however, occupied a paradoxical position. Women were presented both as objects of sexual desire and as instigators of pure divine love. This paradox continues to exist throughout the medieval and Renaissance literatures and we believe it has its sources in the Arabic poetry tradition. It is observed in the works of the Troubadour poets, then again in the works of the famous Italian poet Dante and then in the poetry of many French and the English poets including Geoffrey Chaucer and Sir Thomas Malory.

A truth that must be underlined, however, is that Arabic literature is not the only source of the love poems of the Troubadour poets. Troubadours took whatever they needed from Arabic poetry and blended it with their own, thus creating their own style and poetry. The same must be said for Dante, Chaucer and Malory. The main idea which shall be highlighted here is the point of intersection between the literary works of two different cultures, Islam and Christianity, *vis a vis* the theme of love and the portrayal of woman. Moreover, not only the thematic and stylistic similarities and differences between the products of these cultures shall be examined but the socio-cultural and historical conditions in which they were produced will also be discussed.

At the height of Islamic hegemony, the intersection of cultures between the Islamic world and the West occurred in two centers. The first was Spain, especially the city of Toledo, and the latter was Sicily. These two centers were the contact points of Islamic culture at its zenith; this was also the time when Europe was only slowly emerging from the Dark Ages. With the excursion of Pope Sylvester II (946 –1003) to Cordoba between the years of 967-970, new ideas and knowledge about Arabic culture and art began to be introduced to Europe. The next exchange between Arabs and Westerners occurred after the capture of

Toledo, the greatest cultural center of Islamic Andalusia, in 1085 by Alfonso VI of Castile. In those days, Toledo was famous for its libraries, stacked with thousands of hand written works, many of which were brought from the East. Another feature of Toledo was that the city had three co-existing societies. They were Moslems, Christians and Jews. The Jews often served as a bridge to facilitate commercial and cultural exchanges between Moslems and Christians. Raymond, the Archbishop of Toledo (from 1125 to 1152) using the available resources in Toledo, promoted the translation of scholarly texts from Arabic into Latin, an effort which lasted about one century (Bedevi 7-10).

The second place where cultural activity was at its peak was Sicily. Sicily was under Arabic dominance between 965-1072. Although, the island became a nexus of cultural exchange after its capture by the Normans, the influence of Islamic culture continued. For example, Roger II of Sicily was greatly impressed by Arabic culture. During Roger II's time, an academy was founded where Christian and Jewish scientists worked side-by-side starting a translation activity similar to that which had occurred in Toledo. After Roger II, his grandson, Frederick II of Sicily also was a great patron of the arts and cultural exchange. Gerard de Cremona (1114-1178) of Sicily, the famous translator of the Middle Ages, lived during this time. Gerard travelled to Toledo in order to translate Arabic works and translated around eighty-eight Arabic texts of astronomy, mathematics, medicine, philosophy, and logic. The significant role these translations played in the development of scientific thought and culture in Europe cannot be denied. The translations of Arabic texts on religion and divine love, as stated earlier, had a strong impact on the European man's portrayal of woman and his understanding of love. Indeed a close study of the literature of the period displays to us the extent that the influence of the translations of literary and scientific works from Arabic to Spanish and Italian had on the beginning European Renaissance (Bedevi 11-12).

## **II. History of Al-Andalus**

Restricted in the Arabian Peninsula for centuries, Arab culture and literature carried to the west through the invasion of the Iberian Peninsula by Arabs in the eighth century. During the next 750 years, independent Muslim states were established in Spain, and the entire area of Muslim control became known under the Arabic name of Al-Andalus (Andalusia or

Moorish Spain). In some sources the Muslim population of Al-Andalus is referred to as Arabs, while in others they are called Moors or Berbers, and this is sometimes confusing. Medieval Scholar A.R Nykl, for example, often refers to the conquerors of Spain as ‘Arabs,’ whereas social anthropologist Robert Briffault prefers to call them ‘Moorish’. Nykl explains the origins of the people of Medieval Islamic Spain as follows:

The Muslim conquerors of Spain are called Moors by some, Arabs by others. Neither term is correct. A large number of invaders were North African Berbers, a Hamitic branch of the Caucasian race, who had, at first unwillingly, adopted the faith of Islam and the Arab domination at the beginning of the VIIIth century. (1)

As the works and ideas of the Arab artists Ibn Hazm, Ibn Quzman and Ibn Arabi are examined in this thesis I will refer to them as ‘Hispano-Arabs’ or ‘Andalusian-Arabs’ and not as ‘Moors’. According to Nykl, both the terms Hispano-Arabs and Andalusian-Arabs refer to the same group of people of Al-Andalus; however, these names were formed after the intermarriages between the Muslims and the natives of Spain. He explains the tendency of interracial marriage as follows:

This process was by no means miscegenation, because the natives, the Arabs, and the Berbers all belonged to the same Caucasian race. On the contrary, this constant intermarriage blended the various excellent qualities of the three groups and produced a type known under the general name of Hispano-Arabs or Andalusian-Arabs. (Nykl 15)

Yet Arabs were not the only settlers of the Iberian Peninsula; there was a religious and cultural pluralism in Al-Andalus. Muslims, Jews and Christians (or ‘Mozarabs,’ native Christians of the Iberian Peninsula) lived side by side and built a multicultural civilization where remarkable individuals of different beliefs made significant contributions in such areas as art, music, science, philosophy, architecture, medicine, engineering, navigation, and literature:

That was the era of the Golden Age of Islam, from the early 8th century to the late 15th century, almost coincidental with the Dark Ages in the rest of Europe, when Al-Andalus was the center of global civilization. And the capital city of Cordoba was Europe's largest - the city of books, of patrons of great literary figures and of men who were explorers of knowledge. There existed no separation between science, wisdom, and faith; nor was East separated from the West, nor the Muslim from the

Jew or the Christian. It was here that the European Renaissance began and flourished beyond. (Ghazanfar 2)

Al-Andalus was the cultural center of medieval Europe. Muslim conquerors of the land blended their Eastern culture and knowledge with Western thought and produced some outstanding works of art that are still popular and admired. In literature, poetry was the most celebrated genre of the period, especially Arabic poetry by some remarkable artists. Mahmut Kanık, the translator of *The Ring of the Dove* notes that poetry writing was not something new to Arabs; it was the most common genre in Arabic culture, dating back to the sixth century. Ancient Arab poetry generally dealt with martial exploits, praise of the rulers, and glorification of the tribes, yet it went through a great change after the conquest of Spain. According to Kanık, with the invasion of Spain in the eighth century, Arabs further enriched their poetry in terms of subject matters and style. Arabs were deeply affected by this brand new culture, the natural beauty and the fertility of their homeland (236-38). And of course the features of ancient Arabic poetry changed through the encounter with Western culture. It began to celebrate love, the beauty of the beloved and the suffering of the lover, characteristics that resemble the basic features of the courtly love tradition of the Troubadours. Briffault comments on the thematic similarities between the poetry of Al-Andalus and the Troubadours:

It celebrates love as the highest form of happiness and the noblest source of inspiration; it sings of the beloved's beauty, the sorrow of the rejected lover and the cruelty of the lady. It introduces new fashions in composition, as in its hymns to Spring. Anticipating Provençal lyrics by close on two centuries, Hispano Moorish poetry was the only one, in Europe, to cultivate those themes and to exhibit those characteristics. Nowhere else did a lyrical literature exist, popular or learned, offering a like resemblance to Provençal Poetry. (25)

The pioneers of this new form of love poetry in Spain were Ibn Zaidün (1003-1071), and Ibn Hazm (994-1065). Ibn Zaidün is considered as one of the greatest lyric poets of Al-Andalus. His passionate attachment to the poetess Walhada, the daughter of the Omayyad Caliphate, was the source of inspiration for his literary life and works. And Ibn Hazm, who elaborated on the philosophy of love as well as love poetry, tells different love stories of the people of Al-Andalus in his treatise on love, *The Ring of the Dove*. The true love story of Ibn Zaidün and princess Walhada is one of them.

In the year 711 when Tariq Ibn Ziyad set foot on Spanish soil, the rule of the Omayyad dynasty started. During the reign of the Omayyad caliphs, Cordoba was the capital city and became an economic, political as well as cultural center of Al-Andalus. Medieval scholar James T. Monroe states that “[i]n this atmosphere, culture was favored and primary figures began to appear in the literary sphere” and these literary figures brought the poetry of Al-Andalus to a “new level of sophistication” (8). Poetry was the most common literary genre at that time, and it was in Cordoba where “Arabic poetry in Spain [began] its true career” (Nykl 15). The poetry of joy, love and beauty began to flourish in Andalusia. It was the time of remarkable artists and philosophers. Omayyad emirs supported every field of intellectual activity in Spain and, as it happened almost a century later in France, the nobility and the rulers “founded a tradition both as makers and lovers of verses, and as patrons of poets” (Nykl 17).

The Omayyad Caliphate of Cordoba came to an end in 1031 and Muslim dominion in Al-Andalus was divided between twenty-three small kings who were constantly in political dispute among themselves. These states were mostly independent kingdoms called *taifas*. The most important of these kingdoms were Cordoba, Seville, Valencia, Zaragoza, Granada, and Toledo. Lasting only sixty four years, this period (*Reyes De Taifas*) was a period of high culture as well. Poetry, “became everybody’s patrimony and was appreciated everywhere ...” (Monroe 14). Nykl describes the period of the kings as a period of luxury where drinking and literary parties were not uncommon. He argues that the social life of that time greatly shaped the content and the nature of the poetry. There was a parallelism between politics, social evaluation and literature in this period:

As regards to poetry, the XIth century is the period of unsurpassed brilliancy, due mainly to the great freedom of behavior, which set aside many religious restrictions, especially those against wine drinking, those concerning the seclusion of women, the wearing of the veil, and love relations between the two sexes. (72)

As in Medieval France, the nobility encouraged literary activities and “each of these petty kings had his court poets” (Nykl 7). Furthermore, with the advent of court poets, wandering poets also came into existence. Travelling from one court to another, these poets remind us of the Troubadours, minstrel court poets of the twelfth and thirteenth century France.

After the fall of the small kingdoms in 1095, the Almoravid Period started in Andalusia and lasted until 1149. Poetic activity declined under the control of the Almoravid dynasty as they were more interested in religious exercises than in literature. Nevertheless, one famous name stands out from this period, that of Ibn Quzman, who was one of the most famous poets of his age. The Almoravid period came to an end with the conquest of Andalusia by the Almohad dynasty in 1149. During this period, which lasted until 1248, philosophy was the most superior intellectual and cultural pursuit at the court. Ibn Rushd (known in European literature as Averroes) and Ibn Arabi were the prominent thinkers of the time. Poetic activities again began to flourish, and it was also the time of the development of a mystical current: Sufism in Hispano Arabic poetry. Sufism was the last outstanding movement of Islam in Al-Andalus. Monroe explains the birth of Sufi poetry as: “No new forms are created, but a new spirit is introduced into the old ones that reflects the renovation spirit of the new state”; and he comments on the nature of this new poetry: “One step removed from human love, a breath of divine love enters al-Andalus with the works of Ghazali and mystical poetry comes to the surface and finds favor among different levels of society. (49-50)

The final epoch of Muslim rule in Al-Andalus is known as the Granada Period, and lasted from 1248 to 1492. Due to constant wars with the Kingdom of Castile and Aragon, Muslim rule began to weaken and eventually became untenable. Finally, in 1492, the last Muslim sultan surrendered complete control of the Emirate of Granada to Ferdinand II, the king of Aragon, and Isabella I, the queen of Castile. Although there were ups and downs in literary activities due to the differing political views of various Islamic rulers, poetry writing was celebrated and actively practiced throughout the Muslim dominion in Spain.

The status of women in the Muslim society of Al-Andalus was not like that of those ones who lived under the feudal system in other, primarily Christian, European countries. Briffault reports that women of Al-Andalus formed an important part of the society. As such, they were active participants in cultural and public affairs. And they were sponsors of public works and even had a specific occupation in cultural life: “The transcription of manuscripts was a feminine occupation; hundreds of women were, in one quarter of Cordoba, employed in the fabrication of books” (31). In addition, the women of Al-Andalus were generally much more sophisticated than their sisters in Christian lands:

“They received the same education as the men, and often in classes including both sexes. Learned women were even to be found who took to the study of philosophy and mathematics, and sometimes visited the East to attend the lectures of noted professors” (Briffault 31). Moreover women of Al-Andalus also took part in intellectual activities like poetry competitions in which they were both contestants and judges. For example, Princess Walhada, the daughter of the ruler of Cordoba and Aisha bint-Ahmed held literary gatherings that attracted the best known poets of the day (Briffault 31). As was the case in the court of Eleanor of Aquitaine and Marie de Champaign, women of nobility both supported and became involved in literary activities.

The women of Al-Andalus, however, should not be perceived as representatives of typical Eastern Muslim women. Briffault underlines the fact that the intermarriage between conquerors and the conquered had resulted in an ethnic and cultural fusion that transformed the behaviour of women under the rule of Islam in Al-Andalus. He writes: “The conquerors of Spain brought with them but a few female companions, and peopled their palaces with Spanish women. These retained a large measure of their independence of manner and were encouraged to do so” (30). And therefore the representatives of women under the rule of Islamic Spain had a considerable degree of freedom in contrast with the women in Eastern Muslim countries: “The evidence for this is indeed compelling, although temptation to romanticize the often very beautiful poetry attributed to prominent Andalusian women, thus elevating their status to unrealistic level, is also very real” (Sabbah and Gully 184).

The status of women in Al-Andalus was not like that of those ones who lived under the feudal system in other European countries in the Middle Ages. For Christian world, this was a period where feudality ruled over deeply divided classes and sectarian theology dominated all modes of thought. In a patriarchal society, women’s rights were so limited that they could only exist under the guardianship of their husbands. In addition, the church’s misogynist approach often made their lives more unbearable. On the other hand, in the Islamic world, this period marked the peak of Arabic civilization. Islamic societies far advanced in science, culture and arts were profiting from such advances in their everyday life. For them, this was a period where women co-ruled and took part in daily



social and cultural activities. There were female teachers, philosophers and poetesses. They were a respected group in their societies.

## CHAPTER II

### The Concept of Love in Hispano-Arabic Poetry

#### I. Form and Content in Hispano-Arabic Poetry

Although it was not known for many years that the Troubadour poets derived their sense of form and content from the poets of Muslim Spain, medieval scholars since the nineteenth century have started to study Arabic poetry as an important influence in the development of the love songs of the Troubadours. Briffault expands on this argument as he writes:

Medieval Europe, sunk in the night of five centuries of barbarism, the darkness of which we have difficulty in piercing, was suddenly recalled to life. She owed almost nothing to Rome, which had hitherto transmitted to her, in literature, little more than a few selections from Ovid, Cassiodorus and Boethius. To suppose that the new poetry which made itself heard on the edge of Andalusian gardens constituted a singular exception is, properly considered, an eccentricity which it would take far more cogent reasons to color than the unsupported guesses offered in explanation of the origin of that [the Troubadour ] poetry. (23)

In order to prove this connection, however, we have to look back to the historical facts of the eleventh, twelfth and thirteenth centuries in Spain and France. As was mentioned before, after the conquest of Spain, poetry writing reached its peak in Al-Andalus. Poetic activities there were vigorous and some poets of the time started a new genre called ‘*muwashshah*’ and ‘*zajal*,’ which became extremely popular during the eleventh and twelfth centuries. These new forms were generally used for singing love and praise. Written in the traditional tongue *muwashshah* or *muwassaha* and ‘*zajal*’ (melody) were multi-lined strophic verse poems (“Islamic arts.” *Encyclopædia Britannica*). Both were composed to be sung and accompanied by an instrument: “The principal charm of these poems was the melody (*talhin*), the combination of words in alternate rhymes and with striking refrains” (Nykl 380). The differences between the two forms can be explained as follows; “*muwashshah* was the product of princely courts, and the work of poets who had turned it into a literary exercise, and severed its relationship with life, the popular *zajal* was much more a product of its own milieu, and a reflection of contemporary life” (Abu-Haidar 88). In terms of the language they use, *muwashshah* was written in Classical Arabic whereas *zajal* is written in the vernacular dialect of Al-Andalus (Abu-Haidar 2-3). The

greatest composer of *zajal* poetry was Ibn Quzman who was also the contemporary of the first Provençal Troubadours. It is believed that some of the early Provençal poems' form and content were modelled on *zajal*: “The origin of the poems of the Troubadours is traced to the popular *zajal* poetry of Andalusia. Arabic Andalusian poetry contributed to a great extent to the rise of the new poetry in Europe” (Imamuddin 197).

There are several other proofs that can be mentioned to support the acquaintance of the first Troubadours with Muslim Spain, which brought an inevitable interaction. One of the earliest Troubadour poets and grandfather of Eleanor of Aquitaine, Count Guilhem VII of Poitiers (also known as Guillaume IX) was an influential poet whose poems inspired the works of later Troubadours. Nykl reports that in 1094, Guillaume IX married queen Philippa, the widow of King Sancho of Aragon in Spain. He spent almost a year in Spain after the marriage. After that he travelled to Spain for some political purposes in years 1098, 1114, 1115, and 1119. The family of Guillaume IX was also connected with the Spanish kingdoms Aragon and Castile by marriage (375-376). Likewise many of the famous Troubadour poets such as Cercamon, Marcabru, Arnaud Daniel, Peire Vidal and more visited Spanish courts and there were bilingual minstrels like Mozarabs (Spanish Christians) and Jews of Al-Andalus who were “ready to explain the words and the themes, and eager to devise of professional matters with their Provençal colleagues” (Briffault 77). Despite the individual differences of the poets, their poetic style and subject matters influenced each other: “The Troubadours were great imitators; plagiarism was in honor among them. Cercamon copies the Count of Poitiers, Marcabru imitates Cercamon and Peire d’Auvergne, and Arnaud Daniel helps himself to Marcabru” (Briffault 77). This interplay among the Troubadours enables the continuity of the tradition they adopt. Nykl argues that the elements which formed the Troubadour poetry were “partly autochthonous [native] and partly imitated from the poetic activity in the neighboring Christian-Muslim world in such of its aspects as happened to please the contemporary Meridional taste, especially at the courts of noblemen (373). Although the Troubadours may not have exactly copied the poetic style of Al-Andalus, they were greatly inspired by it and to some extent imitated the themes and the style they like.

### A. Ibn Hazm

Ibn Hazm (994-1064) was a Muslim theologian, philosopher and artist. He was considered one of the most influential philosophers and poets of his time. He was born in Cordoba to a rich and respected family, his father was a vizier in the service of the Abbasid Caliph, Al-Mansur. Being the son of such a man, Ibn Hazm received an eminent education in philosophy, religious sciences and literature. Interestingly, he was educated by women in learning the Quran and poetry and mentions this in his book *The Ring of the Dove*. His lifetime was full of political strife as he saw the fall of the Omayyad Caliphate of Cordoba and the establishment of the independent petty kingdoms in Al-Andalus. Participating in politics between the ages of sixteen and twenty-six, he was a supporter of the Omayyads and became a politician under the rule of the last Omayyad caliph. Because of his political affiliation, he was imprisoned and banished after the fall of the Omayyads. Nevertheless, he had a pleasant life, with luxury, culture and learning. Having forsaken his political role, Ibn Hazm devoted the rest of his life to literary activities. However, his literary career was undulant as well. Although he was a follower of Imam Ash-Shafi'i, and the Shafi'i school, he later accepted the understanding of the *Zahiri* school of Islamic thought, founded by Abu Bakr Ibn Dawud. *Zahir* means 'the apparent state of things' and the followers of *Zahiri* teaching believed in following only 'the literal meanings of the Quran' and Hadith (sayings of Prophet Muhammad) Ibn Hazm tried to spread the understanding of *Zahiri* theology by writing books and giving lectures. For this he was persecuted and his books were publicly burned. He produced many works - around 400 volumes - covering a range of topics such as jurisprudence, history, ethics, comparative religion, theology, and literature, but only a small amount of them survived (Nykl 73-78).

Written in 1022, Ibn Hazm's masterpiece, *The Ring of the Dove (Tawq al-hamâma)*, is regarded as a treatise on the art and practice of Arab love and has been translated into many languages, such as English, German, Italian, French and Spanish. The book is comprised of both prose and poetry, and contains psychological treatments of different love affairs in various stories. Many of the stories are autobiographical, including his own love story, and most of the characters that he describes were his real friends or acquaintances. According to Kanik; most of Ibn Hazm's examples are taken from real life experiences and most of the stories told in the book paint an invaluable portrait of love

among princes, chancellors, scholars and students in the eleventh century Al-Andalus. The book is therefore considered a priceless resource for helping us understand the private lives of Arabs living in Spain at that time (17).

