

# **The Art of Courtly Love Study Guide**

## **The Art of Courtly Love by Andreas Capellanus**

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# Plot Summary

The Art of Courtly Love is a late twelfth century guide book on the genesis, maintenance, and rejection of courtly love. It is written to an unknown young man named Walter by an only slightly less mysterious man, Andreas Capellanus or 'Andrew the Chaplain' who was associated with Countess Marie de Troyes of Champagne, France. The book is known today for attempts to classify the rules of love.

Courtly love is a specific sort of romance that occurred in the medieval period primarily amongst the upper class. In that time period, marriages tended to be arranged for social and economic reasons. Therefore, love in marriage was unusual. So husbands and wives tended to seek romantic attachment outside of marriage and courtly love became a social practice that gave them such a romantic outlet. Courtly love permitted intense emotional and romantic attachment but prevented marital affection.

The author divides The Art of Courtly Love into three books. Book One, 'Introduction to the Treatise on Love,' outlines its basic set of concepts and information concerning love and elaborates the effects of love. It also contains eight dialogues between members of different social classes looking to initiate courtly love such as those between each combination of middle-class, simple noble, higher noble men and women. Love is understood as an internal suffering that results from being overwhelmed and focused upon the beauty of some member of the other sex. This produces a desire to want nothing more than the beloved. True love often brings out man's greatest virtues and brings out humility. It is claimed in book one that marriage kills love. Almost no one in the dialogues expresses any other opinion.

After the eight dialogues, Capellanus discusses other forms of love, such as the love of the clergy, nuns, peasants, and prostitutes.

Book Two, 'How Love May Be Retained' explains all the different practices that one may engage in to keep the intensity of courtly love going. Courtly love is unstable and can easily decay. The 'King of Love' is said to have laid down thirty-one rules of love. These rules are analyzed in detail in the chapter. These rules include 'He who is not jealous cannot love' and 'A man in love is always apprehensive' and 'A true lover is constantly and without intermission possessed by the thought of his beloved.'

Book Three, 'The Rejection of Love' gives Andreas' true advice to Walter. In fact, Andreas thinks that courtly love is not worth the cost. He admits to have given Walter advice on how to attain and maintain love but he encourages him not to use it. The third book is full of arguments against love including religious ones and arguments based on the faults of women.



# **Book One, Introduction to the Treatise on Love, Preface, Chapters 1-5**

## **Book One, Introduction to the Treatise on Love, Preface, Chapters 1-5 Summary and Analysis**

Andreas Capellanus, the author, opens the preface by noting that his good friend Walter asked him to publish his writings on the nature of love between lovers. Walter has recently fallen in love and does not know how to manage it. Andreas agrees to help him.

Book One will consider what courtly love is, where its name comes from, what its effect is, between whom it may occur, its generation, life and death, signs of love's return, and how lovers should act if one is unfaithful.

Andreas defines love as an innate suffering which arises from the perception and focus on the beauty of a member of the opposite sex. Love causes each person to seek the embrace of the other above all things. Before love becomes balanced on each side, no suffering is greater and the one more in love is paralyzed by fear. Love is innate as evidenced when a man sees his ideal woman, lusts after her immediately, and starts planning to woo her.

Love can only exist between members of the opposite sex. Otherwise, individuals cannot engage in the natural acts associated with it. Nature forbids homosexuality and so love is ashamed to accept it. Lovers attempt to bring about the enjoyment of those they love and think about each other continually. The lover can only value something from the beloved if it comes freely. In effect, love or amor derives its name from the word for hook or amus, which means 'to capture.' Love's effect is that true lovers cannot be degraded with greed. Even the uncouth man can become revered for his handsomeness when he is loved and love can make anyone a nobleman.

Everyone of sound mind that can do works of love is vulnerable to love unless barred by age, blindness, or excess passion. Some are too young or too old. The blind cannot see anything upon which the mind can become obsessed. Some men are so enslaved to desire that love cannot bind them. They have no self-control.



# Book One, Introduction to the Treatise on Love, Chapter 6, Dialogues 1-3

## Book One, Introduction to the Treatise on Love, Chapter 6, Dialogues 1-3 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 6 covers the ways in which love can be acquired, attempting to give an exhaustive list. Love can be acquired in five ways: a beautiful body, good character, ready speech, riches and generosity to expressed needs such as promiscuity. Love can only truly be achieved by the first three. The latter two causes cannot produce love worthily.

