

Spring 2005 MWF 3:35-4:50 Dif 116
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Women and Love (France, 1160-1700)

Love has always been an ambiguous emotion for women. On the one hand it is a passion having the potential to realize their deepest aspirations for emotional fulfillment, on the other, it is a feeling leading to their subjugation in personal and societal relationships. The reservations toward love expressed by writers such as Colette, Simone de Beauvoir, and Annie Ernaux, reservations that we may think of as typically modern, have their precedents in earlier periods of French literature. In this course we will turn our attention to depictions of the joys and the dangers of this universal emotion from the Middle Ages through the seventeenth century. Basing ourselves on Christine de Pizan's claim that literature and life would be quite different had more women written books, we will place our emphasis on women's experience as expressed by women writers. We will pay attention to the audiences for which works were written. We will investigate the alternatives that women proposed for the love experience, which was usually a disappointment in reality because of their abandonment by their lovers, the death of a spouse, or the nature of romantic love itself.

The works treated in the course will include:

- 1. The short stories (called *lais*) of the 12th-century Anglo-Norman writer Marie de France. A contemporary of Marie noted that her stories appealed especially to women but that they "were not at all true." We will investigate why Marie turned so much of her attention to stories of adulterous love, and what these stories could have meant to her female readers.*
- 2. Lancelot, the original story of the famous love affair between Guinevere and Lancelot, her husband Arthur's best knight.*

*Although written by a man, Marie's 12th-century contemporary, Chrétien de Troyes, the story treats the theme of adultery in a way sympathetic to Guinevere. We will analyse the way in which the story reflects upon the real-life relationship between the writer Chrétien and his patroness, Countess Marie de Champagne. Like Marie de France's *lais*, *Lancelot* is a fictional tale that is directed to the ladies.*

3. *The Duke of True Lovers, Christine de Pizan's critique of extra-martial relationships, which she bases upon their disadvantages for women.*
4. *Christine de Pizan's Three Virtues, a "conduct book" for women that deals with alternatives to love for strong-minded and virtuous women.*
5. *Sonnets by the Renaissance poetess Louise Labé. Louise borrows the persona of an Italian courtesan to sing the joys and sorrows of love and celebrate the talents of educated women in a collection addressed to the female citizens of Lyon.*
6. *The Princess of Clèves, by Madame de Lafayette, mistress of La Rochefoucauld. This novel presents the story of the eminently virtuous Princess of Clèves against a backdrop featuring other ladies, Henri II's queen Catherine de Médicis, his powerful mistress Diane de Poitiers, and Anne Boleyn, one of the many wives of England's Henry VIII. We will investigate the role of female tradition in determining the conduct of these women. We will include the Princess' often-cited domination by her mother, but will also consider each woman as a possible reader of Christine de Pizan's *Trois Vertus*. In the case of Diane de Poitiers, this was a virtual certainty, since her father had a copy of the work in his library.*

The course is offered to undergraduates in English as FRT 3140. Students can take it for French credit as FRW 4930-02. To receive credit in French, you must write the papers on Marie de France and Lancelot in French. Either of these courses can be used to fulfill the requirements for the undergraduate minor in Medieval Studies. Students can receive graduate credit for the course by signing up for FRW 6938-02.