At the beginning of the book, the writer elaborates on love through the angel of philosophy and on the various causes of love. Then he discusses the happiness and pain which arise through love and gives examples on some particular love affairs. As Nykl states, “he is the codifier of love” (72). He enriches his writing with quotations from the Koran and sayings of the Prophet Mohammed. The book contains thirty chapters in which Ibn Hazm treats thirty characteristics, situations or personages that are of relevance to love relationships, such as the signs of love, falling in love at first sight, correspondence between lovers, the messenger between the lovers, union and breaking off, fidelity and betrayal, separation, forgetting, and finally death. Ibn Hazm begins each chapter with a theoretical explanation about the particular situation of love he will discuss, then switches to anecdotes of daily life before completing his essays with a poem commenting on the situation that he has just described. Ibn Hazm and Capellanus meet at this point as codifiers of love; one in Muslim society and the other in Christian Europe. Ibn Hazm’s philosophy of love, his love stories and his poetic style were influential in the medieval Islamic Spain. And for the literature of Christian West, the same influence can be traced. And for Capellanus, in many sources it is argued that *The Art of Courtly Love* may have been inspired by Ibn Hazm’s treatise on love. A. J. Smith, comments on these influences by referring to some chapters of the book *The Ring of the Dove*:

A treatise of love by the eleventh-century Moorish writer Ibn Hazm parallels Capellanus closely enough in its account of etiquette of love to make comparison illuminating. Hazm musters all the elements of the courtly drama, the go-between, the reproachful friend, the spy, the talebearer, the hazard of the enterprise which compels concealment and secrecy. Moreover he precisely foreshadows some of the familiar attitudes of Renaissance love poetry when he seeks metaphors for the oneness of mutual lovers. (34)

It is apparent that, both Capellanus’ *The Art of Courtly Love* and Ibn Hazm’s *The Ring of the Dove* bring us closer to the actual life of the times by giving examples of different love affairs involving men and women from various classes. Both commented on the nature of love by codifying its rules; however, Ibn Hazm achieved this knowledge one hundred and

fifty years before Capellanus.

While Capellanus' technique in defining love is Ibn Hazm's alike, Ibn Hazm's conception of love resembles Plato's, as was common among the prolific philosophers and artists of al-Andalus at the time. The Islamic world studied Plato and many philosophers and artists adopted the theories of the Greek philosopher. For example, the head of the *Zahiri* School, Abu Bakr Ibn Dawud, deals with the theories of Plato in his work, *The Book of Flower (Kitap az- Zahra)*. Briffault quotes Ibn Dawud's explanation of the Platonic idea; "The Arabian author quotes in detail the Platonic conception of pre-established affinities, according to which souls that have been created by the bisection of the same sphere find themselves attracted to their complementary halves" (27). An ardent follower of the *Zahiri* teaching, Ibn Hazm's definition of the nature of love is similar to the one mentioned above: "Concerning the nature of Love, men have held various and divergent opinions, which they have debated at great length. For my part I consider Love as a conjunction between scattered parts of souls that have become divided in this physical universe, a union effected within the substance of their original sublime element" (Hazm). Ibn Hazm further enriches his ideas on the conception of love by saying that true love is a spiritual kind of love which is more powerful and real than earthly love. Therefore, he concludes, "true Love is a spiritual approbation, a fusion of souls" (Hazm). Ibn Hazm also refers to the mundane instincts of people. For him these kinds of instincts are misleading because they end with only sexual desire and sexual desire has nothing to do with true love. For that reason, in order to achieve 'true love' one has to be in search of spiritual union as well. Ibn Hazm explains:

[P]hysical admiration, and visual enchantment which does not go beyond mere external forms-and this is the very secret and meaning of carnal desire; when carnal desire moreover becomes so overflowing that it surpasses these bounds, and when such an overflow coincides with a spiritual union, in which the natural instincts share equally with the soul; the resulting phenomenon is called passionate love.

Regarding his influence on the Troubadour poetry, Ibn Hazm's name is mentioned first among Arabic artists of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Ibn Hazm created "a true doctrine of courtly love two centuries before the poets of Provence." And he "stresses the ennobling power of love, and in it the spiritual takes precedence over the material"

(Monroe 18). His conception of love and idealization of the lady prefigure the features of courtly love. Briffault comments on this similarity: “Some of Ibn Hazm’s anecdotes, which recall the romanticized biographies of the Troubadours, relate to love for a ‘distant lady,’ known only by hearsay” (28). More specifically, bearing the theme of love some of Ibn Hazm poems are addressed to unknown women who represent physical and spiritual perfection. The general characteristics of his poems can be listed as follows: the lover completely devotes himself to his lady who is sometimes described as a divine creature who is unattainable. He praises the beauty of his lady; she is his life source. Sometimes he is desperate, however, as his love for her is unrequited. When he sees his elegant lady he feels high as the clouds but sometimes he feels miserable and he entreats his lady to allow him to see her once more or to meet with her secretly. She is the meaning of his life; a kiss from her is invaluable and without her he is desperate and joyless. In all cases, what we hear is the voice of the poet lover: his feelings, his longings, his happiness and his sadness. The woman that he addresses his poem to is just an idealized image, the perfect one in the eyes of the lover, as is the case in the love songs of the Troubadours. Now let us look at some examples.

In the following poems, Ibn Hazm depicts the lady as a heavenly figure, the divine one with a perfect image. In each poem the familiar tropes are apparent: The idealization of the lover in divine terms. He compares her to an angel whose light causes a bewilderment of the senses, and an enchantment of the eye. In the first poem, for instance, he asks his love “art thou of the angels’ sphere” and wonders if her radiance has “dazzled [his] judgment.” “The vision of [his] outward eye” does not accord with his reason, which “know[s] [her] form is heavenly.” He draws a divine figure of his beloved, as if she is too beautiful to be a human but an angel.

Say, art thou of the angels' sphere,  
Or sharest thou our human kind?  
My dazzled judgment sees not clear;  
Bewilderment defeats my mind.'

The vision of my outward eye  
A human shape descries in thee;  
When inward reason I apply,  
I know thy form is heavenly.

Then blessed be God, Who did design  
 His creatures so symmetrical,  
 And fashioned thee a light to shine  
 In natural beauty over all.  
 ..... (1-12)

In the following poem, the metaphor of light becomes even more hyperbolic when he says her light is brighter than the lights of heaven, which fall to worship her. Her face is without a single blemish that cannot be added or subtracted; in fact, an image of divinity, which like the divine, is complete in itself – the Alpha and the Omega. If heaven is the place where the utmost beauty and perfection is; comparing the lady's beauty with heavenly figures underlines her perfection and the strength of the love of the poet.

Her loveliness is deputy  
 For the sweet loveliness of light,  
 As substitute the sighs in me  
 For flaming embers burning bright.  
 I describe the second sort of leave-taking thus.

Before her face resplendent all  
 The lights of heaven prostrate fall,  
 A face of perfect loveliness  
 Augmenting not, nor growing less (1-9)

And here, he addresses his beloved, his youthful passion, Nu'm. His depiction of his beloved is so vivid that the image of her resembles a celestial figure. He tells his own story in his book *The Ring of the Dove*:

I was deeply in love with, and passionately enamoured of, a certain, slave-girl once in my possession, whose name was Nu'm: she was a dream of desire, a paragon of physical and moral beauty, and we were in perfect harmony. She had known no other man before me, and our love for each other was mutual and perfectly satisfying. Then the fates ravished her from me, and the nights and passing days carried her away; she became one with the dust and stones. At the time of her death I was not yet twenty, and she younger than I.

The poem reads:

She was a spotless maiden, bright  
 And lovely as the sun's first light;  
 Like stars all other maidens were



And faintly shone, compared with her.  
 Her love sent soaring from my breast  
 My heart, that was till then at rest,  
 And, like some bird upon the wing,  
 It swooped, and then hung hovering. (1-8)

Again we see, the metaphors of light: the stars and the sun, which once more outshone by her beauty. He also introduces a reference to her purity; she is a “spotless maiden”. Maidenhood is one of the common issues of Ibn Hazm’s poetry; it is a device to define perfection.

In the following example, earthly and divine figures are conflated. The poem begins with the poet comparing his wooing to her as a kind of worship, which, had he worshipped God so fervently, would have led to his salvation. However, the next stanza juxtaposes a set of metaphors that are earthly. He talks of passion and uses the image of a lion in the place of God, saying that the lion’s wrath would be assuaged if he prayed to it with equal earnestness as he prays to God for the love of his maid. And, as is common in both Arab and the Troubadour poetry, his love for the maid is at first unrequited, until the final stanza when he is rewarded with “ardent kisses” from his beloved:

Had I wooed half as fervently  
 God's pardon, as that lovely maid,  
 My Lord would have forgiven me  
 However sore I disobeyed.

Prayed I with equal earnestness  
 The desert lion to assuage  
 His wrath, as her my suit to bless,  
 No man need dread his baffled rage.

Long she denied my heart's desire,  
 Then ah! So ardent kisses pressed  
 Upon my lips, that all the fire  
 Of love rekindled in my breast. (1-12)

The wooing he speaks of in the first line of the poem above is a hallmark of the courtly love tradition of the Troubadours. The word ‘wooing’ itself appears again and again in the Troubadour poetry and in courtly love tradition it is seldom seen that a man attains the love

of the lady whom he woos. In this poem for instance, the woman flees from him at first, before finally relenting and allowing him to kiss her. Moreover, another common usage is the word “fair” to describe the appearance of the maid. The lady we see in the poem below is defined with earthly features, and the poet’s love is driven with bodily desires. She is tricky because she is aware of her seductiveness, and she uses it against the lover.

I had a mistress fair:  
She fled me everywhere,  
Yet sometimes stealthily  
She gave her lips to me.

I laid my lips on those,  
And thought to find repose,  
But felt within my breast  
New pain and more unrest. (5-12)

In the final two lines above, we see that the poet’s passion is never stilled by the consummation of a kiss. In fact, as we see below the lover’s passion for his beloved causes him to feel desperate and alone. He is overwhelmed with love. He craves for a union with the beloved, yet this union is not about sexuality, it is more like a metaphor when he wishes her to be put inside his chest. There is no description of the lady; but the wish for an eternal love which exists both in life and after life is introduced. In other words, his desire to be one with his beloved is a divine union; it is far from being earthly.

Come, bring a knife and cleave apart  
This solitude within my heart,  
Then lay my love within the tear,  
And stitch it up with tender care.

And with the morn I pray she shall  
Look for no other place to dwell,  
But fondly keep this little room  
Her own, until the Day of Doom.

Here let her live, so long as I  
Draw breath, and when I come to die  
My heart for comfort may she crave  
In the dark silence of the grave. (1-12)

Ibn Hazm dealt with divine love in his poems. Instead of physical desires, he emphasized the beauty of the woman and the eternity of love. On the other hand, there were some other

Arab poets that handled worldly love in their poetry, like Ibn Quzman, whose love poetry is just the opposite of Ibn Hazm's idea of spiritual love. Ibn Quzman deals with earthly love and pleasures whereas Ibn Hazm believes that 'the union of the souls' is the source of 'true love.' Ibn Quzman's voice is not that of an idealistic lover; he prefers earthly love and the joys of life. From time to time we hear allusions to passionate love, in that he idealizes his love and the beauty of his beloved, but more often he is vulgar and his sayings are bawdy.

### **B. Ibn Quzman**

Ibn Quzman (1078 - 1160) was born in Cordova but travelled during his lifetime to many cities like Seville, Granada, Almeria, and Valencia in search of patronage and for political purposes. According to Monroe he is "one of the very greatest poets, not only for medieval Islam, but of all medieval literature" (41). Yet compared to Ibn Hazm, little is known about his life, however, we know that like the Troubadours, Ibn Hazm was a minstrel poet; "his greatest talent was ... in the field of popular poetry, in singing and dancing before merry gatherings of highly sophisticated *milah*" (Nykl 268). That is, "men of high and refined culture, deeply versed in the knowledge of poetry, philosophy, jurisprudence, but not inclined to adhere to the path of absolute virtue and austerity, while they are young" (Nykl 271). And yet, although he was a talented and famous poet, his life was in turmoil. A man of earthly pleasures, he indulged in many vices such as drinking wine, adultery, and sodomy. Moreover, he was jailed and even nearly executed due to his religious views. During the reign of Almoravid dynasty, his life was easy and gay as he was under the protection of a wealthy family. Things turned upside down for him, however, after the downfall of the Almoravids, and ironically around his seventies he became an imam in a mosque and died in Cordova while the city was being besieged by the Almohads (Nykl 268).

He composed his poetry in the colloquial Arabic of Al-Andalus. However, the language of his songs also differs according to the theme, of which seven are recognized: (1) the love poem, or *ghazal*; (2) the spring-song, or *neharye*; (3) the drinking-song, or *khamrye*; (4) licentious verses, or *baleik*; (5) satires, or *farki*; (6) colloquies in slang speech, or *mozeiledge*; and (7) moral and sententious pieces, or *mokeffer*" (Briffault 48). Composed in

vernacular language, his *Diwan* is a book of songs that includes 149 *zajals* of different lengths and different subject matters that speak of love, wine and the other joys of life. His poetic style, however, is not a traditional one. He had a vain and rebellious character and thus his life style and his literary works were unusual: “Throughout the diwan, Ibn Quzman hews to his mission of bringing to light and satirizing what people around him dare not mention in public. The targets of his attacks are all the “hypocrites” of Andalusian society – officers, rulers, *fugaha*’, and prostitutes” (Menocal 293). Finally, while it is interesting to note that some of the love songs of Ibn Quzman seem to be addressed to men, Briffault explains this by saying that, “it should be borne in mind that it is a current Arab usage to disguise references to a woman by the use of masculine gender” (48).

Ibn Quzman is regarded as the “greatest exponent of the *zajal* form” in the spoken Arabic of Al-Andalus (Monroe 41). As has been previously discussed, apart from the likeness of the form, Briffault argues that there are other striking similarities between Ibn Quzman and the Troubadours’ love songs: “His conception of love, like that of the Troubadours, proceeds on the assumption that passion can attain its full impetuosity only in extra-marital relations” (48). Ibn Quzman gives examples from real life in his poetry by comparing his own conception of love with the platonic love which existed between the poet Gamil and his beloved, Urwah in the poem below. He mocks their situation since Gamil devoted his love poetry to Urwah - who is married to someone else. He, on the other hand, writes “Talk not to me on the religion of Gamil and Urwah!” The “religion” which he refers to is their belief in divine love. For him, love must be passionate. And as he makes clear below, he is a “libertine” who had many lovers;

I am the great lover, despite the anger of him who blames me,— the lover of my time! —As regards passionate love, I am not afraid of anyone....Talk not to me on the religion of Gamil and Urwah!—There are people who are like them in virtue!—But say to him who does not want me to be stable: —Oh you, who surpass Hatim in generosity, — what will be the fate of a libertine,— of whom they make fun everywhere! (quoted by Nykl, *Zajal* CXXIII. 293)

He also ridicules emotionalism, sentimental dependence, and idealistic lovers:

I am amazed at lovers  
Satisfied with just one kiss.

My ways are not their ways.  
 That's not my path or pick.  
 O bacchic love, rise and come. (quoted by Buturovic *Zajal* no LXXXII. 299)

The poem above points to a further resemblance between Ibn Quzman and the Troubadour poets. "O bacchic love" is certainly an allusion to carnal pleasures based on earthly love, as the poet certainly knew that Bacchus was the god of wine, drunkenness and ecstasy. In the following example, the Troubadour poets' sexual desire for their beloved is explicitly recalled. The language is earthy with an abundance of common references to physical appearance, lips, and the heart, as well as a confusion of senses and the joy of consummation with a lover seen as a sexual object:

I am in love with a pretty one who eschews me,—a graceful one with a curly hair! Indeed he is sweet in embracing,— and in pressing his charming lips:— when I meet you in an alley,— my heart begins to melt,— and I do not know where to go! My boy, you are shaped like a moon,—and are a temptation to human beings; —everyone is filled with joy when reunited with you:—you are the cause of delusion,— and union with you is a joy, and what a joy! (quoted by Nykl, *Zajal* CXIV. 296)

The physical and emotional state of the lover described in his poetry is also like that of the Troubadours love poetry. There are similarities of diction, description and feeling that are used when illustrating the situation of the poet lover. Nykl writes of these resemblances:

[T]he bewitching look of the beloved as the origin of love; the tyranny, cruelty, disdain, unfounded suspicion, reproaches of the beloved, which cause weeping, insomnia, feeling of lonesomeness, mental confusion emaciation, weakness of the body, suffering similar to the burning of infernal flames, illness and death. (271)

In the following *zajal*, all the similarities are evident as noted above: the "tyranny," the "cruelty," the "disdain," etc. Moreover, even the relationship between the lover and the lady is illustrated in almost the same fashion as it is in the Troubadours' songs. The beloved has power over the lover. The lover becomes his lady's servant (vassal) and his duty is to fulfil the wishes of his lady. Nykl comments on this parallel: "The absolute duty of the lover to submit to the wishes of the beloved, resembling the attitude of a slave or a

servant toward his master” (272). And Ibn Quzman’s surrender to his beloved is quite observable in this poem:

I was caught in the net of love by my sinning eye, —and by my concupiscent heart!

They said love is an ornament for me,—and my heart made a pact with my eye,—until they drag me to my death:—Oh my eye, see you not that your lids are being drowned,—and you, my heart are being cut to pieces?

You were caught in the net of love of one who—never seek union with you, but, whenever he sees you coming near, turns away;—and the character of that graceful one increases my pains,—when he turns away and does not come back!

My beloved when he wants it, it is tyrannical: —by God, he will not say a word to me!—Very well, then, let him do as he pleases!—I humiliate myself to him, and my opinion concerning humiliation— is that it is the lover’s duty to be humble. (quoted by Nykl, *Zajal* CXI. 297)

“Love in many of his poems is fastidiously calculated and utterly elusive: Indeed, it is colored with everything: coarseness, idealisms, courtesy, and machismo” (Menocal 300). In the following *zajal* for instance, bewitched by the beauty of his beloved, the poet suffers, as his love for her is unrequited. He praises the beauty of his beloved and then talks about her cruelty as well. Her haughtiness is acceptable only because she is beautiful. She is portrayed as a vivid female figure with earthly impulses like being proud and cruel.

A glance at his beauty suffices me,—and love means great trials! — What captivated me and made me prisoner—was (his) beautiful appearance. Because of his aloofness and estrangement—I suffer more than I can bare;— and the reason for his haughtiness and caprices—is the conceitedness due to beauty;—my heart is at war with his eyelids,—or not far from war: —If I come plain to him of my sadness,—he adds more and more to it;—he hears my talk, but if he looked at me,—he would see nobody! (quoted by Nykl, *Zajal* LVII. 280)

And although his intense feelings for his beloved are physically hurting him like an illness, he longs for her while complaining about her cruelty towards him. It is her beauty that transfixes him; a beauty so dazzling that he compares her appearance to paradise. But her paradisiacal beauty is not an angelic one, as the desire of having her is more earthly than divine.

Who can bear patiently (the absence) of the beloved?—This love has brought on what has perplexed me: — a burning pain in my brain which goes down to my spine:—I am not going to mention the name of that beloved;—and the bitterest of things is a love that cannot be mentioned (to others)!

A cruel watcher, whose heart knows no tenderness,—has hidden him from my eyes and has kept him for himself;—and kept his face away from me, so I cannot see that Paradise,—and has kept his mouth from me, so I cannot taste that Kawtar! (quoted by Nykl, *Zajal* CVII. 281)

Here finally, the source of his agony is made clear. It is the guilt of the eyes – seduced by the beauty of his beloved – which confounds him, and which he refers to again and again. The complicity of the eyes to the origin of love is made clear. The concept of ‘love through the eyes’ is a very common notion in the Troubadour poetry.

Love is a heavy burden: give me a heart that can support it!—Oh dear friends, revive our souls: you will be thanked and praised!

The origin of love comes from the glance:—you see two beautiful eyes, created of charm:—they will snatch your reason from you and will deprive of patience,—and you will see your heart in the (beloved’s) like a captive fettered by him.

Oh dear friends, be kind to suffering souls!—Soften those stony hearts for your lovers’ sake! —Have pity on those who love and be concerned with their well-being: —sow the good seed; thus you will sow what you will reap! (quoted by Nykl, *Zajal* CXVII. 291)

Ibn Hazm and Ibn Quzman’s styles resemble each other in terms of idealization of the unattainable lady and the suffering of the poet. However, the meaning they give to love, and the position of the lady is different. Ibn Hazm approaches love as a more spiritual issue, and thus his lady is the divine one, she is merely a human. He uses heavenly features to describe his beloved. On the other hand Ibn Quzman relies on his physical feelings and his lady resembles more to courtly lady who is beautiful and earthly. His lady’s unattainability is not about being angelic, she is within sight but out of reach; she intentionally stays away from the lover.