Beauty wins love with little effort, particularly with respect to simple forms of love. However, such love rarely lasts. Wiser lovers seek those with good characters instead of beauty. Andreas encourages Walter to be careful not to be taken in by beauty or excellent talk. Only good character is worthy of love. Andreas lists dialogues between men and women of different classes. He notes that women are able to change their status through marriage but men cannot achieve nobility by marriage.

In the first dialogue, a middle class man speaks to a middle class woman. Such a man should greet the woman normally and the woman will naturally make conversation. Men should also try to flatter women early on in the conversation; a man could, for instance, comment on the woman's beauty. The woman may resist but the man should double down with more praise. The woman will likely continue to rebuff the man. This is often to gain further compliment; the man should continue to press for a relationship, perhaps by emphasizing that while the woman is certainly nobler than she in many ways, she should give a man of good character a change. The woman may further resist the man. She might mention his greater age. The man should resist the rebuff. If the man is young and the woman mentions his youth, the man should take the same approach, perhaps by arguing that the young man can love long and thus will become worthy of the woman's love.

In the process of the dialogue, Andreas introduces a four-stage theory of the appropriate development of love. First love gives hope, then grants a kiss, followed by an embrace, and finally, the whole person. Women should try to find lovers in the first stage of development. In those cases, a woman does well to select a young man.

The second dialogue is between a middle-class man and a noblewoman. Andreas argues that the man may find the woman unsophisticated despite her social rank. If so, the strategy appropriate to the middle class will work along with a commendation of nobility. If the woman is wise, he should not overly praise her so as not to appear servile or foolish. The conversation should be initiated by the man and initiated with the main praising the woman's nobility along with acknowledging his inferior birth. The man should also argue that love transcends class and request the woman's ear, if only for a



short time. He should then flatter her, emphasizing the overwhelming power of her good qualities.

The noblewoman's rebuff will inevitably be severe, as is appropriate to her higher social class. The woman may restrain herself, emphasizing that the man deserves stern rebuke but that she is too ladylike to give it. She may also emphasize that he does not deserve the gift of her ear and threatens good social order as a result. The woman will probably deny that love ignores class.

The man should not be defensive, but gracious and reemphasize his initial admiration. He should also flatter the woman's rank and sophistication. He should then ask for her ear again and begin to emphasize his good qualities. For example, he could argue that his virtues and other good qualities make him worthy of a higher class.

The woman may express admiration for the man's eloquence but will continue to harshly reprove him. She will reemphasize their social inequality. The man should reply that if he has greater qualities than a nobleman he deserves greater reward. He should also express his desire to wait for her love for the rest of his life.

In the third dialogue a middle class man speaks to a woman of the higher nobility. Andreas emphasizes that only men of the greatest character should dare to do so. He must have great achievements; only these qualities can make up for a lack of nobility. Nonetheless, there is a risk that the public will think that if the woman accepts the man, she does so only out of passion. The man's character must be well-known to counteract this impression.

This middle-class man of character should open the conversation with praise, while signaling his qualities. He must offer his service humbly and proclaim undying love. The woman will dismiss his inquiry, assuming its impossibility; she will argue that to share courtly love with him, she would have to abandon her good name. The man should emphasize his great character to retain the woman's interest. The woman will continue to maintain that the importance of her rank overwhelms even a truly great character.

The man should argue that he is exceptional. If she seizes on one of his apparent flaws, he must minimize it. The woman will then ask about his reputation. When the man discloses his good qualities the woman will inevitably degrade them and reemphasize her great rank. She will then set the bar of character outrageously high. The man must continue to insist that he be given a chance to woo her. The woman will emphasize that he has no reason to hope; the man must emphasize his willingness to hope beyond reason.



# Book One, Introduction to the Treatise on Love, Chapter 6, Dialogues 4-7

## Book One, Introduction to the Treatise on Love, Chapter 6, Dialogues 4-7 Summary and Analysis

If noblemen wish to select a middle class woman, they must use a special speech to woo her. He must emphasize his superior class by sitting by her without permission. Andreas emphasizes to Walter that only men of high rank may do so. The man must immediately emphasize his great rank. The woman will reply with a gentle rebuff by asking for whether he thinks a woman of good character and humble birth is better suited for the nobleman's love than a woman of poor character and high birth. The man should agree.

The woman will still rebuff him, claiming that he belittles his nobility. The man must continue to reemphasize that he would only marry below his class for good character. This sequence will repeat itself. The woman will argue that she should wait for a middle class man of great character, if character is so important. The man must emphasize the importance of high birth in response. The woman will then ask for the chance to think about his request and the man should agree.

In the fifth dialogue, a nobleman speaks with a noblewoman. The nobleman should open with flattery and tell her how hard he must restrain himself to avoid praising her excessively. The woman will appreciate his flattery and the man should continue. The woman will appreciate his compliments and praise his eminence. She will then give him permission to look her in the face. Again, the man must praise her great beauty; the woman might permit him to view her daily.

The woman will claim that she wishes not to endanger herself by giving into the power of Venus or the goddess of love. The man will express respect for her concern. Venus is easy to enter into and difficult to leave, she will maintain. The woman will want to stay liberated. The man should argue that the woman will be safe if she loves him and argue that if she ever wishes to love she may be endangered being trapped with another, falling victim to her current fear. He will also emphasize the dangers of never loving at all.

Andreas illustrate with an extended story. The story ends with Andreas telling Walter about twelve rules of acquiring love: avoiding avarice, embracing chastity for the sake of the loved, not knowingly break up a current love affair, not choose to love those it is shameful to love, always avoid falsehood, keep the love affair largely private, always obey the lady, always be modest, speak no evil, not reveal love affairs, always be polite and courteous, and should not exceed the desires of the lover in desire.



Returning to the dialogue, the woman next admits that enjoying love is great and that rejecting it is often harmful, but she will maintain that she is afraid that she cannot handle love's burdens. However, she will express interest. The man should thank her for this.

In the sixth dialogue, a higher nobleman speaks to a middle class woman. He can retain the same address style of the simple nobleman. Or he might proceed as follows. The man begins by immediately and forthrightly expressing his interest in the woman. He explains that only the woman can make him happy and that his riches are not enough. The woman replies that she has been flattered and cannot imagine why he is interested. She nonetheless rebuffs him, this time on the grounds that she fears his family's greatness, particularly that of the women.

The man replies that love is great when it arises from pleasure and delight in some woman apart from rank. The woman replies that she may be compelled but that the common people might think the woman had gone beyond her limits and thereby ruin her reputation. The man replies that love great enough to overcome class will not undermine her reputation. He will also argue that only God can convince her to love; the woman will reply with trepidation.

The man will then openly ask whether the woman is disposed to love another; the woman will refuse to answer, claiming that his question is improper. The man will argue for her love at length, claiming that she will not lose her freedom if she loves women. The woman will maintain that while the man is reasonable, her fear controls her. The man maintains that reason should win out but the woman will remain fickle. The man will then maintain that the woman risks offending his love offer. She should accept his invitation because he was first. She will deny that this is a good reason but leave future contact on the table.

In the seventh dialogue, a man of higher nobility speaks to a woman of simple nobility. Andreas argues that the man can use the same speech of a simple nobleman or a man of higher nobility with a woman of middle class, except for dealing with the commendation of birth. The man must not boast too much about his nobility.

Again the man opens with flattery and the woman thanks him. Her attitude is less deferential than the middle-class woman and she is more resistant to his entreaties. The woman rebuffs his initial compliments and, again, the man persists. She then expresses concern about what the public might think. The man declines that the concern of the public is sufficient reason to reject him and the woman replies that he too easily dismisses the importance of custom. The man admits his error but excuses it and the woman continues to maintain that their difference in rank is too substantial. The conversation proceeds with the request and rebuff cycle characteristic of the other dialogues. The woman continually emphasizes the inappropriateness of the potential union while the man gives counterarguments.

A few unique insights pepper the conversation, however. The man argues that jealousy and love are inevitably tied because love is a great bond and a man must defend the





bond or risk losing love entirely. He also argues that marriage and love are incompatible. His marriage does not threaten the woman he is pursuing.