Once again we have met with proof that the Andalusian Arabs were composing love songs and love poetry before the Troubadours’ love songs came into existence. In regard to the

love poetry of Quzman, Briffault maintains that “we have no equivalent of it with respect to the popular poetry of the same period in Christian Europe” (47).

### **C. Ibn Arabi**

The final outstanding literary movement of Islam in Al-Andalus is seen with the development of Sufi poetry in the twelfth century. This mystical poetry introduced a new interpretation of love to the traditional love poetry. Instead of human love, divine love entered the poetry of Al-Andalus through the works of Ghazali and Ibn Arabi. And by the end of the eleventh century, Sufism and mystic poetry was spread throughout the Islamic world. In many scholarly writings, Sufism is explained as the mystical aspect of Islam but it is hard to make an exact definition of Sufism as the practices of Sufi philosophers vary according to their teachings. Exploring the inner dimensions of Islam, Sufi philosophers searched for ways to illuminate the spiritual self and to find the inner reality of God. For them;

[N]othing exists absolutely but GOD: that the human soul is an emanation from his essence, and, though divided for a time from its heavenly source, will be finally re-united with it; that the highest possible happiness will arise from its re-union, and that the chief good of mankind, in this transitory world, consist in a perfect union with the Eternal Spirit. (Ernst 9)

The fundamental tenets of Sufism are love and divine love; Sufi is the lover of God and of the Prophet Muhammad. Love is identified with absolute beauty and love of God is the ultimate truth. This conception of divine love in Sufi literature dated back to the eighth century. It was Rabi'a of Basra (died 801), a woman Sufi, who first formulated the Sufi ideal of a love of God. After that, for centuries, Sufi philosophers dealt with this conception of divine love and God and therefore; “the Sufi path becomes a path of love, where the Sufi becomes the “lover” and God the “beloved” (Ramakrishnan 118). Since the Lover’s ultimate goal is union with the beloved, the lover-beloved relationship in Sufism is highly symbolic. The journey of the Sufi to reach the Beloved takes place in the heart, wherein the lover comes closer to the beloved until they finally unite. This is described as a state of oneness with God. Arabic Sufi poet Mansur al-Hallaj (858 -922) describes the union with God in the following lines:



I am he whom I desire, whom I desire is I;  
 We are two spirits dwelling in a single body.  
 If you see me, you have seen him,  
 And if you see him, you have seen us. (quoted by Ernst, 153)

In the poetry of some Sufi poets the beloved appeared in the form of a woman and in “Sufi teachings women manifest the divine attributes of Beauty, Mercy, Gentleness, and Kindness in a relatively direct manner within their outward forms” (Chittick 286). One of the most famous Sufi who valued woman in his mystical poetry is Ibn Arabi. His recognition of divine beauty made manifest in the form of woman is apparent when he says; “[t]he sight of God in woman is the most perfect of all” (Shah quotes Ibn Arabi 158).

Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi, also called Sheikh al-Akbar (1165-1240), is one of the greatest masters of Sufism in Islam. He is also one of the most appreciated mystic-philosophers of the Islamic world. Ibn Arabi was born in Murcia, Spain to a respectable family. He received his early education in Seville where he learned the Quran and studied the works of Aristotle and Plato as well the greatest scholars of the time. Fittingly, he was surnamed Ibn Aflatun or the ‘son of Plato’. He went to Lisbon to study law and Islamic theology where he proved himself as a gifted student who had an immense intellectual capacity. During his adolescence, he travelled to various cities in Spain and along the way he studied with a number of mystic masters and began to write poetry. Among his masters, there were two Sufi women who had a great impact on his spiritual development: Yasmin of Marchena and Fatima of Cordoba. During one of his travels, he met the great master of Aristotelian philosopher Ibn Rushd (Averroes) in the city of Cordoba. It is said that Ibn Rushd was overwhelmed with the mystical depth of young Ibn Arabi (Shah 155-164).

After spending thirty years in Spain, Ibn Arabi decided to leave his homeland for a pilgrimage to the East from which he never returned. On this lifelong journey, he met his famous contemporary, Persian Sufi Mevlana Jalal al-Din Rumi and he spent his last seventeen years in Damascus where he purportedly wrote his collection of poems *Interpreter of Desires*, (*Tarjuman al-Ashwaq*) in 1215 (though some sources argue that these poems were composed in Mecca). Like Ibn Hazm, Ibn Arabi was a member of the *Zahiri* sect. And Like *The Ring of the Dove*, Ibn Arabi’s *The Interpreter of Desires* is regarded as one of the most famous Arabic works on the ‘nature of love’; former dealing

with spiritual love, while the latter examining pure divine love that uses the beloved as a way to reach God. By the time of his death, Ibn Arabi had produced an immense volume of work in both prose and verse that influenced the philosophical and mystical thought of not only the Islamic world, but Christian Europe as well.

Ibn Arabi was a great Sufi mystic, a spiritual master and an outstanding philosopher with his teachings. Unfortunately, due to his use of symbolic language, Ibn Arabi's writings were sometimes misunderstood and misinterpreted. While at times people sympathized with him and elevated him to the level of sainthood, at others his works were prohibited and he was accused of being a heretic and a liar ("Ibn al-'Arabī." *Encyclopædia Britannica*).

Ibn Arabi's view of woman was subtle and powerful, Etel Adnan, a Lebanese-American poet and essayist comments that "Ibn Arabi is the only great theologian of History that has given woman absolute equality within the Absolute" (50). She further explains Ibn Arabi's perception of woman accordingly:

Everything is exalted by the woman; she traverses the signs of the zodiac at their highest point. She is the morning that rises into the sky, the rose that arises from tears. Her throne is a high mountain, for she transcends the world. And from there, the sky of light is under her feet, her diadem, beyond the spheres. She establishes - on the human, as well as mystic level - harmony and union. (Adnan 52)

For Ibn Arabi, the beauty of woman is connected to divine reality. He saw the beloved as an ideal woman, embodying both physical and spiritual perfection. God's perfection was expressed through the unity of characteristics found in woman.

The concept of 'love', as we see below is prevalent throughout Ibn Arabi's thought and writing. 'Love' is his religion. For him it is at the 'heart' of all things no matter the 'direction' (i.e. persuasion) they take. Therefore, his heart's love is not exclusive, but open to fellow creatures, infidels and even idolaters, in addition to believers in Islam:

My heart has become capable of all forms:  
For gazelles, a meadow, for monks, a monastery,  
A temple for idols, the pilgrim's Ka'aba,  
The Tablets of the Torah, the Book of the Qur'an.  
I profess the religion of Love, and whatever the direction

Taken by its mount, Love is my religion and my faith. (Ibn Arabi quoted by Addas, 211)

Beauty is the ultimate theophany wherein, according to the nature of mystic love, spiritual love and physical love coexist: “God’s Beauty is the ultimate basis of Love. His beauty is the source of all other forms of beauty and the expression of His perfection” (Kahadduri 75). For Ibn Arabi the character of Nizam represents such a theophany, to whom his masterpiece *Interpreter of Desires* is dedicated. The book expands on the poet’s conception of woman as a vehicle to commune with divine love and God. It consists of sixty odes and love poems, and appears on the surface like a collection of romantic and erotic love poems; however, in fact his poems are the mystical odes of his intense love for the Divine which is expressed in symbolic language of human love. In the poems Nizam is scarcely ever mentioned by name, but there are one or two references to her in some poems.

Ibn Arabi met Nizam in Mecca in 1201 when he was thirty-six. During his stay in Mecca he was welcomed at the home of an eminent Persian sheikh. Nizam, surnamed ‘ayn al-Shams wa’l-Bahá,’ was the beautiful daughter of the sheikh and her physical as well as spiritual charms affected Ibn Arabi greatly. Her name and surname is symbolic: she is named ‘harmony’ and surnamed ‘eye of the Sun and of Beauty’. Nizam became a symbol of love and knowledge for him; a representation of heavenly perfection who embodied Divine love and beauty, and for as long as Ibn Arabi lived, Nizam remained for him “the theophanic figure of Sophia aeterna” (Corbin 44). She is the divine/eternal wisdom; so she is the visible manifestation of deity or divine beloved. “Thus Ibn al Arabi sees God in Nizam” (Haule 17). Like the Troubadours, however, his love towards his beloved Nizam was platonic. He worshiped his lady from a distance. She was unattainable and thus Ibn Arabi elevated her beauty to the status of a religious icon, a divine being like the Virgin Mary. Just as his ultimate goal was is to unite with the Divine, he transformed his earthly love for Nizam into divine love.

What we have traced so far then, is the tradition of earthly and spiritual love and the veneration of the beloved. And though Ibn Arabi’s conception of love is much more

philosophical than the other love poets, Ibn Hazm, Ibn Quzman. Here are some examples from the *Interpreter of Desires*:

O grief for my heart, O grief! O joy for my mind, O joy!  
 In my heart the fire of passion is burning, in my mind the full moon of  
 darkness hath set. (XXV 1-2)

Here we can recognize some of the same imagery and metaphors which we encountered in the works of Ibn Quzman. The writer speaks of the grief in his heart, which paradoxically, excites his mind. The poem is very earthy, and describes the ‘passion’ in his heart and many images taken from nature, such as an eclipsed moon which blackens his thoughts – no doubt because he cannot be with his beloved.

O musk! O full moon! O bough of the sand-hills! How green is the  
 bough, how bright the moon, how sweet the musk!  
 O smiling mouth whose bubbles I loved! and O saliva ill which I tasted  
 white honey!  
 O moon that appeared to us veiled in a red blush of shame upon thy  
 cheek!  
 Had she removed her veil, it would have been a torment, and on this  
 account she veiled herself.  
 She is the morning sun rising in a heaven, she is the bough of the sand-  
 hills planted in a garden. (XXV 3-7)

He uses sense imagery to describe the smell – ‘musk’ – and the sight of her. The moon appears as a hyperbolic image to describe her fairness and place her within the celestial realm, and later the moon again appears with a ‘red blush’ upon its cheek. Her freshness is compared to the green ‘bough’ of the trees in the ‘sand-hills’, while the sand-hills themselves are a reference to paradise in the Koran. His lover’s mouth is hyper realistic, in that we can see the bubbles forming from saliva, which to him tastes like a sweet nectar, a ‘honey’. She is so beautiful that she must remain veiled or it would be a ‘torment’ for the poet to look upon her. Again we encounter the poet’s idealistic elevation of his love to the celestial realm when he uses the image of the ‘sun’ to describe her; his evocation of ‘the morning sun rising in heaven’ is almost an echo of Ibn Hazm’s line, ‘She was a spotless maiden, bright / And lovely as the sun’s first light.’

Fear made me watch her incessantly while I watered the bough with  
 falling rain.

If she riseth, she will be a wonder to mine eye, or if she setteth she will  
 be a cause of my death.  
 Since Beauty bound on her head a diadem of unwrought gold, I am in  
 love with gold that has been wrought.  
 If Iblís had seen in Adam the brilliance of her face, he would not have  
 refused to worship him.  
 If Idrís had seen the lines that Beauty limned on her cheeks, then he  
 would never have written.  
 If Bilqís had seen her couch, the throne and the pavement would not have  
 occurred to her mind. (XXV 8-13)

A further idealization occurs when he likens her to ‘wrought gold.’ She is so beautiful, in fact, that the poet maintains the devil itself (*Iblis*) would have agreed to worship Adam if he had had the same ‘brilliance of her face.’ The following line makes reference to the Prophet *Idris* (a.k.a. Enoch), who, he declares, would’ve been so distracted by her beauty that he wouldn’t have written the chapter of the Dead Sea Scrolls which bears his name. Even the Queen of Sheba (*Bilqís*) would have given up her ambition if she had seen the poet’s beloved in recline.

O *sarh* tree of the valley and O *bán* tree of the thicket, deliver to us of  
 your perfume, by means of the zephyr,  
 A musky odour which exhales its fragrance to us from the flowers of thy  
 lowlands or the flowers of the hills.  
 O Wu tree of the valley, show us a branch or some twigs that can be  
 compared with *her* tenderness!  
 The zephyr’s breeze tells of the time of youth spent at Hájir or Miná or  
 Qubá,  
 Or at the sand-hills and where the vale bends beside the guarded pasture  
 or at La‘la‘, where the gazelles come to browse.  
 Do not wonder, do not wonder, do not wonder at an Arab passionately  
 fond of the coy beauties,  
 Who, whenever a turtle-dove moans, is thrilled by the remembrance of  
 his beloved and passes away. (XXV 14-20)

These lines reiterate the natural sense imagery from the beginning: the winds of the ‘zephyr’ which blow her ‘perfume’ through the air; the smell of musk; the tender branches of the Wu tree; sand hills, vales, and pastures. The poem ends with the poet’s declaration that ‘whenever he hears the cooing of a turtledove, he is so thrilled by his memories of his beloved that he could die.’ Overall, this poem defines the beauty of the beloved with earthly metaphors; her physical beauty is the core of the poem.

This next poem differs from the previous one in that it belongs more to the category of divine poetry and his darling is extremely idealized. It seems possible, moreover, that the woman it describes is his own beloved, the fair Nizam, since she was said to be fourteen when he met her. The imagery is a complete hyperbole here, her beauty is in its “utmost limit”. Although the familiar metaphor of the moon is used to describe her, she actually transcends the physical world. She is a force eternal, more powerful than ‘Time’ itself. The moon must go through phases to reach perfection, she is unmoving and whole unto herself, like god, encompassing the heavens above and the earth (meadow) below. He summarizes by saying that Beauty has reached its apotheosis in her, and that nature could produce no other like her.

Between Adhri’át and Busrá a maid of fourteen rose to my sight like a full moon.  
 She was exalted in majesty above Time and transcended it in pride and glory.  
 Every full moon, when it reaches perfection, suffers a waning that it may make a complete month,  
 Except this one: for she does not move through zodiacal signs nor double what is single.  
 Thou art a pyx containing blended odours and perfume, thou art a meadow producing spring-herbs and flowers.  
 Beauty reached in thee her utmost limit: another like thee is impossible.  
 (XL 1-6)

This final poem again recalls the earthly themes of the Troubadour poetry. The beloved is clearly the object of the poet’s physical passion. Here the image of the ‘full moons’, is used to describe the ‘swelling breasts’ of the ‘tender’ virgin, which ‘fear no waning’ i.e. are not in danger of becoming old and sagging. In the boughs of a tree perches a dove, the symbol of the ancient Near East deity of Love, and also a symbol of purity. As usual, the poet’s desire is a cause of suffering, for both the poet and his beloved, whom he describes as two arrows launched at the same target by kismet (Time), when he was travelling alone in foreign lands ‘far from a home’, where he met his soul mate.

Who will show me her of the dyed fingers? Who will show me her of the honeyed tongue?  
 She is one of the girls with swelling breasts who guard their honour,  
 tender, virgin, and beautiful,  
 Full moons over branches: they fear no waning.

In a garden of my body's country is a dove perched on a *bán* bough,  
 Dying of desire, melting with passion, because that which befell me hath  
 befallen her;  
 Mourning for a mate, blaming Time, who shot her unerringly, as he shot  
 me.  
 Parted from a neighbour and far from a home! Alas, in my time of  
 severance, for my time of union!  
 Who will bring me her who is pleased with my torment? I am helpless  
 because of that with which she is pleased. (XL 1-8)

Ibn Arabi's tradition of divine love and lady, and the Troubadours' courtly love tradition were blended perfectly in the west by the Italian poet Dante (1265-1321). The meaning he gives to the divine lady is as sacred as that which Ibn Arabi instils in Nizam, and like Arabi, he immortalizes Beatrice in his works *The Divine Comedy* and *La Vita Nuova*. French orientalist philosopher Henry Corbin describes the similarity between Dante and Ibn Arabi in the way of their portrayal of the lady: "She was for Ibn 'Arabi what Beatrice was to be for Dante; she was and remained for him the earthly manifestation, the theophanic figure, of Sophia aeterna" (Corbin 51). Dante's love towards Beatrice is also unrequited and idealized – as in the tradition of courtly love. She is depicted as an angelic figure with fair skin; her name means 'the blessed', which refers to the holiness of the lady in the eyes of Dante. Beatrice becomes his spiritual guide, and "leads Dante to union with Divine Knowledge through human love" (Fries 48).

## II. Dante and Love

Among the stepping-stones along the path of Arabic love poetry towards the Christian west, the works of Dante assuredly plays a significant role. M.Q. Khan in his essay *The Influence of Arabic Poetry on Dante's Devine Comedy* highlights the importance of the literary activities on the development of the Italian literature that took place during reign of Emperor Frederic II of Sicily. He argues that before the twelfth century, there was no tradition of love poetry in Italy where women were idealized and venerated; and this tradition of love poetry only began to be practiced during the reign of Frederic II. As was the case in the royal courts of Al-Andalus and France, Frederic II encouraged literary activities in his own court. He was the benefactor of many poets and thereby played an influential role in the development of Italian poetry. A poet himself, and a patron of Sicilian School of poetry, Frederic II had such a strong interest in Oriental as well as

Arabic poetry and literature that he sent scholars to Islamic countries to collect works in Arabic which he then had translated into Latin. It was this time that Italian poets became introduced to Arab mystical thought and poetry. Moreover, not only the poetry of the Arabs but also the poetry of the Troubadours entered his courts:

His kingdom was regarded as the first modern state in Europe, and the most significant fact about it was that this place became the most important center of the East-West contact. It is from this place that much of the Arabic culture, Arabic language, Arabic literature, particularly Arabic poetry, infiltrated in to the whole of Europe. (Khan 19 -20)

Following these literary activities, the thirteenth and the fourteenth century poets began to deal with the themes of idealized and spiritual love. Among them Guido Guinizelli, who inspired Dante a lot, was one of the eminent love poets of the time. He was also the forerunner of the movement '*dolce stil nuovo*' (sweet new style) which was practiced by a group of Italian poets, including Dante during these centuries ("dolce stil nuovo." Encyclopædia Britannica). As in the love songs of the Provencal Troubadours and the Sufis, the writers of the new style exalted love and depicted woman as a symbol of divinity. It was a refined poetry full of symbolic language, and like Ibn Arabi, they dealt with the theme of spiritual love and the concept of the divine. Dante's depiction of heavenly Beatrice fits perfectly within this frame. The interaction between Western and Eastern culture in the realm of love poetry and the development of the concept of idealized woman is clearly identifiable. This interaction of Eastern and Western culture is summarized clearly in the following quotation:

But the influence of the new poetry developed in Spain and the impact of ideal concept of woman propounded by the Eastern mystic were too strong and had too deeply penetrated into the European society to be extinguished by the Christian attitude towards woman, Dante had to tear himself away from the orthodox Christian dogma in order to establish in Italian poetry the new image of idealized woman and for this he naturally turned to the poetic tradition that had been long established in Andalusia, had flourished in Sicily, penetrated into the Provincial poetry and had now infiltrated into Latin literature. (Khan 21)

The Arabic love poetry of Al-Andalus influenced the Troubadours. Arabic love poetry, Sufism and the Troubadour poetry influenced Italian poetry, and like the Troubadour poets, Dante played a significant role in the development of the theme of love and woman in



European love poetry. But the starting point of this tradition of love poetry remains the Muslim culture of the East and the West.

## CHAPTER III

### The State of the Woman and the Conception of Love in Medieval Europe

#### I. Feudalism and Woman in the Middle Ages

No period in history can be said to begin and/or end at certain dates. When we study a certain historical period closely, we can easily identify events, ideas and ideologies that are peculiar to it also in the ages that precede it. The European Middle Ages, however, is generally said to begin in 476, with the fall of the Eastern Roman Empire, and end in 1453, with the conquest of Constantinople by the Turks. It is the time when Europe is no longer ruled by one main empire but by tribes or fiefdoms of different kinds and sizes that try to control the land they seize or inherit. Therefore feudalism turns out to be the predominant socio-political system in Europe. Feudalism claims to be a natural hierarchy in which God is at the top, followed by the king representing God on Earth, then the aristocracy, the knights and the serfs. Parallel to this hierarchy there is another hierarchy of power in which the Pope is at the top representing God, followed by the cardinals, archbishops, bishops, priests etc. Both the secular aristocrats and the Church fathers held fiefs granted to them by their suzerain lords. They collected taxes from the fiefs and kept armed knights to protect their own fiefdom and to serve their suzerain in time of his need. Within this feudal system women had no place. Their fathers, husbands or brothers spoke for them and took care of them. Moreover, when a woman lost her male protector, she often lost her status in society.