In the dialogue, the woman suggests a unique remedy to their disagreement: to submit a letter to the Countess of Champagne to arbitrate their dispute. The man promises to abide by the Countess's decision and drafts a letter. The letter argues that it is good to appeal to a wise arbiter and explains their situation.

The Countess replies that love cannot exist between two people who are married, for lovers give everything freely without necessity but marriage involves duty. And no woman can be in love with two men. Love cannot acknowledge rights between husband and wife. Ultimately, the Countess sides with the man on his view that jealousy is an essential part of love.



# Book One, Introduction to the Treatise on Love, Chapter 6, Dialogue 8

## Book One, Introduction to the Treatise on Love, Chapter 6, Dialogue 8 Summary and Analysis

In the eighth and final dialogue, a man and woman of higher nobility interact. Andreas advises the man to always use soft and gentle words, doing nothing to deserve reproof. The woman of higher nobility will always be ready to censure a man for anything and will ridicule him if given the chance.

The man begins with an extended and flowery form of flattery and the woman is particularly dismissive. She emphasizes the costs and torments of love and the man responds that by not loving she denies benefits to those in her life who are worthy of them. The woman claims that she is only speaking to the man, encouraging him to seek greater rewards because there are better things on the earth. The conversation continues with initiation and reproof. In this case, the woman emphasizes that the man should seek something even higher than the love between man and woman. The man emphasizes that such love is a great good.

Those involved in courtly love must avoid bad appearances. The man emphasizes, as the last man did, that marriage between a man and woman prevents them from loving one another. Again, the testimony of the Countess of Champagne is highlighted. The woman in this case stresses that she is too old and uninterested for love but the man persists. They continue to argue about the prudence of love. The woman expresses deep skepticism and lack of interest and the man becomes more intense over time.

In this case, one of the reasons that the woman reproves the man is because he is a member of the clergy and so should be satisfied with higher things. The man admits that to engage in such love would be risky but that God has not barred them from courtly love just because He has barred them from the flesh. The woman claims that the clergyman nobleman is only interested in courtly love out of passion but the man denies this vehemently. The man still emphasizes his good qualities. But the woman then mentions another man who already has her interest. Continually the woman cites the costs of love and the man the benefits. The man's intensity increases to where he argues that the woman's continued resistance indicates derangement.

The woman grows tired of the argument. While she is impressed by his answers to her questions, she claims that the discussion should end. The man says that he will respect her wishes.

The man then asks if a man can love two women in the courtly fashion or whether one woman should reprove him until he gives up the other. The woman hesitates to give an answer but argues that the lover must keep chaste for the beloved. In this case, she

thinks, the man should lose his first love. However, the beloved may also pardon the excess of the lover. The man then doubts whether the lover should be punished if he goes to another woman without loving her and fails to achieve his desire. The woman thinks this to should be condemned.



# Book One, Introduction to the Treatise on Love, Chapters 7-12

## Book One, Introduction to the Treatise on Love, Chapters 7-12 Summary and Analysis

The noblest class, the clergy, has remained unmentioned in the foregoing. Since the 'clerk' has devoted himself to God, he cannot look for love since he is bound to renounce delights of the earth. His nobility does not come from his ancestors and the secular power cannot remove it. But since clergy are weak to carnal sin, they should consult the foregoing dialogues in accord with the rank of their parents. Nuns must fiercely avoid love because their sin stirs up God's wrath and destroys good reputations. Anyone seeking the love of a nun is a beast.

True love cannot be bought with money. Greedy women can only love in a counterfeit way and should join a brothel. These dishonest women bleed men dry and leave them. If such a woman really loved her man, she would be hesitant to ask so much of him. Such women are deadly enemies.

Andreas encourages Walter not to be fooled. Instead, he tells Walter to find a woman who will love him regardless of his money. He then explains that it is hard to love that too easy to attain, like women who give into carnal passion easily. Such a woman's love cannot be won because she cannot love a single man, but only satisfies her lust.

Peasants rarely love, for they are akin to horses or mules. For them, the happy life is one of hard labor. Sometimes peasants are stirred to love but if they are taught the theory of love, which is unnatural to them, they will find it useful.

If one falls in love with a peasant, he should make sure to praise her and then in a convenient location 'embrace [her] by force.' Andreas presumably is talking about rape. Andreas does not encourage such love but only advises what to do in such a case. Finally, the love of prostitutes should be absolutely resisted.



# Book Two, How Love May Be Retained, Chapters 1-8

## Book Two, How Love May Be Retained, Chapters 1-8 Summary and Analysis

Book One concerned acquiring love; now Andreas will explain how love can be retained. Men must first avoid letting the love be publicly known. The lover should also appear wise and restrained in conduct and avoid annoying the beloved. The man should be sympathetic to his beloved's troubles. When she wants something unreasonable, he should give it to her. If he offends her, he must immediately apologize and should not talk excessively about her or excessively praise her in front of other men. A man must always be obedient and humble. Love can be retained by indulging in the solace of the flesh but only as often as will not be wearisome to the woman.

Love may also be increased after it has been consummated. First, if lovers see each other rarely and with difficulty, desire will increase. Love will also increase if one expresses anger at the other. Real jealousy is 'the nurse of love'. Dwelling on the thought of the beloved helps, as do carriage rides and compliments.

Love can also be decreased. Too many chances to see and talk with the beloved decrease love. If a man appears uncultured or suddenly loses property he will also lose love. In times of trouble, men's faces and figures change and they cannot avoid becoming contemptible. Blasphemy against God and the saints, mocking Church ceremony and withholding charity also destroy love. And when love starts to decline, it can quickly end.

Love can surely come to an end if lovers break faith with the other or leave the Catholic Church. If lovers fail to aid the other, have unequal love or are deceitful, love can also end. Love requires mutual trust and similar desires. There are also indications that love has returned, such as if a woman stops avoiding the man and starts paying more attention to her appearance.

If one or another lover is unfaithful, and the offender is a man, he becomes unworthy of his previous love and the woman should abandon him. If the woman does the same it counts enormously against her character. Women who stay with cheating men will have no rest emotionally, as they will worry about losing their man. Yet sometimes men are pushed to new loves by irresistible passion. If the man falters once or twice, he can be forgiven.

If a man asks permission to leave his lover, the woman should deny him. If the woman is unfaithful, the rule need not always be equal between them. Women must be punished more severely for not being chaste. No man can feel pure love for one woman and a mixed or common love with another. A raped woman still deserves love and a



woman who has enabled a friend to be unfaithful does not. A woman who has loved he who is unworthy of her must either try to improve him or give him up. Lovers must not arbitrarily deny each other love. Loves can also negotiate whether they will have pure, mixed or common love as the relationship progresses.

In chapter seven, Andreas reviews decisions in love cases. In the first case, a lady forbade a man to love another with a very severe punishment. The Countess of Champagne said that she was too severe. In the second case, a man asked a lover of his if he could embrace another woman but it turned out he was only testing his first lover. The woman responded by denying him her love but the judge, the Queen of Eleanor, disapproved of the woman's rejection.

The third case had two men equal in every way but property. It could not be distinguished who the better lover was. The Countess of Champagne ruled in favor of the poorer man as it would improve both the beloved more. Andreas then reviews eighteen other cases very briefly all of which follow the general rules of love already discussed in the book.

In the eighth chapter the rules of love are laid down but Andreas presents them in a story about a British man seeking love who needed a gauntlet to his beloved. After some minor conflicts, the Briton goes to see King Arthur to display the gauntlet and attract a hawk he needed for his quest. Following a battle in King Arthur's court, the Briton seized the hawk and found a parchment next to the hawk's perch. The parchment contained the rules of love written by the King of Love.

There are thirty-one rules on the parchment which the Briton returned to the lady. Selections of the rules are as follows: (1) marriage is no excuse for not loving, (10) love is always a stranger in the home of avarice, (18) good character alone makes any man worthy of love, (26) Love can deny nothing to love, (30) A true lover is constantly and without intermission possessed by the thought of his beloved.



# Book Three, The Rejection of Love

## Book Three, The Rejection of Love Summary and Analysis

In the final book, Andreas advises Walter on the rejection of love. Some wise men avoid all the deeds of love and its requirements. One reason is to serve God directly. Love is dangerous because it can impel men to sin. Another argument is that with courtly love we can injure our neighbors. Another reason is to avoid destroying friendships due to relationships. Sexual sin can stain the body and soul and not just the soul like other sins. That is another reason to avoid love. There is another reason as well. Men in love are bound and they are enslaved by even the suspicion of unfaithfulness.