Regardless of their station, women in medieval Europe had hard lives. Their life expectancy was low, many women died during childbirth or shortly after. Of course, life was especially hard for female serfs as they had to work in the fields like men, in addition to giving birth and caring for children. Since power and money were the main concerns of the feudal landowners, even noble women had very limited legal rights. Arranged marriages among the feudal nobility to contribute to the family wealth left no room for genuine love. Women's rights were handed over from the guardianship of their father to that of their husband. Moreover, the Church was also biased against women. Christianity held women, as daughters of Eve, responsible for the fall of mankind and bringing on the original sin into the world. As Eve, she was considered to be the source of seduction:

“[T]hey stand for the lower or weaker parts of man, for carnal desires, or inconsistency of mind. Woman as the most obvious object of male concupiscence is made to present lust and thus is held responsible for it; the object of temptation becomes the cause” (Ferrante 2).

Church’s attitude towards matrimony was also a matter of discussion in the medieval world. The institution of marriage was mostly under the control of the Church, whose aim was to suppress society by making people believe that the passion between spouses was an instrument of the devil. According to the French historian Georges Duby, whose book *Love and Marriage in the Middle Ages* gives a useful introduction to the historical setting that produced courtly literature. Passionate love between spouses, particularly in the twelfth century, was considered theologically sinful: “[T]he Church first offered a moral code for a good married life. The intention was to attempt to purge marriage of its two major corruptions, namely the filth inherent in carnal pleasure and the frenzy of the impassioned soul” (1996, 10). At the same time, ecclesiastical moralists turned marriage ceremony into sacramental ceremony, “making the rituals sacred, ... the wedding rituals, and surrounding the bridal bed with set phrases and gestures which were designed to ward off the devil and keep the couple in chastity” (1996, 11-12). Love and marriage were separated and married life was robbed of the feelings of desire, passion, care, all that is associated with happiness and romance in man and woman relationships.

The role of the woman in marriage was also reduced to the role of a kind of a slave. Her body and soul belonged to her husband, master. According to Duby it was one of the missions of the Church to educate and guide the laity - especially women - concerning their duties in marriage. He gives an example of a letter written by a cleric to a countess who has asked him to enlighten her about the duties of a married woman. Duby reports:

[T]he soul and the body, he said, reside in the human being. God is the owner of both. In accordance with the law of marriage which he himself established, he granted to the husband (in the same way as a feudal tenure was granted, that is to say by handing over the use of property while retaining ultimate ownership) the right which he held over the body of the wife. Thus the husband became the feudal tenant of the body and authorized to use and exploit it, and make it bear fruit. (1996, 27-28)

The priest continues his moral lesson by commenting on sexual intercourse between husband and wife. He says that, the wife had no right to refuse to give herself to her husband. Moreover, he adds, the woman had to act “as if she were made of stone, without the slightest quiver of her soul” (1996, 28). It is not difficult to conclude, therefore, that women suffered the loss of human dignity both in private and in public space. They were literally reduced to the position of objects.

Ferrante, the author of *Woman as Image in Medieval Literature*, comments on the symbolic treatment of women in the literature of the high Middle Ages. He argues that in religious and secular works, especially those of the twelfth century, the portrayal of women are not realistic, i.e. “they are not portrayed as “real people” with human problems; they are symbols, aspects of philosophical and psychological problems that trouble the male world” (1). Ferrante draws attention to the opposing views of women in biblical exegesis; she is both Eve, the symbol of sin and feminine weakness and also Virgin Mary, the mother of Christ, the ideal female (2-3). Like Ferrante, Fries also comments on the dualistic image of woman in his essay *Popular Images of Women in Medieval Literature*. He says; “The image of woman is derived from the two archetypes of Christian thought; the blessed Virgin and Eve” (49). The negative view of woman as Eve reflected the general attitude of men and the clergy towards women in medieval society. There was, generally speaking, a misogynistic attitude toward women because the church held women responsible for bringing into the world the original sin and for continuing to be a source of temptation for men. Women were explicitly denigrated in clerical texts. Once Eve had eaten the forbidden fruit of the tree of knowledge, and persuaded Adam to eat from that tree, they were punished and banished from this world: “As daughters of Eve, women were said to tend naturally to disobedience, vanity, cupiditas, indeed to all sin” (Fries 49). Women were burdened with the curse of Eve and seen as the source of seduction.

On the other hand, the image of medieval women somewhat changed with the exaltation of Virgin Mary around the thirteenth century in medieval society. She was celebrated through illustrations, writings and, of course, literature. She was the ideal feminine figure, a mother and a symbol of purity. As a symbol of holiness, purity and perfection, Virgin Mary became a divine feminine mediator between human beings and God, and people began to pray to her for salvation (Thompson). No longer were women seen solely as seductresses

and sinners who had caused the fall of mankind in the Garden of Eden. They also began to be perceived in an idealistic light, cast by the divine figure of Virgin Mary. As Ferrante explains the mother of Christ was highly respected on account of her virginity and the belief that her son, Jesus, was conceived without sexual intercourse. In other words she was divorced from sexuality but not from motherhood (20). Thus, the image of the woman is represented in two opposing ways in biblical exegesis: she is both Eve, the symbol of man's fall and Virgin Mary, the symbol of man's salvation.

Kathleen Coyle in her book *Mary in the Christian Tradition: from a contemporary perspective*, comments on the rise of the Marian cult in the Middle Ages and how it was reshaped in various times and places due to the religious needs of the Christians of the times. She defines the twelfth century as the age of the Crusades, of feudalism and of courtly love as well as the "golden age of Mariology" (53). She writes:

Mary was hailed in chivalrous terms as the fair lady of the knights. ... Mary, a simple Palestinian housewife, could not meet the needs of the aristocratic ladies. Before they could venerate her they had to make her one of themselves. From the simple maiden of Nazareth she became the great Queen of Heaven, assigned a place above the church, between God and the highest angels. (54)

Marian Warner in her book *Alone of All Her Sex* also deals with the myth and the cult of Virgin Mary, and comments on the influence of the Marian cult on Troubadour poetry. According to Warner, The rise of the cult of Virgin Mary in the thirteenth century coincided with the evolution of secular literature, particularly the love songs of the Troubadours. The idealization of woman in poetry and the devotion to the Virgin were the two dominant preoccupations of medieval thought. Furthermore it is believed that the cult of the Virgin had a deep impact on the development of the courtly love tradition (134). However the elevation of woman in Christian dogma became confused and confusing after the birth of Troubadour poetry in the twelfth century. For Warner, although courtly love poetry and the Marian cult were two independent social currents, the cult of the Virgin Mary was both "a cause and an effect of courtly love", a paradox which only became reconciled in the thirteenth century (134). Marian Warner defends her argument by commenting on the striking similarity between Virgin Mary and the beloved lady of the love songs and calls them "twin types of the virtuous and untouchable maiden" (135). The

beloved in the love songs of the Troubadours is often portrayed as a physically beautiful lady with fair skin and elegant manners. She is also admirably chaste, i.e. close to perfection. Like Virgin Mary, she is accessible but unattainable. By imagining women as beautiful, chaste and perfect, much Troubadour poetry places women on pedestals, transforming them into idealized unattainable figures similar in their perception to the image of Virgin Mary who is likewise visible but unapproachable:

By the early thirteenth century, lyric poets no longer sang of the joy or agony of physical love, but accepted without demur the premise that their lady was worthy of their love precisely because she was too pure to reciprocate it. ... [T]he Virgin Mary could become a symbol of the ideal to the poets, artists, and the practitioners of courtly love. (Warner 137)

In short, like the dualistic perception of woman as Eve and Virgin Mary in biblical exegesis, ‘secular’ and sacred love also get mixed up in literature of the times as the distinction between physical and spiritual love is obliterated. According to Swanson, however, despite the escalation of Marian devotion and the idealization of women figures in the courtly love tradition, the general attitude towards women in real life does not change: “as a role model [Virgin Mary] was so perfect, so inimitable, yet so to be imitated, that the demands of imitation further shackled the lives of the real women” (204).

## **II. Marriage and Courtly Love in Twelfth Century Europe**

Social and political life in medieval Europe, particularly medieval France embodied all the peculiarities of the feudal system. As stated earlier, the control of land and power was the central concern in the establishment of the foremost social institution; marriage. Duby describes marriages in twelfth century France in the following way: “It is clear that in this social milieu all marriages were arranged. It was men that spoke to one another, either fathers or men in paternal positions, such as the lord of the domain in the case of widows or orphaned daughters of a dead vassal.” He explains, however, that most of the surviving information pertains to the marriages of the “people in high places, the rich, the highest riches of the aristocracy and princes. These were the ones who were talked about” (1996, 24). He then goes on to comment on the nature of married life and the importance of marriage in terms of maintaining social order:

[T]he social order rests entirely on marriage and because marriage is an institution, a legal system which unites, alienates and imposes obligations ensuring the continuity of social structures, particularly the stability of power and wealth. It is not fitting that marriage should embrace frivolity, passion, fantasy and pleasure; when it starts to do so, the institution may well have already lost some of its functions and is tending to disintegrate. Seriousness and gravity are fitting in marriage. (1996, 32)

The introduction of the courtly love tradition central to the chivalric romances of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in Europe brought a new understanding of love and marriage. In romances love between a man and a woman was celebrated and ladies were presented as unattainable and supreme. Courtly love embodied a philosophy of love and a code of lovemaking which were very much in line with medieval social and cultural norms. The love relationship reflected in the poetry of the courtly love tradition took different shapes and meanings in the hands of medieval narrators, however, both because of their individual differences and because of the conceptual changes which took place over time. Therefore, it is hard to give a strict definition of this tradition which has been examined and interpreted by scholars for centuries. For example, the French Troubadours' unattainable, nameless noble lady turns into a divine symbol in the hands of Dante. Chaucer's Emily in the *Knight's Tale* is considered to be a stereotype, however, Malory's portrayal of Guinevere is very vivid and unlike the passive Emily, she is a passionate temptress, an adulterous beloved.

In modern literature, courtly love literature is generally described as the poetry of secret and idealized love between a brave, combative knight and a lady who is rich, noble and beautiful we read: "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" (Moller 126). The knight lover must suffer long months of silence before declaring his love to his beautiful lady. C.S Lewis, the author of *Allegory of Love* explains the lover's situation:

The lover is always abject. Obedience to his lady's slightest wish, however whimsical, and silent acquiescence to her rebukes, however unjust, are the only virtues he dares claim. There is a service of love closely modelled on the service which a feudal vassal owes to his lord. The lover is the lady's man. (2)

The knight becomes his lady's vassal and he must prove his devotion and fidelity to her by noble service. The duty of the lover is to submit to the wishes of his lady. His love for his beloved inspires him to achieve great deeds, in order to be worthy of her love or to win her kindness. Yet, according to Moller this love affair is rarely consummated; "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" (126). Parry on the other hand claims the opposite. He explains that according to Medieval Christianity, love between a husband and a wife was not possible hence, the best partner in a love affair is another man's wife (Parry 5). Since courtly love tradition placed love outside marriage, adultery became a central theme in most courtly love literature. According to C.S. Lewis "any idealization of sexual love, in a society where marriage is purely utilitarian, must begin by being an idealization of adultery" (13). In other words "adultery was glorified" (Cuddon 189).

Apart from the loveless marriages which left no room for sexual attraction and pleasure, Duby points to the age difference between spouses as another handicap in support of adultery: "The strict rule was that girls should be given away at very early age" (1996, 26). The age of the girl could be even as young as twelve. Sometimes the husband was a greybeard or sometimes he could be an adolescent that she had never seen before (Duby 1996, 27). Most of the women lived the life that their families approved for them and inevitably they became the victims of unhappy marriages. We may say that the love songs of this tradition created a fictitious world to satisfy the needs of pure love that the unfulfilled souls of the medieval world were lacking.

### **III. The Knight and the Church**

Over time, the image of the knight also changed. In the twelfth and the thirteenth centuries, chivalric romances portrayed knight errants generally as 'lovers'. Richard Barber, in his book *The Knight and Chivalry*, points out that warrior soldiers, the aggressive combative knights of the early Middle Ages, experienced a transformation by the eleventh century with the rise of the crusading ideal of the Church. Thereafter, knighthood became a prestigious occupation as knights became the secular arm of the Church in its quest to conquer the Holy Land. The ideal knight became a defender of the weak and of the



Christian Church (39). In the early twelfth century which is recognized as the starting point of Chivalric literature, this image of knighthood and its attendant ideals became the subject matter of secular poetry; thereafter the knight turned into a “lover and crusader” (49). Duby in his book *The Knight, the Lady and the Priest* says that the nobility “wanted to domesticate their knights, to attract them to their courts and keep them there” (1993, 218). Court was the right place to educate young bachelor knights. They learned how to fight, how to behave and how to integrate into the courtly community; in short how to become knights. Duby underlines another fact about knights who were educated in the houses of the nobility. He writes: “A married woman was usually both [the knight’s] initiator and the object of his desire. ... She was the wife of his lord, who was often his uncle.” According to custom; “the bachelor hero, like most of his contemporaries among the nobility, left his father’s house as a boy to be a kind of apprentice in the house of another, very often that of his mother’s brother” (1993, 221). This gives us a logical explanation for the typical love affair between a young knight and the lady who is older than her lover. He further explains these characteristics of courtly literature in the following way:

And while his nephews served the lord as sons, at the same time they desired his wife. She, like the Virgin Mary in other cases, took the place in their hearts of the mother from whom they had been exiled so young. Thus do the plots of courtly romance reflect real relationships of conviviality as it existed in those days. (1993, 221-222)

From the perspective of literature, with the rise of courtly literature, the figure of the heroic knight becomes an ardent lover who yearns for his lady’s love instead of military victories, power or gold. Generosity, bravery and courtesy were the main characteristics of this new definition of knighthood. From then on they were the loyal servants and gentlemen lovers of the ladies of the court and appeared as such in the stories of medieval courtly life. Barber states that “[t]he idea of the lady as the source of inspiration behind knightly deeds is present throughout chivalric history from the early twelfth century onwards” (71). This is the point where the Troubadour poets’ courtly love theme came to life. They sang songs of the ideal love between the knight and his lady and sometimes they turned into the character of an ideal poet knight who sang of gentle and refined love.

#### IV. Troubadours and Secular Love

The dualistic perception of woman finds a strong voice in the love songs of the Troubadours who were the purveyors and pioneers of courtly love poetry in Western Europe. Robert Briffault describes the role these wandering minstrels play in the medieval society in his book *The Troubadours* as follows:

He [the Troubadour] was the world's reporter and practically the sole provider of entertainment. As he passed, singly or in groups, from court to court, from castle to castle, where his coming was always a welcome event, the singer of verse took no account of frontiers and found ready access to every lordship. He was a vagabond by vocation. (4)

Originating in the south of France and flourishing between the years 1100-1350, the Troubadours travelled around many courts and palaces composing and singing beautiful love songs, often by their rulers' instruction. Their songs mainly focused on the themes of chivalry, virtue, manhood, femininity, and courtly love. In heroic epics recounting military exploits and battles, women hardly appear. However by the end of the twelfth century, new literary genre, chivalric woman and love became the central themes of the romances.

#### V. The Image of the Courtly Lady in Troubadour Poetry

In opposition to the appalling reputation of female gender, courtly poets constructed a new picture of beauty and perfection. Joachim Bumke describes the conception of beauty and the beauty of the Troubadour lady whom the poet praises "from top to bottom, from head to feet" in his book *Courtly Culture: Literature and Society in the High Middle Ages* (325). He points out however that the beauty of the lady and the description of her personal features in courtly love poetry are stereotypical. He says "The poets' praise of beauty was not concerned with personal features of individual women but with an ideal that manifested itself in a fixed stock of attributes" (325). All beloved women have fair skin, blond hair, radiant eyes, lovely neck, red mouth, small ears and a straight nose etc. Whereas the depiction of the bodily features are not so common, "arms and legs, if they are mentioned at all, are white, round, and smooth, the breasts small, the waist slim" (325). For example Bertran de Born, living in the twelfth century gives a highly ironic and bawdy description of his beloved but his lady is still; "golden haired ... with skin as white as

hawthorn flower, supple of arm, firm of breast, and like a young rabbit's is her back." She has "pure and fresh complexion"

Rassa! A lady have I who is fresh and pure, a graceful and gay young girl, golden-haired with tints of ruby, with skin as white as hawthorn flower, supple of arm, firm of breast, and like a young rabbit's is her back. By her pure and fresh complexion, by her high merit and by her praise they can easily single her out as the best – day who claim to know in which quarter I adore. (157)

All in all, however, the figure of the lady described in the love songs was not only physically beautiful, but also spiritually perfect; she is the embodiment of the platonic concept of beauty, complete and self-sufficient. Bumke explains the philosophy of this idea of beauty saying: "Physical beauty manifest the inner virtue of a woman. The minnesingers celebrated all her good qualities and her beauty. ... The harmony of beauty and moral perfection was a central aspect of the courtly image of women" (325). Therefore, Troubadours attributed double perfection to the beloved.

Ferrante on the other hand interprets this "harmony of beauty and moral perfection" somewhat differently. He points out that the figure of the lady occupies a paradoxical position; she is both the object of sexual desire as well as a symbol of religious love. Therefore Troubadour poetry does not focus on one overlooking the other but it intermingles the divine with the earthly love:

The poet is always going through a kind of psychomachia between his higher and lower impulses. The lower impulses are represented by the *lauzenger*, who are concerned only with sex and physical satisfaction, for whom a woman is nothing more than an object, while the lady represents the higher aspirations, the striving for nobility, honor, valor, good. ... [W]hen the poet succumbs to his lower impulses, he speaks like the *lauzenger* and accuses the lady of being fickle, treacherous, and selfish because she does not grant what he desires; when he is governed by the higher impulses, he asks only to be worthy of her, to be allowed to serve her and better himself in the service. (72)

Studied more closely we see that some of the Troubadour poems include the above-mentioned double perfection of the courtly lady, while others focus on just one aspect of this perfection. In other words, some poems define the lady as possessing divine qualities, whereas others concentrate on the physical desires she inspires in their lovers.

As mentioned earlier Bertran de Born's perception of his beloved is defined by his sexual desires. In another poem de Born's image of the beloved is even bawdier. Although he idealizes her, saying that no one compares to her in beauty, he mentally undresses his beloved in the poem imagining her 'doffing her clothes' to reveal the 'fruits of her youth' which 'enflame his lust'. He thinks that, she reveals her breasts 'so fair and shiny as to turn night to day'.

Nought unto her fair form in loveliness is peer; nor is this fancy mere;  
 who so disparts her dress, belied is not his guess; show forth bedazzling  
 fruits of youthsomeness; and the more raiment's doffed, the more flames  
 lust aloft; shene of her bosom's turns to noonday night; and somewhat  
 downward to enquire the universal world setteth afire. (quoted by  
 Briffault 111)

On the other hand, many of the Troubadours elevated women to a purely divine level making her unattainable and describing her as physically and spiritually perfect, an angelic figure. In their poetry, this idealization of the lady is carried to such an extreme that the lady turns into a religious icon, a symbol of perfection like Virgin Mary. In Barber's words, "She is a shadowy divinity, to be worshipped unquestioningly" (83). This kind of sentiment is expressed by the twelfth century Troubadour poet Arnaut Daniel (flourished 1180-1200). He writes:

Each day I improve and grow more pure, for I serve and worship the  
 most noble in the world – this I can tell you openly. Hers I am from head  
 right down to foot, and even if the cold wind blows, the love that rains  
 within my heart keeps me warm in deepest winter.

...

And when I gaze on her golden hair and her person which is slender and  
 fresh, I love her more than whoever gave me Luserna. (183)

Another example of 'unattainable lady' who represents spiritual perfection can be seen in the following lines of the Italian Troubadour Sordello (1200-1269). The poet describes his lady as the source of moral excellence; she is unadulterated and the ideal one:

For so I am bound to her, devoted and pledged, that my soul will have  
 left my body sooner than I had left her, so much do I love her in perfect  
 love.

Lady Delightful, root of all merit, I am in heart, in body, and in deeds and words entirely yours, for you are the most perfect, pure and pleasing, gentle, and discerning.

In God's name have mercy, gracious lady, on me, or you are my death and life. (243)

In the following lines of another Troubadour poet of Bernard de Ventadour (1148-1195), this conflation of both the spiritual and sensual themes is made obvious.

Ah, good and desirable loved one, body well formed, smooth and slender, fresh and fair-complexioned flesh which God fashioned with His hands! All times I have desired you, and no other gives me pleasure. No other love do I want at all.

Sweet and most gracious being, may He who so finely fashioned you grant me that joy which I hope for! (85)

She is so well formed that it is as if she were fashioned, like Eve, by the hands of God Himself. Her physical features, her "fair complexion" resemble a heavenly figure. And yet the poet sullies this description by expressing his earthly 'desire' for her.