Love can also result in poverty because men lose regard for all else, and will often commit crimes for their loves. Love also brings many torments. It threatens the great virtue of chastity. We also find that with intense love related excesses tend to develop. It is also unclear what good comes to men through love besides the love itself. Men can also be deprived of honor in this world due to love. Lovers are often slow and lazy about everything other than love and the Devil is often the author of false love. Love often leads men to inescapable warfare and destroys peace. It breaks up marriages that God ordained. Thus, Andreas asks Walter why he would ever want to fool with love; he encourages Walter to restrain his passions.

In fact, Andreas, despite giving all of the former advice, wants to persuade Walter not to look for love. He gives a number of other arguments. Men's bodies are weakened by love, which makes them worse soldiers. Sex reduces men's power. Love causes one to eat and drink less and it takes away sleep and rest. Wisdom loses its function during love as well.

Further, women cannot bind themselves to lovers in mutual love as men can. Women do not love to please men but to get rich, which Andreas thinks is only natural. Women will often be envious and slanderous of other women as well.

Women are greedy. They tend to be the slaves of their passions, particularly to food. They are fickle and never make up their minds. And they often speak deceitfully. Women almost always disobey men and thus are arrogant. They tend to despise all other women. Women also tend to be vain. They love to be flattered. Women live, drink too much, are loud-mouthed, gossips, wantons, and inclined toward adultery. Women often commit great sins without fear or even a good reason and they do not love men with their whole hearts.

Love is also terrible because it tends to make men fall in love with women who do not return that love. Love is so often unrequited, which can be devastating.

In conclusion, Andreas notes that he has had two points of view in the book. In the first part, he gave in to Walter's request to know about the art of love. In the latter part, he was concerned about what would be useful to Walter. So Andreas commends the book to him.





# Characters

## Andreas Capellanus

Andreas Capellanus or Andrew the Chaplain is the author of *The Art of Courtly Love*. He is thought to have been the priest for Countess Marie de Champagne of Troyes in twelfth century France. Historians know little of his life. However, his name appears on charters as witnesses between 1182 and 1186. He refers to himself in the book as 'chaplain of the royal court' though there is no other evidence for this claim.

Andreas wrote the book on the request of Countess Champagne, who was the daughter of King Louis VII of France and Eleanor of Aquitaine. Andreas is said to have been an expert on the Art of Courtly Love in part because the practice was elaborated and maintained in Countess Marie's court. The book is thought to have been a parody on Ovid's technical treatises.

It is pretty clear that while Capellanus wrote the book, he did so at the behest of Countess Marie. In fact, he seems hostile to many of the ideas expressed. For instance, he is clear that his audience should attend to spiritual matters and the love is typically opposed to it. Andreas is clearly connected with the Church and thinks that should be a priority for any man considering courtly love.

Capellanus divided the Art of Courtly Love into three books, all of which contain his particular opinions; he seems of a divided mind, but this appears to have been because the first several parts of the book were written by request and the last to caution against the information he wrote down.

## Walter

If historians knew little about Andreas Capellanus, they know even less about Walter. Walter is the man to whom *The Art of Courtly Love* was written. Andreas explains that Walter is a youth who is a member of the highest nobility, but it is not clear whether he was real or merely a general figure meant to give character to the book.

One historian, Trojet, thinks he was real. He had the title 'venerandus' and this name was only given to bishops or to the French royal family in the days of the grandchildren of King Louis VII. And yet these children seem to have been too young for Andreas to address. Trojet thinks that Gaucher III of Chatillon, Count Robert I of Dreux's grandson, is Walter; he is King Louis' grandnephew. However, historian Gaston Paris argued that Gautier and Gaucher had different last names. Trojet seems to have changed his mind.

Again, Walter is the one to whom the book was written. Consequently, he does not speak. And so while Walter is the second most important person tied to *The Art of Courtly Love*, it is difficult to say anything definitive about him. However, if he was indeed a real person, Andreas seems to have had some opinions about him. For instance, he seems



to have considered him weak to the temptations of love and likely to engage in a practice that Andreas thought it was worthwhile to discourage him from.