The portrayal of the women in these gentle and refined love poems of the Troubadours considerably differ from the real situation of the women in medieval Europe. Women suffered a lot in their male dominant society. They were regarded as the embodiment of weakness in human nature, so they were scorned and kept under the control of men. Courtly love tradition brought about a change in the attitude of men towards women – at least in the world of fiction. The fair sex became the center of love poetry. Women depicted in these poems and songs were certainly different from the women in real life. They embodied both physical and spiritual perfection; they became the source of all good qualities. At least in the eyes of their lovers, they were elegant, beautiful and ideal feminine figures. On the other hand, women's voices were still absent in most love literature; we hardly know anything of these ladies other than the fact that they are the objects of the knight's desire and passion. It is the emotional state of the lover that courtly love poetry focuses. The poems describe the sufferings of unrequited love. We learn about the knight lover's feelings - like hope, desire or frustration - while reading courtly poetry. We know of the lady through his eyes only. As described by Ferrante, it is an extremely solipsistic form of love: "[I]t is one the poet feels. He selects the lady he loves or, to put it

another way, he incarnates Love in a lady. Then he forms an image of her in his mind, attributes the qualities he values to that image, and worships or berates it, depending on his mood” (66). In other words, the courtly image of women can be said to be an invention of the poets.

Because women characters played central roles in courtly love literature, it is not surprising that the audience of these narratives were largely women of nobility like queens, duchesses or countesses. Eleanor of Aquitaine, queen of the Court at Poitiers, France and then of England, and her daughter Marie, Countess of Champagne were the advocates and the most ardent patrons of this new literary phenomena. They set up a court controlled by women and had a particular influence on the development of this romantic tradition and the codification of its rules. Many poets and scholars produced literary works at the court of Poitiers. *The Art of Courtly Love* by Andreas Capellanus, for example is the most famous work from this court.

#### **VI. *The Art of Courtly Love*: Medieval Facts and Fictional Conventions**

At the request of Marie de Champagne, Capellanus codified the rules for what we consider ‘courtly love’ in his book. The book was written sometime between 1186 and 1190. John Jay Parry, the translator of *The Art of Courtly Love* suggests that the work draws a realistic picture of life in the medieval court of Poitiers; i.e. Capellanus, brings us closer to the actual life of the time (3). Like Parry, Bumke also comments on the importance of Capellanus’ work and writes “No other literary work of that period gives us such precise information about the great role which discussion of love played in French courtly society of the twelfth century” (362).

Capellanus was a cleric, yet from his writing he seems quite tolerant of the secular ideology of the age he lived in. His book was written in scholastic style and it sets out to teach lovers how to behave in an orderly and “seemly” fashion (Duby 1993, 216-17). In his treatise, Capellanus analyses love amongst different social groups and different ranks. He provides sample dialogues and advice for assorted cases from various classes of society. The book opens with a definition of ‘love’ which he enriches with thirty-one rules governing the expression of love.

Composed of three parts, the first part of *The Art of Courtly Love* discusses what love is and how it may be acquired. Capellanus describes love as a state of suffering, and he celebrates women as the means of all goodness (148). Then he explains how to be a successful lover. Here Capellanus presents a series of nine imaginary dialogues between men and women of different social classes. For instance, a man of the middle class speaks with a woman of nobility or a man of the higher nobility speaks with a woman of simple nobility and other such combinations. In each dialogue the man pleads to be accepted as the woman's lover. In the second part the author discusses how love may be retained. This part begins with a discussion of how love is maintained and kept and then he concludes with how it comes to an end. Following this, comes the section entitled 'various decisions in love cases,' which is a series of thirty-one romantic decisions about different cases made by famous women of the court, like Eleanor of Aquitaine and Marie de Champagne. Later on, he lists thirty-one rules of love such as: "Marriage is no real excuse for not loving." "He who is not jealous cannot love." "The easy attainment of love makes it of little value; difficulty of attainment makes it prized." And "Every act of a lover ends in the thought of his beloved" (Capellanus 184-86).

According to Capellanus, "Love is a certain inborn suffering derived from the sight of and excessive mediation upon beauty of the opposite sex, which causes each one to wish above all things the embraces of the other and by common desire to carry out all of love's precepts in the other's embrace" (29). However the love he is talking about is something that does not exist between husband and wife. Thus he comes to a conclusion that exposes the basis for marriages during his age:

[L]ove cannot exert its powers between two people who are married to each other. For lovers give each other everything freely, under no compulsion of necessity, but married people are in duty bound to give in to each other's desires and deny themselves to each other in nothing. (106-107)

Finally, in the third and shortest part, the author discusses why love should be avoided, and explains why everything he has said about love so far should not actually be practiced. Although in the first two books Capellanus defines how to acquire and retain love with a list of rules, the content of the third book is completely different. Here his attitude changes; he defends why it is better to abstain from love and the "[m]ain argument against love [is]

the alleged wickedness of women, which Capellanus proves with an elaborate catalogue of vices” (Bumke 361). What Capellanus underlines in this part is a typical medieval misogynist attitude and conventional condemnation of sensual love. Capellanus warns men to avoid the deceitful nature of woman. For him man is by nature superior to woman and he points out that when man devotes all his efforts to love, he uses all his usefulness (187). Although he describes the philosophy of love and love making in the first two books, here he attacks ‘love’ and writes; all sorts of wickedness come from love” (197). And from a scholastic point of view he writes bodily pleasures are misleading and God hates the ones “who engaged in the works of Venus outside the bonds of wedlock or caught in the toils of any sort of passion” (187). Opposing the courtly love idea of devotion to a lady, he writes he person who is in love only thinks to please his beloved and therefore he loses his faith in God and his duties (190).

Bumke regards Capellanus’ work as “evidence of a comprehensive theory of courtly love. If one wanted to know what courtly love was, all one had to do was to familiarize oneself with the exposition of Capellanus” (362). Capellanus’ work can be said to reflect the dualistic attitude of the medieval society towards woman. On the one hand, he portrays woman as the source of all goodness and explains how to be a successful lover, on the other hand, he warns men not to engage in bodily pleasures and advises them on the ways to be a devout Christian, which of course has to do with the avoidance of the temptations present in women’s sexuality. Capellanus’s book is citing the codes to be followed by a courtly lover. It also points to norms of love underlined in Troubadour poetry such as the importance of secrecy to be observed by the lover and the beloved, the absolute necessity of obedience, devotion and suffering as codes to be followed by the lover although as stated earlier the author describes women as “fickle and changeable”: For Capellanus, “A woman is just a melting wax, which is always ready to take a new form and receive the impress of anybody’s seal” (204).

To sum up it is important to realize that the courtly love tradition is formulated in medieval Europe by the merging of the feudal and Christian understanding of a woman’s role in the society with the Arabic and Sufi conceptions of the woman as an instigator of divine love in man. This form of the portrayal of the woman is central not only in the literature of



medieval Europe but continues to influence the present European socio-cultural norms concerning man-woman relationships and the woman's role in the society.

## CHAPTER IV

### Chivalric Romance and Courtly Love in Medieval England

#### I. The Lady in Life and Fiction

In the previous chapter, I have discussed the role of the woman and the conception of love in Medieval European society and their reflection in the Troubadour love poetry. This chapter will concentrate on the way woman and love is portrayed in the majority of medieval romances. As opposed to the poetry of the Troubadours, the medieval prose and poetic romances focus on the ideas of chivalry, loyalty, courtesy and the knight's love for his lady. Ferrante provides us with a convenient starting point for illuminating how Troubadour lyric and medieval chivalric romances differ in presenting the woman and the conceptions of love:

In the lyric which describes the emotional states, the lover alternates between hope and despair, desire and frustration, resignation and resentment; in romance, where the love is a part of a narrative, the lover is faced with the conflicting demand of chivalry and love, of society and personal desire, of worldly reputation and personal integrity. (65)

With regards to the portrayal of woman in poetry we see that the woman is at the center; the poet chooses the lady he loves and incarnates love in her: “[L]ove and the lady are virtually interchangeable: they have same powers and the same effect on the lovers” (Ferrante 66). She becomes an image of excellence, an ideal one in the mind of the poet. We see the beloved's beauty through the eyes of the lover. Poems present the poet's emotional states such as happiness, sadness, longing, desire, and frustration. And the lady he loves is just a passive figure, a symbol. However, the way women are described in romances are different; they appear to be “separate beings” (Ferrante 66). The lady in a romance is also the force behind the actions of the lover: “She is often a mirror image of the lover, or as a figure he has somehow fashioned to his desires” (Ferrante 66). As regards the portrayal of love and women, two significant and well-known medieval romances draw particular attention: Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Knight's Tale* and Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*.

Historically speaking, the Middle English period in England begins with the Norman Conquest in ca. 1200, and ends with the accession of Henry VII to the throne in 1485. It was near the end of this era that William Caxton printed Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte Darthur* (ca. 1469 -70). Medieval scholars describe the significance of the Norman invasion of the British Isles in the following way: "The arrival of the Normans in 1066 opened up new channels of cultural communications, and Britain subsequently shared with all the other countries of western Europe in the profound awakening of the renaissance and became a productive and cosmopolitan center of letters" (Dunn and Bryness 3). The literature of the period focused mainly on the subjects of religion, courtly love and Arthurian legends. The two most well known medieval literary figures were, without any doubt, Geoffrey Chaucer (1343-1400) and Sir Thomas Malory (1405-1471), the writers of the famous medieval chivalric romances *The Knight's Tale* and *Le Morte Darthur*.

## **II. Geoffrey Chaucer and the Medieval Conception of Love**

Chaucer was an English writer, poet, civil servant and a diplomat who is best known for his unfinished work *The Canterbury Tales*. His ability to read and speak French, Italian and Latin enabled Chaucer to follow the literary, social, and political developments in the continent. His period was one full of political and social unrest. Right after his birth, for example, the Hundred Years' War broke out. This was also the time of the outbreak of the Black Death, the worst pandemic in human history, which created religious, social and economic upheavals like the Peasants' Revolts in England and France. David Wright, the translator of *The Canterbury Tales*, describes this period as: "an age of transition ... chivalry was at its zenith ... while at the same time the feudal structure was starting to crumble" (XII).

Born in London in 1343 to a wealthy family, Chaucer had strong connections with the nobility of his time. During his lifetime, three kings succeeded the throne of England: Edward III, Richard II, and Henry IV. Wright describes Chaucer as a "public man and as well as a poet" (XII). Chaucer was often sent on diplomatic missions. In 1359, for example, he went to France as a squire with Edward III's army. He was captured by the French at a siege and ransomed a year later. In 1368 he went to Spain with the Black Prince, the Prince of Wales and in the same year he was appointed as an esquire of the King's Household. Chaucer's family was also intimately connected with the court. In 1366

he married Philippa de Roet, a knight's daughter who "was of higher birth than the poet" (Abrams 77). Chaucer's wife served in the royal household at the service of Queen Philippa, the wife of Edward III. After the death of Queen Philippa, she became lady-in-waiting to Constance of Castile, the second wife of John of Gaunt. At the same time Chaucer's sister-in-law, Katherine Swynford was the governess of Constance's daughters. After the death of Constance she became the mistress and then the third wife of John of Gaunt, the Duke of Lancaster.

Chaucer's literary career is said to have begun with the partial translation of the long French poem of courtly love, *Roman de la rose*, a poem written in a style known as allegorical dream vision. Later he wrote his first important poem *The Book of Duchess* (1369), an elegy for Blanche, duchess of Lancaster, John of Gaunt's first wife, who died of plague in 1369. In his book *Medieval English Literature 1100-1500*, Larry Scanlon divides Chaucer's literary career into two basic periods. His early career is remembered for three major works: *The Book of Duchess*, *The House of Fame*, and *The Parliament of Fowls*, while his later career is renowned for his works *Troilus and Criseyde*, *The Legend of Good Women*, and *The Canterbury Tales* (168-170). Regarding Chaucer's first three major works, Scanlon maintains that Chaucer "makes each of them literally texts constructed out of previous texts, and he is particularly interested in the experimental dimension of this process" (168). *The Book of Duchess*, is written in the form of a dream vision and it contains some of the elements of courtly love (Lewis 167). It is a version of the story of Ceyx and Alcione from the eleventh book of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (Scanlon 168). Ceyx was a king who lost his life in a shipwreck and Alcione was his queen who received her beloved husband's drowned body in a dream from Morpheus, the god of sleep. Indeed Ovid was not the only source Chaucer made use of while writing *The Book of the Duchess*; he also "drew heavily upon Machaut's poetry for elements" of his own verse ("Guillaume de Machaut" *Encyclopædia Britannica*).

One important historical fact about Chaucer's work is that, Chaucer composed *The Book of Duchess* in English. Rosalyn Rossignol in her book *Critical Companion to Chaucer: A literary Reference to His Life and Work* reports that after the Norman Conquest in 1066, "the literature of the English court was written primarily in French" and "the language spoken at the court was a mixture of a dialect of French, ANGLO-NORMAN, and Middle

English” (34). She adds that “Chaucer is one of the first writers to compose for the court in English ... his early poems, including *The Book of Duchess* ... show a strong French influence in vocabulary, style, and structure” (34).

In the years 1372 and 1378 he was sent to Italy on diplomatic missions and his journeys in the Italian peninsula are considered “a milestone in his literary development” (Abrams 77). While in Italy, he visited Florence where he became acquainted with the works of such famous literary figures as Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio. Abrams tells us that “These writers presented him with new verse forms, new subject matters and new modes of representation” (77). After his contact with Italian literature, he composed *The House of Fame* (1379), which is written again in the dream vision style. The story is about the poet’s journey in the talons of an eagle to the palace of the goddess Fame. In many sources it is said that Chaucer’s work *The House of Fame* parodies Dante’s journey depicted in his epic poem, *The Divine Comedy* (Abrams 77). *The House of Fame* is followed by his third long poem, written again in the form of a dream vision: *The Parliament of Fowls*. The story takes place on St Valentine’s Day. All the birds meet on the day of lovers to choose their mates; “their “parliament” humorously depicts the ways in which different classes in human society think and talk about love” (Abrams 77).

In 1382 Chaucer was appointed to the office of the Controller of Petty Customs of wine. It is during this period in his life that he composed his first monumental work which is also his longest completed poem, *Troilus and Criseyde*. Written in 1385, the work is considered by some critics as an epic, by others as a “fusion of epic and romance” (Scanlon 170). It describes the tragic story of two lovers, the Trojan prince Troilus and his beloved Criseyde. The story of their love is told against the background of the Trojan War. *Troilus and Criseyde* is in fact an adaptation of Boccaccio’s *II Filostrato* (Abrams 78). Unlike his earlier works which relied heavily upon French models, Chaucer turns to Italian models this time only for inspiration. This is a switch that serves the writer well, for according to Abrams: “[e]ven if he had never written *The Canterbury Tales*, *Troilus* would have secured Chaucer a place among the major English poets” (78).

*The Legend of Good Women*, which follows the composition of *Troilus and Criseyde*, was left uncompleted. *The Legend*, however, was Chaucer's fourth and final work written in the form of a dream vision. In this story, Cupid the god of love is angry because Chaucer had previously written so often about women like Criseyde who betrayed men. As a penance, the god of love orders him to write about good women, whereupon he proceeds to tell the stories of nine legendary women: Cleopatra, Thisbe, Dido, Hypsiplye, Medea, Lucretia, Ariadne, Philomela and Phyllis. Except for Thisbe all these women are betrayed by their lovers, which perhaps accounts for Scanlon's observation that Chaucer's work has been taken much more seriously by feminist critics in the last few decades (171). Scanlon makes distinctions between the popular medieval romances and Chaucer's work, remarking that: "In contrast to the (characteristically male) lover of romance, who proclaims to be dying in the cause of love, a number of these heroines actually do die. The poem's emphasis on their fidelity thus grounds itself on a grim recognition of the political constraints on female desire" (172).

Although Chaucer has written many works in a variety of genres like comedy, tragedy, satire and on a variety of topics such as philosophy, religion and politics yet he is best remembered for his unfinished work *The Canterbury Tales*, which he began writing in 1387, after the death of his wife and continued until his death in 1400. Chaucer was buried in Poet's Corner of West Minister Abbey but it wasn't until eight years after his death that William Caxton brought out the first printed edition of the unfinished collection of stories, *The Canterbury Tales*. *The Knight's Tale* is the first tale told by the fictional pilgrim knight in this collection.

Broadly influenced by Italian and French writers, Chaucer is nonetheless regarded as the Father of English poetry: "He essentially introduced the Italian tradition to England, but he also drew widely on more different French writers and traditions than anyone else. His poetic line was always syllabic, a prosody ultimately derived from French models" (Scanlon 167).

### A. *The Canterbury Tales*

In *The Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer originally intended to write one hundred and twenty stories recounted in the voices of thirty fictional pilgrims travelling on horseback from London to the Shire of Saint Thomas Becket in Canterbury and back, but he only managed to complete twenty-two stories (Abrams 79). Written in vernacular Middle English, *The Canterbury Tales* portrays life in medieval society by presenting dramatically men and women who belong to different professions and social ranks, and uphold different attitudes to life and morals. His pilgrims give us the impression of being drawn from real life and constitute a rich cross-section of medieval society. For example, there is the Knight and the Squire who represent nobility, the monk and the Parson who belong to clergy, and The Ploughman and the Miller who stand for the peasantry. There are also artisans like Miller and Carpenter, there are professionals like the Man of Law and the Doctor of Physic and female characters such as the Prioress, the second Nun, and of course the most interesting and vivid character of all the arrogant Wife of Bath.

Every pilgrim tells an original tale focusing on a different theme, and the style of each varies from the satirical, the comical, and the bawdy to the earthy or the religious depending on its speaker and the theme. The diversity of the tales, moreover, necessitates the employment of an array of literary genres ranging from courtly romance, to fabliau, saint's life, allegorical tale, beast fable and medieval sermon. Scanlon comments on the contents of the tales told in *The Canterbury Tales* and relates them to the main goal of the pilgrims in the tale: Pilgrimage is a long journey of moral significance. And though it is an act of a religious devotion, "it turns out to be a worldly, non-sacral or even a profane one ... the worldly contest is dissolubly linked to the sacral; the collection's narratives always hold out the possibility of sacral significance, even where they seem most profane" (Scanlon 174).

#### 1. *General Prologue*

The Prologue itself, with the thirty pilgrims who meet at the Tabard inn in Southwark, constitutes a drama in its own right. Along with the description of each character that is given in the Prologue, each of the tales the pilgrims tell displays an insightful portrayal and criticism of medieval society and its most significant institution, the church. It begins with

an elaborate description of the renewal of nature in April and its effects on men and women who are about to set out on a pilgrimage. Fictional protagonist Chaucer is the narrator of what goes on. We see the pilgrims and their stories through his eyes and his interpretations. Pilgrim Chaucer is pictured as a very naive, impressionable person who cannot distinguish between appearance and reality or right and wrong. In the Prologue, we are given a description of each pilgrim both as an individual being with specific physical and personal traits and as a type belonging to a social class and profession.

Chaucer, the *dramatis persona*, tells us that, acting upon the innkeeper's suggestion, the pilgrims agree to draw lots and accordingly tell stories in their turn. The agreement is that each pilgrim is to tell two tales on the way to Canterbury and two on the way back. Whoever tells the best tale, on their return to the inn is going to be treated to a feast. The lot is drawn and the Knight turns out to be the first person to tell a tale. Ironically, the Knight is also the person of highest social standing on the pilgrimage. He is a reputable warrior and a noble knight, who resembles the ideal heroic knights of the medieval romance fictions. A long list of battles and sieges over a wide geographical area is given with many accompanying details to highlight his great deeds as a genuine Christian hero. And though he is depicted as the noblest both in terms of status and character, his manners are modest and he is not at all ostentatiously dressed.

The knight is accompanied by his son, a young Squire and a Yeoman, the Knight's servant. The Squire is described as a young courtly lover; "A lively knight-apprentice, and a lover" (Chaucer 81), "which means that he has attained the first degree of knighthood" (Rossignol 113). He is also devoted to love as he gets little sleep at night, hoping to win his lady's affection. Furthermore his clothes are embroidered with the images of fresh and colorful flowers and we are told that he has many talents like singing, playing the flute, drawing, and writing. Like an ideal knight to be; he has fought in battles, shown great strength and bravery but he is also polite, modest and obedient to his father.

The story the Knight tells is exactly what we would expect from a perfect knight: it is the tale of two noble knights, colored with warfare, duels and courtly love.



## 2. *The Knight's Tale*

We understand that Chaucer has used many sources while he was composing *The Knight's Tale*, but the final vision appears to have been tailored after the Italian poet Boccaccio's *Teseide*. William E. Coleman, in his essay about the sources and analogues of *The Knight's Tale*, claims that eighty percent of Chaucer's text relies on Boccaccio's work, though he has shortened and re-arranged most of what he borrowed (88). Coleman argues that the main characters in *The Knight's Tale* namely Theseus, Arcita, Palamon and Emily - are "less complex and less rounded" than those of Boccaccio. According to him, especially Emily "loses much of her voice and personality" in *The Knight's Tale* (91).

In composing this narrative Chaucer was also inspired by Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*, which he translated to English. The *Consolation of Philosophy*, written while Boethius was imprisoned, became a philosophical and spiritual classic in the Middle Ages (Coleman 94). The philosophy of Boethius maintained that "worldly fortune is deceitful and ephemeral and [that] the Platonic doctrine that the body itself is only a prison house for the soul that aspires to eternal things" is the only truth concerning this world (Abrams 78). Coleman says that "Boethius contributed eighty-seven lines to *The Knight's Tale*, but his work transformed the themes of Chaucer's story" (95).

In addition to Boccaccio and Boethius, another source that contributed to the fashioning of *The Knight's Tale* is Statius' *Thebaid*. Statius was a first century Latin author and *Thebaid* is the primary source for the legend of the Thebes which provided the materials for several long poems, including Boccaccio's *Teseida*. Boccaccio used it as a rhetorical and thematic source for his work (Coleman 91-92). Indeed, Chaucer's use of *Teseida* and *Thebaid* has a complex relation "[*Thebaid*] was the prime source of his main source [*Teseida*]" yet "while neglecting to acknowledge Boccaccio, Chaucer twice cites Statius in *The Knight's Tale*" (Coleman 92).

Due to the fact that Chaucer is a poet of courtly love, *The Knight's Tale* embodies some of the typical aspects of the courtly love tradition, wherein the lady loved is described as a fair, elegant lady who is unattainable. The knight suffers greatly for his love and he will do anything to protect and honor her, while remaining faithful to her at all costs. Worshipping his lady at a distance, the knight tries to win his beloved's heart but nonetheless fears that

he will never be accepted by her. These aspects are all basically included in the story, yet the love triangle between Emily, Arcita and Palamon in *The Knight's Tale* is further complicated by the introduction of codes of chivalry and knightly brotherhood.

#### a. Courtly Love and Women in *The Knight's Tale*

The action takes place in ancient Athens starting with the battles and marriage of Theseus, the Duke of Athens. By giving us an account of Theseus's story at the very beginning of the tale, Chaucer introduces us to the ideals of chivalry and the norms and values of an exemplary knight. The Duke's character and form of behaviour also serves to set the noble and magnanimous tone observed in the rest of the narrative. Theseus shows to the readers that injustice, even in war, should be punished.

When the story begins we are told that Theseus "in the height of all his triumph and his joy" (I, A, 903) is returning from his conquest of the Amazons. He has taken Hippolyta, the queen of the Amazons as his wife and he is on his way to Athens with his bride and her sister Emily. His journey is interrupted by a company of ladies weeping and lamenting. They are the widows of noble knights who were killed by the tyrant Theban king Creon during the siege of Thebes. These ladies want the bodies of their husbands back in order to carry out proper burial ceremonies. Creon has acted dishonorably by refusing to hand over the corpses to the families. Once the wives of powerful men, the suppliant ladies are now the victims of "Fortune and her fickle wheel" (I, A, 933). Margaret Hallissy in her analysis of *The Knight's Tale* points out that by introducing the figure of Fortuna, the goddess of chance and her wheel so early in the tale Chaucer draws attention to the significant role attributed to chance and fortune in the tragic fall of many medieval noble men. Hallissy explains that "Men striving for worldly advancement were imagined as climbing onto Fortuna's wheel at the bottom. Reaching the top of the wheel symbolized success" (55). She refers further to an analogy frequently drawn in the Middle Ages between the woman as Eve, the temptress and the cause of man's fall, and the inconsistent female deity. She says "the goddess Fortuna is a woman and thus ... changeable by nature. At any time, without warning, she could spin her wheel, (and) send the overachievers at the top ... to the bottom" (55). The goddess Fortuna plays an important part in the chain of events that follow, as "chance shapes" the plot of *The Knight's Tale* (Hallissy 55).

While at the top of the wheel Theseus "... to whom Fortune has assigned / Victory and conqueror's garland" (I, A, 923-924), decides to take revenge on Creon for his unknighly behavior. He fights with Creon, kills him "as befits a valiant knight" (I, A, 993) and vows to return the bodies of the slain noblemen to their weeping widows. While Theseus' men are searching for the bodies of their own dead comrades, they come across two severely wounded Theban knights, Arcita and Palamon. They capture these noble knights and turn them over to Theseus who decides to send them to Athens to suffer in prison forever.

These Theban knights, who turn out to be cousins, remain imprisoned in a tower for years, until one day Palamon, looking through the single tiny window of their cell, sees the fair Emily wandering in the garden.

Emily's description draws on a number of motifs that are immediately familiar to the reader of the medieval romance: the temporal setting is ... May, the month of lovers .... The beauty of Emily is compared to flowers, especially the rose; and, most importantly, when Palamon than Arcita see her, her beauty instantly pierces them to the heart, inflicting on them the intense and overriding pain of love. (Klassen ix)

She is gathering flowers on that fateful spring day when Palamon spies her: "At which he started back with a loud cry, / as though he had been bitten to the heart" (I, A, 1083-1084). Palamon falls in love at first sight with the beautiful Emily. Hearing Palamon's lamentations Arcita thinks that his cousin is complaining about his captivity. Palomon objects saying:

The prison was not the reason for my cry,  
For I was hurt just now, pierced through the eye  
Right to the heart; the wound is killing me.  
The beauty of the lady whom I see (I, A, 1099-1102)

As Hallissy tells us "Palamon's explanation of his love-injury reflects a medieval belief about falling in love. [O]n first sight of the beloved, Cupid shot the arrow of love through the eye of the lover into his heart" (58). Upon learning the source of his cousin's pain, Arcita also looks through the window and he too is bewitched by the image of Emily. He exclaims: "Beauty so fresh destroys me, as I look" (I, A, 1122). Palamon is quick to remind Arcita that it was he who first saw the lady and as a cousin, and especially as a brother knight, Arcita should help him to win her love. At this point, Chaucer is careful to

point out the differences between the loves of the two men towards Emily. Speaking through the character of Arcita, Chaucer tells us how different their motives and attitudes towards love are. While Palamon's love is nobler it is platonic, similar to the way a man loves God. He sees Emily as a goddess. Arcita's love, on the other hand, is more passionate and worldly. His love for Emily is the love of a man to a woman - it is not a religious adulation like Palamon's. In both cases, however, Emily's beauty is idealized. She is figured as an unattainable lady and an image of physical perfection. The unattainability of Emily is paralleled to the unattainable freedom of the knights by V.A. Kolve in his book *Chaucer and the Imaginary Narrative the First Five Canterbury Tales*. He draws attention to the psychology of the imprisoned lovers when they first see Emily. Kolve writes:

The two young knights fall in love with Emily for her beauty, unmistakably, but for the beauty of her freedom most of all. They cannot describe her – for they cannot see her – apart from the liberty and ease of her movement. From within prison they fall in love with a creature who seems to incarnate a condition the exact opposite of their own. (246)

In either case their love is unrequited. Both Palamon and Arcita selfishly want to rule over Emily, and in wishing so they reduce her to the status of a mere object.

Ironically Arcita and Palamon know that they will never be released from prison, so whoever saw Emily first is of no consequence anyway. Yet one day Arcita does receive his freedom when Perotheus, a duke and a childhood friend of Theseus comes to Athens. Perotheus knows Arcita at Thebes and he entreats Theseus to set Arcita free. Theseus agrees to free Arcita under the condition that he will never set foot in Athens again. Upon attaining his freedom, Arcita begins to suffer even greater agony. He thinks that Palamon is the luckier one, since he will be able to see Emily every day through the window of his prison cell. The absence of his beloved strains his wits; he laments the cruelty of his fate:

He cried, 'Alas, the day that I was born!  
For I'm in a worse prison than before.  
Now it's my fate eternally to dwell  
Not in a purgatory, but in hell! (I, A, 1226-1229)

Arcita perceives his freedom as a reversal of fortune; his freedom has become hell and prison is recalled as a paradise. Although he is literally free, because he is banished from

vicinity of Emily he considers his soul to be imprisoned. Arcita is now “in another prison, the prison of love” (Kolve 93).

O my dear cousin Palamon! Cried he,  
 ‘It seems that in this case you’ve come out best,  
 How happily in prison you may rest!  
 In prison – no indeed, but paradise!  
 Yours is the luck in the throw of the dice,  
 For you have sight of her, I the absence.  
 ...  
 Well may I die in despair and distress!  
 Farewell my life, my joy, my happiness! (I, A, 1237-1252)

On the other hand upon realizing that Arcita has been set free, “[Palamon] created such an outcry, the great tower / Resounded with his bellowings and clamour” (I, A, 1279-1280). Unaware that his cousin has been exiled, Palamon imagines that Arcita will take up arms against Theseus to win Emily for his bride.

As you’re at large, no prisoner but free,  
 And a prince too, how great is your advantage:  
 Greater than mine, here dying in a cage.  
 For I must weep and wail while I’m alive,  
 With all that prison brings with it of grief;  
 And with the added pangs of love also,  
 Which doubles all my torment and woe.’ (I, A, 1294-1300)

Arcita meanwhile, continues to live in a state of grief. We are told that “like any conventional literary lover of the period, he languishes from grief” (Hallissy 60) until one night in a dream he sees Mercury, who prompts him to return to Athens. As his appearance has changed considerably on account of his grief, Arcita believes that no one will recognize him and he will be safe. So trusting his dream, he goes to Athens, finds a job in the palace of Theseus near Emily, and as a result of his noble disposition he even gains Theseus’ trust. In the meantime, Palamon, after serving his seventh year in prison, finds a way to escape. Hoping to find Emily and marry her, Palamon even plans to wage war against Theseus: “...he’d either lose his life / Or else win Emily to be his wife “(I, A, 1487-1488). One day in May, the month of lovers, while Palamon is hiding in the woods, Arcita wanders into the same woods in order to be alone. Unaware of Palamon hiding close enough to hear him, Arcita invokes the gods and begins confessing to them about his

current situation. Arcita, “behaving like the conventional courtly lover” (Hallissy 61) praises the beauty of nature, laments the cruelty of his fate and confesses out loud his unrequited love towards Emily. Upon hearing Arcita, Palamon reveals himself and furiously gives Arcita an ultimatum: either Arcita should stop loving Emily or Palamon shall kill him (though in fact he has no weapons of any sort). At this, Arcita offers him food and clothing for the night, and a knight’s armour for the duel they agree to have the following morning. In other words, Arcita offers Palamon an equal chance and a fair fight, as a noble knight would do.

Next morning, while Theseus, his wife Hippolyta and his sister-in-law Emily are hunting in the same wood with a large company, they happen to come to the spot where Palamon and Arcita have begun fighting. Theseus interrupts their combat to ask who they are, and Palamon narrates their entire story. Not surprisingly, as they are his enemies Theseus wants to kill them both. His wife, Emily and the other ladies in their company begin to weep and beg him for his clemency. Being a noble and magnanimous ruler, Theseus forgives the knights, one for breaking the rules of exile, the other for escaping from prison. He decides to arrange a great tournament a year later in their honor and tells each to bring with him one hundred fully armed knights to fight for his cause along with him. The winner of the tournament will marry Emily. As Hallissy rightly points out it is clear at this point in the story that “a typical romance heroine, Emelye is the reward for male prowess” (64).

Theseus prepares for the tournament by constructing an enormous amphitheatre in the grove where Arcita and Palamon had skirmished. By its gates, he erects three shrines to the pagan deities: one for Venus, the goddess of love, one for Mars, the god of war, and one for Diana, the goddess of chastity. Hallissy explains that Chaucer’s narrative of the pre-Christian deities resembles medieval Christian devotion to saints:

The pre-Christian characters of the “Knight’s Tale” would have delighted in such shrines to their favorite gods and goddesses, much as the medieval Christian loved the many side chapels in medieval churches dedicated to saints. Like those chapels, the three oratories have wall-paintings and wall carvings featuring the iconography of the god or goddess to whom the shrine was dedicated. (64)

Chaucer gives a lengthy description of each shrine with wall paintings, carvings and statues highlighting the characteristic features of the deities. The description starts with Venus, the goddess of love. She is associated with suffering, longing and pain of love:

The broken sleeps, the shuddering and cold  
Sighs, the sacred tears, and doleful wailings,  
The fiery stings, the longings and desirings,  
That all Love's servants in this life endure; (I, A, 1914-1917)

Furthermore Venus is depicted as naked but as wearing a rose garland in her hair with doves fluttering above her head. In front of her sits her son Cupid, winged and blind. He carries shining arrows and a bow.

Then we are given an image of Diana, the goddess of chastity. In the description of Diana, several mythological characters are mentioned such as Callisto who upon offending Diana was transformed into a bear and then became the northern star. There is also Actaeon, who was turned into a stag “for punishment; he'd seen Diana naked” (I, A, 2056), and who was later eaten by his own dogs. Since Diana is also a goddess of the hunt and the protector of childbirth, her statue shows all her traits; she is depicted holding her bows and arrows with her hunting dogs, while before her sits a woman in labor, crying out for Diana's help. Finally we move into the altar of Mars the powerful god of war. In this alter Chaucer “stresses all the misfortunes connected with the dark angry god of war” (Hallissy 65), and Mars is portrayed as a menacing and ferocious character. Images of brutality, blood, fire, and dead bodies complement his nature. Treachery, Anger, Fear, Madness, Mischance, and Outrage are the companions of Mars. He is armed, standing upon a cart with a fierce, bloodthirsty wolf standing in front of him.

Twelve months pass and the day of the battle finally arrives. “Like any medieval knight before a great battle, each of the participants prays for success” (Hallissy 66). On the eve of battle Palamon prays to Venus to grant him success in winning his love. Palamon is a typical courtly lover; he is a man of words and he is ruled by his emotions. He prays to Venus, vowing that he does not care about success in war or attainment of glory as a knight; he only wants Emily to become his wife. If he cannot have her, he wishes to be killed by Arcita, since only death would quell the pain of losing his beloved to his rival:

I have no wish to brag of feats of arms,  
 Nor that tomorrow should bring victory,  
 Nor for renown, nor for the hallow glory  
 Of honour won, trumpeted up and down;  
 But I what I want is the sole possession  
 Of Emily ... (I, A, 2231-2236)

In response Palamon receives a sign from Venus, signifying acceptance of his prayer. Arcita prays to Mars beseeching the god of war to allow him to win the battle so that he can win his lady. Arcita being more a pragmatic knight thinks of the task set for him in achieving his aim and prays accordingly. He asks Mars to help him win the battle:

I must by my strength win her in the lists;  
 And well I know that without help or grace  
 From you, my lord, my strength will not avail.  
 Then give me aid tomorrow in the battle, (I, A, 2389-2392)

Like Palamon, Arcita receives a positive sign from the god whom he entreated. Emily, on the other hand, beseeches Diana to distract both men from loving her, as she wishes to remain a maid in the service of Diana. If that is not possible she wishes to be the wife of the one who loves her the most. Suddenly Diana appears and tells her that one of the knights will be her husband.

Due to the confusion caused by the acquiescence of all three gods to the entreaties of their worshippers, Jupiter is asked to intervene and settle the matter in an equitable way. He decrees that neither of the men should die. Consequently, in order to avoid any unnecessary deaths, Theseus orders the knights to quit the field if they become wounded. Since Palamon is the first to be wounded, he is forced to stop fighting as decreed by Theseus. Accordingly, Theseus declares Arcita the victor of the contest: "Arcita of Thebes shall have Emily, / ... she has been fairly won" (I, A, 2645-2646). The judgement is quite arbitrary, in that it was not even Arcita who wounded Palamon. Nor does the judgement allow for the possibility that Palamon might have succeeded had he been allowed to continue. At any rate, Arcita wins Emily and she in response bestows a "friendly" (I, A, 2667) look upon him. It is here that we encounter a very important statement about the situation of women of the time. Chaucer writes that "for, generally speaking, all women / Follow whoever's favoured by Fortune" (I, A, 2668-2669). That is, women accept whatever fortune brings, and thus Emily accepts Arcita with an open heart as she knows



that her fate is settled and there is no point in fighting against it. Feeling cheated, Venus weeps with shame that her knight lost, until Saturn calms her and signals that all is not over. Saturn has other plans; he causes an earthquake which mortally wounds Arcita.

Before he dies, Arcita speaks to Emily in favour of Palamon and he tells her that Palamon is a man to be loved and that she should be happy to have him as a husband. Theseus arranges to have Arcita to be buried with great honor as a knight – in fact, more like a king, since he is clothed in a golden costume, white gloves, etc. All of Athens mourns Arcita's death, but Emily, Theseus, and Palamon are especially affected by the death of the knight. Their grief is so inconsolable that even after many years both Emily and Palamon continue being dressed in black and mourn and lament for Arcita's death. Emily "wept both night and day" (I, A, 2806). After the funeral, Theseus speaks to Palamon and Emily about the transience of life and points out that for knights to die at the peak of their fame, and so to be remembered "it's best, as regards his good name / To die when he is at the height of fame" (I, A, 3038-3039). In the end, Theseus marries Palamon and Emily, and they live happily ever after. In other words we see all the prophecies come true at the end of the tale since in line with Mars' promise Arcita wins the battle but loses Emily, while Palamon as agreed by Venus, is defeated in battle but wins his lady's hand in marriage.

#### **b. Emily and Courtly Love in *The Knight's Tale***

As is the case in most courtly love narratives, Emily is the ideal lady and she is ostensibly at the center of *The Knight's Tale*. Chaucer's portrayal of Emily is conventional: "Emily is a potentially idealized abstraction of womanhood in the tradition of medieval romance of chivalry" (Hornstein 118). She is depicted as an unattainable celestial creature, a symbol of perfect beauty in the eyes of Arcita and Palamon. The setting in which she is presented is stereo typical for courtly romances. She is walking in a beautiful but closed garden, filled with lilies and roses. The time of the year is May, the month of lovers. These are "traditional motif(s) of courtly romance ..." (Cooper 2001, 69). As Cooper explains "the alternating references to Emily and to May associate her indissolubly with the month of love; the lilies and the roses to which she is compared ... associate her further with purity and love" (1998, 196). Emily's freshness and the freshness of the garden are totally "intermingled" (Cooper 2001, 69). With her beauty, blonde hair and rosy cheeks more

beautiful than the finest flowers of spring: “She has practically become part of nature” (Woods 7).

Till so happened, in the month of May,  
That Emily, lovelier to look upon  
Than is the lily on its stalk of green,  
And fresher than the May with flowers new  
For with the rose’s colour strove her hue,  
Nor can I tell the lovelier of the two (I, A, 1079-1084)

When Palamon and Arcita see her in the garden, they are enthralled by her intoxicating beauty and both men fall passionately in love with her - at first sight, from afar - without even having spoken to her. In fact, “[o]nly her beauty speaks to them, and [it is] ... compelling ... [enough] ... to transform their lives” (Crane 83). The portrayal of Emily in the garden scene is vivid and serene: “She is a proper romance heroine, she is ideally beautiful and engaged in graceful symbolic activities” (57 Hallissy), wearing fresh clothes, her hair braided, singing and gathering colorful flowers:

Picture her clad in color fresh and gay:  
Her yellow hair was plaited in a tress  
Behind her back, a yard in length I’d guess.  
And in the garden, while the sun uprises,  
She wanders here and there, and as she pleases  
Goes gathering flowers, mixing white and red,  
To weave a graceful garland for her head; (I, A, 1093-1099)

Woods draws attention to the effect and the significance of space and place in *The Canterbury Tales*. According to him, spaces or places play an important role in relation to the identities of the characters. With regards to *The Knight’s Tale*, he points to the way some of the characters in that narrative are identified with the spaces or places that they are in: “Emelye in her garden, Palamon and Arcite dueling in the grove – all occupy spaces or places that quietly manifests social identity and individual attention, furthering the narrative without seeming to do so” (2). To this effect, Emily’s introduction to the tale in the garden scene plays a significant role: “[H]er behavior in the garden scene speaks eloquently of who she is and what we may expect from her” (Woods 3). Moreover, Woods explains that Emily’s interaction with her peaceful garden reflects her state of being. Emily strolls in the garden and gathers white and red flowers. She sings happily “like an angel out of heaven” (I, A, 1060). She is a happy young woman, “in tune with her surroundings,

expressing who she is within a natural space that resonates with the presence of her identity” (Woods 23). The beauty of the garden and Emily’s presence complement each other: her “state of being [is] something close to beatific” (Woods 7). In this Edenic garden, she is like an aesthetic object with her lovely body, the freshness of her beauty, and her heavenly voice.

Everything about her suggests perfection and goodness. She is presented as a being that is “above all created beings” (I, A, 2755). Like the Virgin Mary, which her angelic beauty and her maidenhood seem intended to evoke, she is initially portrayed as a semi-divine lady who wishes to remain a spotless maiden throughout her life. What’s more, Chaucer’s association of Emily with brightness, as in the lines, “fair and radiant Emily” (I, A, 1073), emphasizes her purity and unsullied beauty. And even her visual perfection draws the knights’ attention at first sight and “emphasizes her availability to the pleasures of looking,” at the same time we understand that in “her distance from her male desirers, her unavailability, and her unconsumability; there is no question here of anyone’s touching or tasting her” (Miller 85). Her unattainability is communicated via her immense beauty, and it leads Palamon to hyperbolize the situation by calling her a goddess.

However, apart from Emily’s symbolic beauty, she has no qualifications. She is depicted as a passive young woman with no individual character traits. Emily is a “paragon of beauty” and yet we know very little else about her (Rossignol 143). She remains silent until the time we hear her pray to the goddess of chastity, Diana, and reveal her wish that she does not want to get married since she wants to remain a virgin. She says:

O you chaste goddess, you know well that I  
 Desire to be a virgin all my life,  
 Never to be a mistress or a wife.  
 You know I’m still one of your company,  
 A virgin, and a lover of chase, (I, A, 2296-2300)

Her prayer reveals her lack of interest in either of her two suitors, but when she is told that she must marry, then she asks for the one “that most desires” (I, A, 2317) her. Yet, her will is not important, since she is forced into marriage by her brother-in-law and is not allowed to stay a virgin. At the end of the tale we see her as a completely submissive woman. Elizabeth Scala points out that she is “merely a name” or “merely a symbol of noble men’s

desires". She occupies a "tantalizingly empty, mirror like role" in the poem (108). It seems clear, therefore, as Scala explains, that though Emily appears to be at the center of the story, the dominant characters are Arcita and Palamon and the central theme is the two knights' desire to possess her. Consequently she exists chiefly as an object of love, desire, and she awaits her final disposition according to the outcome of a tournament. It is the men's world where women are treated as objects.

It is also worth mentioning – and a matter of great irony - that Emily is the younger sister of Hippolyta, the Amazon queen whom Theseus defeated in battle and took as his bride. As Queen of the Amazons, Hippolyta, once the ruler of a female centered society, loses both her autonomy and her power when she becomes the wife of Theseus. Conversely, Theseus's victory entitles him to absolute authority over both Hippolyta and Emily. In the case of Emily, moreover, we see that she does not even have the right to refuse an undesired marriage arrangement - her wishes are completely disregarded; indeed, she is not even consulted. In the story, Emily's Amazonian identity is superceded by her presentation as a medieval courtly lady whose beauty, fairness, and elegant manners make her a perfect representative of a courtly beloved. Furthermore, she stands for the ideal medieval Christian lady who is totally passive and submissive to her lord. In her Essay titled *Amazonian Queens or Gender Trouble as Political Trouble*, Nancy Bradley Warren comments on the problematic identities of the Amazonian sisters Hippolyta and Emily. They are members of a race of women warriors, and yet "their identity plays almost no role at all in the tale" (Warren 96). Hippolyta is a captive bride and Emily is completely silent. They remain completely submissive to men, for both women have repressed their past: "Hippolyta and Emelye are foreign women, brought home and 'domesticated'" (96). Once again we recognize the pattern of masculine dominance, feminine submission and loss of feminine agency that was so typical of the institution of marriage in the medieval world: "An unattached woman of high rank would have her marriage arranged by her male protector, usually her father. Here Theseus, her brother-in-law, plays this role" (Hallissy 63).

The changes that occur in Emily's character throughout the tale are noteworthy. We hear her first when she prays to Diana. She entreats the goddess of chastity to save her from having to marry at all. As has been mentioned previously, when the goddess gives her a

sign that she has to marry one of the knights, she immediately accepts the situation and beseeches Diana to grant her the one who loves her the most. Later, when Arcita dies, like an ideal wife, she displays considerable grief at his funeral and mourns his death for several years. In the end, when she is finally given to Palamon in marriage, again like an ideal wife “Emily loves him so tenderly” (I, A, 3086) that the two live happily ever after. Emily accepts whatever life brings her, and moves from being one symbol to another, accepting each time the roles assigned to her, first by the goddess Diana and then by Theseus.

The depiction of Emily as perceived by her lovers is also noteworthy, there being a fundamental difference between the ways that Palamon and Arcita speak of their mutual beloved. Palamon’s language is one of adoration and reverence, whereas Arcita’s is worldly and passionate. When Palamon sees Emily, he falls in love with her idealized image. In fact, he extols her beauty so much that for him she resembles Venus. Palamon says, “I don’t know if she’s woman or goddess, / But it is really Venus I would guess” (I, A, 1105-1106). He thinks that Emily must be the goddess of beauty, Venus herself, and he prays to Venus to grant him her love. Thus, Palamon’s love towards Emily is in the tradition of unattainable divine love. It is like a “religious feeling” (I, A, 1162), in which the beloved is thought to be standing on a high pedestal. In other words, Palamon sees the reflection of God in the person of his beloved; it is “as though her expressive capacities were a marker of a special proximity to the divine” (Miller 86). For Arcita, on the other hand Emily is the provoker of his physical desire. When he first sees Emily, for example, he is overwhelmed by her beauty and says; “Beauty so fresh destroys me, as I look / Of her who wanders yonder in that place” (I, A, 1122-1123). Later on he explains to his cousin that he is more entitled to possess her since “mine is real love, love of a human being” (I, A, 1163). We can define Arcita’s love towards Emily as earthly love. since he claims to feel bodily desires for her. While it is true that Arcita idealizes Emily’s beauty as well, the distinction in the nature of their love for Emily is maintained throughout the tale and for both of them she remains the unattainable lady - at least until the end. Hallissy explains the similarities and differences between descriptions of the chivalric lovers and their beloveds with Emily and her suitors in *The Knights Tale*. “To the courtly lover, the lady is pure, beautiful and inaccessible,” like Emily. She tells us that “the courtly lover is her abject worshipper” similar to Palamon, who perceives in Emily a goddess. We see moreover that

this kind of love relationship widely observed in courtly romances also resembles the love of a devout Christian to God and His mother Virgin Mary: Hallissy tells us that “as (the) medieval Christian adored the Virgin Mary, so the lover adores his lady” (59).

Chaucer’s description of Emily, however, is slightly different from the portrayal of woman in chivalric love poetry. In both the woman is described as an unattainable being who embodies both physical and spiritual perfection. She is fair and beautiful, and it is her beauty and her passivity that attract her lovers - not her reality, i.e. her character. As was mentioned above, the image of the lady in chivalric romances exists in the poet’s mind; she is a voiceless image, existing only through the words of the poet. In the second half of *The Knights Tale* on the other hand Emily appears as a being in her own right. Although she is still extremely submissive and silent, she is a real character with thoughts and emotions of her own. It is true that throughout the story she remains an icon of men’s desire and an object of adoration and her physical beauty definitely outshines her character, her thoughts, her actions and feelings. The loveliness of Emily and her lack of individuality and willpower as well as her failure to accomplish her desires are underlined throughout the tale. At the end, however, love is consummated, we are told that Emily returns Palamon’s love and is happy to be his wife. The story finishes like a fairy tale; “And Emily loves him so tenderly, / And he loves and serves her so devotedly” (I, A, 3086-3087).

Although this is only a tale, the criticism of the institution of marriage in the Middle Ages is also forcefully and ironically displayed. The fact that arranged marriages allowed women almost no right to have a life of their own is underlined. Warren comments on the social reality of women in the Middle Ages by referring to the examples of Hippolyta and Emily, who were once rulers and warriors themselves but in Theseus’ court “turn into women who embody precisely the ‘proper’, heavily gendered, roles accepted for medieval royal women” (Warren 96).

### **III. Sir Thomas Malory, Chivalric Romance and Courtly Love**

Sir Thomas Malory (1405-1471) lives and writes almost a century after Chaucer’s composition of *The Knight’s Tale* (1384-1389). We know from medieval records that during Malory’s time, at least noble British women have a greater say in family matters

and the affairs of the state than their predecessors. Indeed sixty-two years following Malory's death, Queen Elizabeth I ascends the British throne.

Sir Thomas Malory lived in a century full of political uncertainties. Fifteenth century was a time of turbulence; the nobility were divided between the 'Lancastrians' who supported Henry VI, and the 'Yorkists' who were loyal to the duke of York. This conflict, known as the Wars of the Roses, lasted for thirty-five years in the history of England. In her introduction to *Le Morte Darthur*, Helen Cooper reports that little personal information survived from this period regarding Sir Thomas Malory of Newbolt Revel in Warwickshire. Nevertheless, it is recorded that he was knighted in 1441, that he worked in various public offices, and that he was a Member of Parliament. He is also known to have served as a noble knight until 1450 when he inexplicably turned to a life of crime and violence including rape, extortion, and attempted assassination, etc. He was incarcerated yet escaped twice from prison, and he is thought to have written *Le Morte Darthur* during one of his periods of imprisonment. The novel was finished in 1470, the author died a year later, in 1471 (Cooper 2008, x). Thomas Malory's *Le Morte Darthur* was printed in 1485 by William Caxton, in the year when the Tudor dynasty came to reign. The obvious disparity between Malory's life and his work has led people to suspect that he was not the true author of the work. As Cooper argues, "The golden ideal of chivalry", which he introduces in his work, is totally the opposite of the life he lived (2008, 10).

#### **A. King Arthur in History, Legends and Literature**

Arthurian legend is a body of stories centering on the legendary King Arthur and the adventures of his Knights of the Round Table. These legends inspired some of the most important works of European literature, particularly in the medieval period. Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain* and the romances of Chrétien de Troyes and Malory's *Le Morte Darthur* are only some of the examples that draw attention. Written in the 1130's, Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain* "first made Arthur into the great British hero ..." (Cooper 2008, vii). Laura C. Lambdin reports in *Arthurian Writers* that *History* chronicles the lives of the British rulers starting with Brutus around 1100 BC, to Cadwallader's fall around 689 AD; and Geoffrey of Monmouth is the writer "to put Arthur in the line of British kings" (30). His account of the Arthurian story contains the names of Arthur's famous warriors Sir Gawain and Sir Kay, as well as Arthur's traitorous nephew

Mordred, whose attempt to usurp the crown in the absence of Arthur leads ultimately to their fatal battle against one another (Cooper 2008, vii). Following Monmouth, Arthurian stories gained popularity in England and were retold several times. The character Sir Gawain became the most popular knight of Arthurian Legends in England, and following this tradition, the romance of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (ca 1375-1400) came to life in the Medieval English Period (Cooper 2008, viii).

In the 1160's, French poet Chrétien de Troyes composed the first French romances on Arthur and the individual knights of the Round Table, including Erec, Lancelot, and Pervacal: "It is in these that Lancelot first achieves prominence, as the lover of Guenivere and as Arthur's best knight, displacing Gawain" (Cooper 2008, vii). Chrétien is believed to have been connected with the court of Eleanor of Aquitaine and Marie de Champagne, and like other works under the patronage of the court of Aquitaine, he wrote about courtly love. As Lambdin argues, the romances of Chrétien de Troyes entail the emergence of conventions of chivalry and courtly love in the Arthurian story: "he transformed brutal warriors into elegant statesmen and lovers" (37). Just as Geoffrey had done in England, Chrétien de Troyes popularized King Arthur in France: "The fashion started by [him] initiated an extraordinary literary flowering of Arthurian materials across Europe" (Cooper 2008, viii). Following Chrétien, new Arthurian romances were composed in France and translated into many languages. Written by various authors, prose romances of the thirteenth century explored major themes, specifically the quest for the Holy Grail, the story of Merlin, the adventures of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table, the love affair between Lancelot and Guenivere, and the death of Arthur. This vast body of works is called the Vulgate cycle (a.k.a. Lancelot – Grail cycle) (Cooper 2008, viii). And finally comes the monumental work of Sir Thomas Malory, "which is regarded as the best and the most complete treatment of the story of Arthur and his knights" (Abrams 345). The analysis of *Le Morte Darthur* will be dealt with in detail in the subsequent pages.

## **B. Malory's Sources**

The main sources for the *Le Morte Darthur* include French romances known as the Vulgate Cycle, the French prose *Tristan*, and the two English poems *Morte Arthure* and *Le Morte Arthur*. In Terence McCarthy's essay entitled *Malory and his Sources*, the author gives detailed information about the above-mentioned works in explaining the primary



sources of Malory. According to McCarthy, Arthur's wizard counsellor Merlin is based on the French model *Suite du Merlin*, which Malory dealt with in a more condensed manner than the Vulgate romances (2000, 75). The next section, on the other hand, which describes Arthur's war against Emperor Lucius, is based on the Middle English alliterative *Morte Arthure*, though McCarthy notes that Malory changes the ending of the original work in which Arthur is killed (2000, 76). *The Tale of Sir Lancelot*, which is the shortest part of the book, is itself again based on extracts from the Vulgate Cycle, the *Prose Lancelot*, while the source of the largest section, *The Tale of Sir Tristram*, is a "separate but parallel prose romance known as the *Prose Tristan*" (McCarthy 2000, 75). The Grail quest is again adapted from a tale in the Vulgate Cycle called the *La Queste del Saint Graal*. Finally, the last book of the Vulgate Cycle, *La Mort le Roi Artu*, is regarded as the primary source of *The Tale of Sir Lancelot and Guenivere* and the *Death of Arthur* (Cooper 2008, xx). Like many Critics, McCarthy underlines the fact that the main source of these two sections is sometimes replaced by the "fifteenth century stanzaic English poem *Le Morte Arthur*", which is also an adaptation of the same French romance (2000, 77). Apart from the main sources listed above, Cooper notes that there are also other sources which are regarded as "less important" in Malory's creation, namely the works of the thirteenth century French author, Perlesvaus and the fifteenth century English chronicler, John Hardyng. She also adds that the episodes of *Tale of Sir Gareth* and the healing of Urry are without sources (2008, xx).

### C. *Le Morte Darthur*

The book is actually a compilation of Arthurian legends and stories that either belong to or are associated with King Arthur. Although it is uncertain whether Arthur lived or not, he was probably a British or Roman-British leader whose legendary stories surpassed his historical reality (Abrams 344-45). Malory's Arthurian romance gives a detailed story of Arthur's life: his birth, conquests, downfall, and tragic death along with the lives and deeds of the Knights of the Round Table such as Lancelot, Gareth and Tristram. Both King Arthur and the Round Table knights are depicted as perfect examples of ideal knighthood. They actually swear an oath compels them "to avoid treason and wrongful quarrels; to show mercy; never to offer violence, especially sexual violence, to gentlewomen (the aristocratic social basis is a premise almost universal in medieval romance, not least in

Arthurian material) and to fight on their behalf” (Cooper 2008, xiii). Abrams points to the foremost duty of all knights according to the convention saying; “chivalry is the code that governs the actions of the knight-adventurer who rides out in search of wrongs that he may right - typically in search of ladies who he may rescue from monsters, churls, and wicked knights” (345).

Throughout the book, Malory glorifies the ideals of courtly love and describes a knight’s duty to his lady in lines very similar to his duty to God (Cooper 2008, xiii). Cooper also draws attention to the love relationship in secular romances of the time. According to her; some of the courtly love romances of the time are actually based on the manner of love that “begins with courtship and sexuality that leads into marriage” as it is in the case of Gareth’s winning of Dame Lyonesse as his wife (2008, xiii). Yet the great majority are the narratives of adulterous relationships, which serve to underline the power of love that does not yield to “social taboos” like the illicit passion of Lancelot and Guinevere or Tristram and Isode (Cooper 2008, xiii). In *Le Morte Darthur* we find both sorts of love in which women are portrayed as beings with sexual desires, regardless of the constraints of the medieval culture.

With regard to the artistic style of the book, the prose is quite simple; language is the language of everyday speech, with almost no metaphors of any other figurative expression. Scholars of Malory such as McCarthy in commenting on the style of *Le Morte Darthur* says “[i]t is a powerful and intensely moving style and yet, apparently so simple; indeed, almost artless, unexpected” (1991, 124). Malory also does not describe the emotional of the individual worlds of his characters. His characters are portrayed dramatically through their combats and speeches; “he does not give thoughts or anything about inner life, he only presents speeches and actions” (Cooper 2008, xvii). In other words, the stylistic intricacies of the Arabic and Troubadour poems as well as the formal beauty and the philosophic depth of *The Knight’s Tale* are absent in *Le Morte Darthur*. But Malory is a master of drama and supersedes all his predecessors in portrayal of character. As Abrams points out “the majority of his (Malory’s) characters are masters of understatement who express themselves in moments of great emotional tension, with bare minimum words” (345). It is because of this that the paradoxes and dilemmas of courtly love, marriage and life in the feudal world come out so forcefully in *Le Morte Darthur*.

#### D. Women and Love in *Le Morte Darthur*

Geraldine Heng in his essay, *Enchanted Ground, The Feminine Subtext in Malory* explains that “The image of knightly culture on which that civilization is posited must assume feminine presence and assistance for its completion, yet also constitute the feminine in essentially subsidiary relation to masculinity” (97). Indeed, the female characters in the majority of chivalric romances are presented as “distressed creatures who create the need and opportunity for adventure for good knights” (McCarthy 1991, 51). As Heng justifiably argues, the role of the women even in *Le Morte Darthur* is crucial not only in displaying the norms and ideals of knighthood but also the different personalities of the knight. It is not possible to describe even the leading knights of the Round Table such as Lancelot and Tristan, for example, without talking about their attitude to Guenivere and Isode. On the other hand, the passive lady of courtly romance who plays the role of a catalyst for the knight to expose his valour and to outshine his peers is presented in *Le Morte Darthur* as person in her own right. Guenivere and Isode are strong women who are not controlled by their knights but control and even manipulate them. Guenivere dominates the greatest knight of the Round Table; Lancelot behaves as if he is bewitched by her, he is “ready to do anything in obedience to the queen’s desires” (Markale 73). Furthermore, Guinevere and the other beloveds of Round Table Knights are among the most closely and sympathetically presented characters in the book. They are compared and contrasted with one another and their distinctive qualities are highlighted. The evil ones, for example, engage in various magical practices as they search for a way to achieve their ends (Cooper 2008, xviii-xix). In discussing the power attributed to the female characters in *Le Morte Darthur*, Heng points out the power the ladies have over men, they are able to be the cause of men’s success or failure, salvation or destruction. She says:

Women also possess devices that restore, like Isode’s bracelet which reclaims Tristram to the world after and isolating madness. Objects of protection, like Lyonesse’s ring and Lyonet’s magical ointment, both so effective in securing Gareth’s good reputation, come from women, as do those of harm, such as Morgan le Fay’s dangerous cloak, horn and shield. (98)

In the great majority of tales, the adventures of the knights are instigated by women. Ladies demand help and thus the adventure begins. Ladies ask for a life to be pardoned,

and so someone lives. The existence of a strong woman makes events happen around her, like in the story of Gareth (Beaumains) and his grumpy damsel.

### **1. Courtly Love Leading to Marriage: Sir Gareth and Dame Lyonesse**

The tale begins as a damsel stops Gareth while he travels in the woods and asks him to save her sister who is held captive in a castle. On the way to the castle Gareth encounters and fights with many knights. Each time after Gareth overcomes a knight he asks the damsel if she wishes to save the life of the knight he has defeated. In response to the pleadings of defeated knights Gareth each time says: “All this availeth not, said Beaumains, but if my damsel pray me to save thy life” (Malory 133). Ironically, the damsel treats Gareth very badly and scorns him throughout the journey, but Gareth never ever thinks of giving her up. On the contrary, he claims that her scornful words inspire him to fight for her.

Gareth braves many perilous adventures just to save a lady whose name he does not even know. Chivalric traditions dictate that it is a knight’s duty to save ladies in need of help. When he finally reaches the castle, he sees the lady and falls in love with her at first sight: “She beseemeth afar the fairest lady that ever I looked upon; ... for truly she shall be my lady, and for her I will fight” (Malory, 142-143). The idea of ‘love at first sight’ is typical of the courtly love convention as was discussed in the love of Palamon and Arcita for Emily. Not surprisingly, Gareth wins the battle and rescues her. The lady, Dame Lyonesse, is ready to reward his achievements with her faithful, lifelong love, but she introduces one condition: he has to wait for twelve months to have her. As the tradition of courtly love dictates, she gets more and more unattainable in time due to her own scheming. After several pages in which the reader follows the tricky dame’s attempts to acquire some information about Sir Gareth's bloodline, she finally surrenders to his love, and their passionate love begins. Yet even now, events seem to be under control of the dame. Burning in “hot love” as Malory states (151), Sir Gareth is instructed by Dame Lyonesse to sleep in the hall, and she promises to come to his bed before midnight. The dame’s sister however finds the love between unmarried couples quite scandalous. Dame Lyonesse is depicted by Malory as a very powerful, dominant and independent woman who sees no indecency in going after her desires; in fact, there is no evidence that she even considers such an act as indecent. Her characterization and her role in the book is quite the opposite

of what we have seen in Chaucer's *The Knight's Tale*. The former story had events that revolved around the female character Emily, but we barely heard her voice, and we had almost no idea about what kind of a person she was. Emily lived a subservient life and though she preferred to be left alone and remain a virgin, she was made to marry first Arcita then Palamon. In contrast, Malory's Dame Lyonesse gets everything she wants done; she lives exactly how she pleases. She plays with love and men, and runs after her earthly impulses. Most of the female characters in *Le Morte Darthur* are like Dame Lyonesse, they have a tendency to behave in a self assertive manner. But we should not forget that Dame Lyonesse is not married. This situation implies that she does not commit the sin of adultery. Thus, among the knights of Malory, only Gareth finds a lady who is free to love.

The significance of virginity as an attribute of courtly love has also been pointed out in *Le Morte Darthur*. Cuddon explains that "the medieval tradition of devotion to the Virgin Mary also influenced the evolution of courtly love." (189). We can see in Gareth's story that remaining a maiden and consummating the relationship for the first time have to be reconciled in courtly love romances. Gareth (Beaumains) fights and defeats all the knights he encounters on his way to rescue Lyonesse from the Castle Perilous. During one of those adventures, he fights with Sir Persant who eventually is defeated, whereupon the lady with whom he is travelling entreats him to spare the life of the vanquished knight. Since a lady's wish is to be taken as an order, Gareth pardons Sir Persant's life. In return, Sir Persant says that he is thereafter under Gareth's command. They feast and Gareth goes to bed to rest. Sir Persant, as is fit for a noble man in the service of a knight, sends his maiden daughter to Gareth's bed, telling her to make him happy. She goes to Gareth's bed as ordered. When he wakes up and finds the girl in his bed, the maiden tries to explain why she is there. Gareth's first reaction is worthy of attention: "Be ye a pucelle or a wife?" he asks. At which the girl replies: "I am a clean maiden." (Malory, 137). He sends her away hastily, saying it would be a disgrace towards her father. She leaves, tells her father what happened. And, Sir Persant accepts the rejection of his daughter on account of her maidenhood considering such a rejection a noble gesture.

## 2. Courtly Love and Adultery: Lancelot and Guinevere

The most famous knight-lover in the book is Lancelot. He is the closest to Arthur and the most accomplished knight in the fellowship of the Round Table. His fame as a chivalric paradigm receives a fatal blow, however, due to his adulterous relationship with Arthur's queen, Guenivere. In fact, it is this liaison that brings about the end of the fellowship and causes the death of Arthur. Lancelot perceives his relationship with Guenivere as a sort of duty and denies the adulterous nature of their liaison, convincing himself that it is a 'service' towards the lady. Once again it is the female protagonist who manipulates and directs the relationship: Guenivere is a powerful and independent woman, the queen. Unlike Emily in *The Knight's Tale*, Guenivere is in charge of this relationship; she manipulates Lancelot and he justifiably feels like her servant. "Lancelot cannot make a move without the image of Guenivere entering into it. In fact Lancelot never acts on his behalf. ... he acts always and only on behalf of the ideal, prodigious, adulterous, infernal couple he forms with her" (Marlake 72-73).

Their relationship remains chaste for a very long time. In the Tristram section of *Le Morte Darthur*, Malory introduces another female character, Elaine, who is desperately in love with Lancelot. It is only when Guenivere understands that Elaine could be a potential competitor for Lancelot's affection that she decides to invite Lancelot to her bed. Ironically, both by accident and with the help of magic, Lancelot goes to Elaine's bed, thinking that Elaine is Guinevere. When Guenivere discovers that Lancelot is in bed with Elaine, the "Queen was nigh out of her wit, and then she writhed and weltered as a mad woman" (Malory 287). Lancelot realizes his mistake the following morning but it is too late; Guenivere accuses him of being unfaithful to her and banishes him. Lancelot goes mad from grief. He flees like a wild man and for two years nobody hears from him.

Throughout Malory's collection of tales, Guenivere does what her heart desires even though she is aware of the potentially risky consequences of her actions. At one point in the narrative, for example, knowing that Lancelot is not going with Arthur, she refuses to join Arthur under the pretence that she is ill. It is Guenivere who explains to Lancelot that people will gossip about their relationship when they realize the two have remained behind: "What will your enemies and mine say and deem? See how Sir Lancelot holdeth

him ever behind the King, and so the Queen doth also, for that they would have their pleasure together” (Malory 415). But criticism and gossip does not deter her from following her will. What’s more, she is depicted as a very jealous woman, easily moved by earthly impulses. Disregarding the fact that she is cheating on her husband, Guenivere at times blames Lancelot for betraying her with other ‘fair maidens’. Her rage can be so extreme that she might even send him away from the castle forever - as happens at the beginning of their courtly love narrative. Moreover, if somebody wishes to bed her against her will, unlike Emily of *The Knight’s Tale*, she has the courage and the voice to resist: “I will rather slay myself than go with thee” (Malory 447). In short, submission as the defining characteristic of a Christian woman and/or a courtly beloved is not to be found in Guenivere. Guenivere acts submissively only when she chooses to sacrifice her will in order to save the lives of her noble knights as in the episode of *The Knight of the Cart*. Despite all the unflattering characteristics that Malory attributes to Guenivere, he admits one especially positive quality in her: that she is a “true lover” (444).

Elaine, the Fair Maiden of Ascolat, presents a foil to Guenivere. Both Elaine and Guenivere love Lancelot but the quality of their love and the way they display it are very different. Elaine meets Lancelot when her father arranges a jousting tournament. She helps Lancelot disguise himself and falls deeply in love with him. Unlike most of the ladies in courtly love romances or in *Le Morte Darthur*, she pursues her love, and openly wishes her love to be returned: “my love is he. God would that I were his love!” (Malory 424). Going even further, she actually proposes to Lancelot and is even ready to accept any form of relationship: “Sir, I would have you to my husband. ... wed me or be my paramour at least” (Malory 432-433). While her forwardness is striking, it burdens Lancelot as he finds it hard to refuse her love. And such is the intensity of her love that when Lancelot is gone for good, she ceases eating and drinking and after ten days she is on the brink of death. When asked to give up on him, she speaks of her love in such a tender fashion that we feel we are witnessing the most ‘divine’ expression of love that we see in the book. She states that love, actually good love, comes from God, and God created her so, and she loves Lancelot with the love she received from God:

Am I not an earthly woman? And all the while the breath is in my body I may complain me, for my belief is that I do no offence, though I love an earthly man, unto God; for He formed me hereto, and all

manner of good love cometh of God, and other than good love loved I never Sir Lancelot du Lake. And I take God to record, I loved never non but him, nor never shall die for so noble a knight. (Malory 434)

She begs for mercy from Heaven for the “innumerable pains” (Malory 434) which befell her while in pursuit of the love of the noble knight. Then she instructs her father and brother of her wishes after her death, and soon she passes away. “Love brings pain and suffering, and, at times even death” (McCarthy 1991, 52). In other words, she actually dies of a broken heart from her unrequited love.

Elaine is not a fully developed character, but Malory carefully frames her psychology; her pain, her grief and her state of mind. McCarthy comments on the relationship between Elaine and Lancelot calling it “a reversal of courtly tradition” as she does all the courting and serving for their union (1991, 69). He adds that, Elaine “is the only lady in *Le Morte Darthur* whose heart Malory gives us a glimpse of” (1991, 69), as she declares her love towards Lancelot openly and sincerely, saying that “he is the man in the world that I first loved, and truly he shall be the last that ever I shall love” (Malory 423).

The death of Elaine is followed soon after by the May passage, a short digression from the main events of the story which nevertheless emphasizes one of the tropes of courtly literature. There is a detailed description of that “lusty month of May” (Malory 443), the month of lovers, as we have also seen in *The Knight's Tale* when the lusty hearts “beginneeth to blossom and burgeon” with the force of the renewal of nature. In this episode, Malory also comments on the matter of love: “Therefore, like as May month flowereth and florisheth in every man’s garden, so in likewise let every man of worship flourish his heart in this world, first unto God, and next unto the joy of them that he promised his faith unto” (Malory 444). Malory’s characters are called to love in the month of May, but he reminds them of their priorities: God comes first and then the beloved to whom the lover pledges his love and faith: “Knightly service is motivated first of all by devotion to God, and secondly by devotion to a lady” (McCarthy 1991, 65). Finally, Malory comments on the instability of the lovers of his time in relation to the ideals of Arthur’s day. For him, the lovers of his time are impetuous and fickle, “soon hot, soon cold” (Malory 444), whereas ‘old love’, he recalls, is ‘true’ and ‘faithful’. This ‘old love’, is the kind of love found in King Arthur’s day and Queen Guenivere is the “true lover”



(Malory 444). Nevertheless, despite all the romantic theorizing, McCarthy thinks that Malory's lecture on love in the May passage is actually there "to justify his lovers" and to prepare the reader for the upcoming sexual congress between Lancelot and Guenivere (1991, 64).

The following episode is called *The Knight of the Cart* and opens with Queen Guinevere's maying with her ten knights - unarmed except for swords - along with their ladies and their servants. Noticing that Lancelot is not around, Sir Meliagaunt, who has long lusted after the queen, seizes the opportunity and kidnaps Guenivere and her knights. Having learned his lady is in the hands of Meliagaunt, Lancelot immediately hastens to rescue her. Lancelot rescues the lady and threatens to kill Meliagaunt, whereupon Meliagaunt promptly throws himself at the queen's mercy. That night, Lancelot gains access to the queen's chamber and bed but cuts his hand severely while prying open the iron bars of her chamber window. At her request he lies with her and these few sentences account for the only instance of apparent sexual intercourse that we find in the book. Although the whole book revolves around the actions of these two main characters, the climactic point of the story is kept to a brief minimum: "Sir Lancelot went to bed with the Queen and took no force of his hurt hand, but took his pleasance and his liking until it was the dawning of the day; for wit you well, he slept not, but watched" (Malory 453). Elizabeth Edwards, in her essay *The Place of Women in the Morte Darthur*, notes that although Malory's Arthurian sources included more erotic description of this scene, Malory has kept it short, probably because he "means to suggest, unlike his sources, that love relations do not necessarily include sexual relations" (51).

The indirect consequences of Lancelot's and Guinevere's adulterous relationship are the death of King Arthur, the collapse of his kingdom, and the end of the fellowship of the Round Table. Knowing that she must redeem herself, Guinevere makes another choice in the end which again highlights her strength of will and powerful emotions. She repents and commits herself to a life in convent, a world in which her future actions can have no possible bearing on any king or kingdom. Even there, her faithful lover Lancelot seeks her out, ready to propose marriage. Upon seeing him though, Guenivere recalls all the damage they have brought about: "Through this same man and me hath all this war been wrought,

and the death of the most noblest knights of the world; for through our love that we have loved together is my most noble lord slain” (Malory 520). Guinevere understands the consequences of her choices and takes responsibility for the actions that she has committed. She refuses earthly happiness with Lancelot and chooses to lead a spiritual life in which she hopes to attain salvation. In fact, we understand that she still loves Lancelot since she swoons from the flood of her emotions. However, she sends Lancelot away so that she “may have a sight of the blessed face of Christ Jesus and at Doomsday to sit on His right side” (Malory 520). She has started a new life in the presence of her Lord Jesus Christ and advises Lancelot to do the same: “She is his inspiration here; just as she inspired him to feats of chivalric prowess earlier, now she inspires him to perhaps and even greater feat of spiritual strength” (Wollock 146). Like Guenivere, Lancelot chooses the way of the spirit in the end and they are separated forever. Their mutual redemption is fitting, since “[I]n a way, Malory’s handling of the end of the relationship between Lancelot and Guenivere is a kind of exploration of the potential of courtly love, even adulterous courtly love of the most shocking kind, to transform itself into divine love” (Wollock 146).

To sum up, the role attributed to Guinevere makes it hard to identify her function in the book. As a queen and as a wife, she has responsibilities not only to her husband, but also to her people. These facts should deter her from having an illegitimate relation with anyone, not to mention her husband’s greatest knight. However, she is a woman who follows her heart’s desires and this characteristic compels her to accept Lancelot’s courtship, as is the usual case in the courtly love tradition. At the same time as Edwards explains she is not above exercising her power over her lover:

Guinevere is imperious, impulsive, and sometimes witty. She exercises her power by exiling Lancelot on several occasions, usually when she is in a jealous rage. Her power is that absolute power of the beloved in the courtly love tradition, which is revealed as merely the power to reject; the exercise of that power labels her as a capricious, cruel and arbitrary in the view of her husband and other knights. (50)

Likewise, Fries also comments on the representation of Guinevere as a courtly beloved. He refers to two different archetypes of the courtly lady by comparing Dante’s Beatrice with Guenivere. To Fries, Beatrice represents the spiritual and physical perfection of one who “draws men to goodness from the heights to which her poet has raised her”, whereas he

calls Guenivere “the negative archetype of courtly lady”. Although Guenivere is beautiful and inspirational like Beatrice, “she is ultimately an unchaste destructive woman” (48).

As for Lancelot, being a courtly lover means he becomes his lady’s vassal and struggles to prove his devotion and fidelity to her through his noble service. In many episodes, for example, Guenivere is charged with infidelity and condemned to be burned at the stake. However, Lancelot is always there to save her life and defend her reputation. He submits to the wishes of her love and becomes her servant in love. And even though a sorceress and several comely maidens attempt to entice him over the course of various episodes, he remains immune to any temptation other than that of his lady Guenivere. Cooper notes that the love towards women is taken as something that completes a man’s perfection: “His [Lancelot’s] physical superiority and his faithfulness to the terms to the Round Table oaths together make him the paragon of knightliness; by the time of Malory’s great lyric encomium on love, his devotion to Guinevere is included as a part of that excellence” (2008, xiii-xiv).

As an ideal knight and a courtly lover, Lancelot’s faithfulness and devotion to Guenivere perfectly fits Capellanus’ list of thirty-one rules of love, mentioned in the second chapter of this thesis. For example, rule number twelve states that “A true lover does not desire to embrace in love anyone except his beloved” (185). Even though he gets seduced by Elaine and in another adventure he is offered a very sincere and genuine offer of love from Elaine of Ascolat, Lancelot does not for one moment consider betraying Lady Guenivere, to whom he has devoted his body and soul. Likewise, rule number twenty-four informs us that “Every act of a lover ends in the thought of his beloved” (185), wherein we recall Lancelot’s unquestioning efforts to save his beloved’s life and her reputation. Rule number twenty-five, finally, maintains that “A true lover considers nothing good except what he thinks will please his beloved” (185). We recognize here that Lancelot’s actions on every occasion are imbedded in his desire to prove his holy devotion and fidelity to his lady; this type of obedience is a typical courtly love characteristic: the lady/vassal relationship. Her desire is above everything; and thus the lover-knight must happily respond to his lady’s desire (Markale 39).

As we have seen, the most vivid and real-life female characters described so far are those created by Malory. His female characters are powerful, bold, and sometimes ill-tempered.

They manipulate men using their social power and femininity and they are not submissive at all. They are demanding and authoritative, unlike the male characters, who seem too submissive and compliant when it comes to their service in love. Ironically, however, it is precisely their wish to 'serve' to the lady that propels all the action in Malory's tales. The demands and manipulations of the women set the plot in motion and stir the knights to action. The love described in *Le Morte Darthur* is basically worldly displaying all the paradoxes and dilemmas inherent extramarital relations even if they follow strictly the idealized conventions of courtly love. We can catch a glimpse of divine love in Elaine of Ascolat's story through her ardent devotion to Lancelot. We can understand how human love can mirror divine love and be a step in the experience of a transcendental love.

Whatever the events of a love affair may bring, Malory puts emphasis on faithful love within the context of the ideals of chivalry. For example, despite the many difficulties and conflicts Lancelot faces throughout the book, he maintains his love and his service to his lady against all the entanglements as part of his chivalric code. Not only does he believe his personal behaviour reflects a knightly attitude, but he expects other knights to behave likewise as well. He even scorns such an exemplary knight as Tristram, who marries Isode in spite of the mutual love he shared with his uncle's wife, La Belle Isode. For Lancelot, Tristram should never have married Isode, but rather should have remained faithful to his mistress. The belief that happiness and true love exist only outside of marriage is a typical characteristic of courtly love romances. The lone exception for this is found in the story of Sir Gareth and Dame Lyonesse, their passionate love is sealed with matrimony. It should not be forgotten, however, that according to Capellanus' *The Art of Courtly Love*, love cannot survive in marriage. Only when love is under constant threat, is subject to temptation and fear of loss, as in the extra-marital courtly love relationship of Guinevere and Lancelot, it can renew itself, flourish and gain strength.

## CONCLUSION

In 1859 Kipling begins the epic poem *The Ballad of East and West* with the observation that “East is East and West is West, and never the twain shall meet.” Yet despite the poet’s seemingly dire prognosis, they have met countless times. In fact, careful readers will note that Kipling understood this when, in the third and fourth lines of the poem, he concludes: “But there is neither East nor West, Border, nor Breed, nor Birth, / When two strong men stand face to face, though they come from the ends of the earth!” (quoted by Smid 1). In other words, when two strong cultures face each other, their differences fade away and they are free to deal with one another as equals. Through trade, science, diplomacy and unfortunately, slavery and conquest, empires along the East, West axis had constant intercourse with each other over the ages, exchanging and assimilating aspects of culture and technology that appealed to them or had practical value in the further development of their civilizations.

Reason dictates then, that if it was true for civilizations then it must also have been true in the field of arts and letters. Change may have occurred incrementally, but gradually over the centuries, old templates of self-expression were modified or left behind while innovations and flourishes were experimented with and slowly adopted. What is our alternative to accepting this thesis? Either we accept the fact that humans have never lived in a cultural vacuum and that the interchanging of ideas, technology and arts was always a reality, or we have to believe that almost identical themes, tropes, and linguistic peculiarities could appear and repeat themselves over and over again across thousands of kilometers, in dozens of cultural settings, spontaneously, by chance.

In the light of such facts, it is obvious that there was a significant exchange of ideas and outlooks between Eastern and Western literatures in the Middle Ages. In their narratives on divine and courtly love the Europeans and the Arabs alike focused on the woman in defining and appraising man. Consequently the woman was sometimes described as an object of sexual desire and at others as a symbol of pure religious love. As an early elaborator on the expression of such themes, Ibn Hazm believes in the divinity of love and venerates women. As for Ibn Quzman, he often depicts earthly love, but at the same time

he idealizes women's beauty to the point of hyperbole. Ibn Arabi, on the other hand, endeavors to reach out to his unattainable divine lady.

Blending these characteristics, Troubadour poets created their own style, which became a starting point for the western Romance tradition. Yet in medieval European Literature, the image of the courtly woman who was depicted as an idealized feminine, contradicted the reality of the medieval Christian woman who was regarded as the daughter of Eve and thus inferior by nature. The rise of the cult of Virgin Mary - the supreme feminine to whom medieval man prayed to for salvation - changed nothing in reality except for the representation of medieval woman in the world of fiction. The courtly love songs of the troubadours centers on this conflicting fact and fiction, concerning the medieval European man's approach to the concepts of 'love' and the 'woman'.

After originating in Al-Andalus and being passed on to Provence and the Troubadour poets, the concept of woman as the instigator of secular or divine love spread to other European countries and eventually reached Dante, Chaucer and Malory who blended this idea of love and the woman's role in it with the respective peculiarities of their cultures and reshaped them after their own views. A study of the courtly love tradition is a clear indication of this cultural exchange. In the Middle Ages from East to West over a span of centuries, no matter where love narratives appear the women are consistently presented as lacking agency; they are usually depicted as the unattainable objects of masculine desire. Having established this, however, Malory's women should not be regarded as contradictive evidence to this rule. We should not forget that the norms and values of Malory's society are different from those of the twelfth century Europe. To the nobility of the eleventh, twelfth and the thirteenth century Europe Arthurian knights were seen as the ideal representatives of the age of chivalry, an age when courtly love tradition played a significant role in the life and literature. Malory's approach to chivalry, to secular and divine love as well as the role women play in these traditions is one that represents a far belated approach to these issues.

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