## **The Countess of Champagne**

Countess Marie de Troyes of Champagne features in the book as an arbitrator over disputes concerning the practice of courtly love.

## **The Middle-Class Man**

The middle-class man may easily approach women of the middle-class for courtly love but he must have great virtue to be deserving of courtly love from women of higher rank.

## **The Middle-Class Woman**

The middle-class woman is free to rebuff a man of any social rank but it is often best for her to be with those of higher ranks.

## **The Simple Nobleman**

The simple nobleman must approach women of higher nobility with care, much as the middle-class man who approaches a simple noblewoman. However, he has open access to both simple noblewomen and middle-class women.

## **The Simple Noblewoman**

The simple noblewoman more strongly rebukes her suitors, particularly middle-class men, although she is very respectful of the advances of men of higher nobility.

## **The Higher Nobleman**

The higher nobleman has the most permission to pursue women. While the woman of higher nobility will still rebuff him, simple noblewomen will be fairly open to his advances and middle-class women will be almost entirely open.

## **The Higher Noblewoman**

The higher noblewoman is the most hostile to the advances of men, completely dismissing the middle-class man, largely resisting the simple nobleman, and cautiously responding to the higher nobleman.



## **The King of Love**

The King of Love is a fictional character who codified the thirty one rules of love listed in Book Two.

## **Peasants**

Peasants are typically too animalistic to engage in courtly love.

## **Clergy/Nuns**

Clergy and nuns are strictly off-limits for courtly love. Their hearts must be devoted to God.



# Objects/Places

## Twelfth Century France

The setting of *The Art of Courtly Love* is late twelfth century France among the royal family of France.

## Countess Marie's Court

Capellanus was the chaplain for Countess Marie, whose court he served.

## Courtly Love

The practice of developing a deeply romantic, but non-sexual bond between a man and a woman who were married, but not to one another.

## Marriage

Since most marriages in the twelfth century were arranged in France, love was largely off the table. As a result, these loveless marriages may well have given rise to the practice of courtly love.

## Social Class

Social class is very important in the book. Courtly love is unavailable to the lower classes and must be negotiated carefully according to the class of the man and the woman involved.

## The Rules of Love

One of the most enduring and popular elements in *The Art of Courtly Love* is the list of thirty-one rules of love given in Book Two.

## Good Reasons to Love

Good reasons to love others include having good character. Capellanus insists that courtly love should develop only for good reasons.



## **Bad Reasons to Love**

A bad reason to love is for money, because, like so many other things, it is not rooted in an enduring and admirable feature of the beloved.

## **Arbitration**

In some disputes over proper etiquette in the practice of courtly love, authorities would be brought into arbitrate, such as the Countess.

## **The Dangers of Love**

In Book Three, Capellanus discusses many emotional, physical and spiritual dangers associated with courtly love.



# Themes

## Acquiring Love

Each of the three books has a well-defined theme. Book One is the introduction to the treatise and it starts where a treatise on love naturally begins, explaining how love is acquired. Capellanus begins by explaining what love is and the various forms of love, their effects, and the people who should engage in the practice of courtly love.

However, the primary element of importance in the acquisition of love is the initiation of courtly love. The process is complex and involves many subtleties, most of which vary according to the social rank of the lover and the social rank of the beloved. For instance, all the rules of initiation require that social class be at least implicitly acknowledge particularly up front and in general throughout the entire conversation.

This is clearest in cases of deeply unequal dialogues. For instance, in the third dialogue, a middle-class man pursues a woman of higher nobility. Capellanus is cautious with Walter, arguing that such a man must be ready to not only be rebuffed by utterly scorned. Indeed, in the conversation, the woman is much more hostile to the man than in other cases. The sixth dialogue displays this element as well with a man of higher nobility speaking to a middle-class woman. The woman is still required to rebuff the man of higher nobility but she does so on the grounds that he would diminish himself by being with her and that she was not worthy of him.

The rest of the book covers all the various classes of people that should not share in courtly love, such as nuns, priests, peasants, and prostitutes. Capellanus explains the difficulties with pursuing such relationships.

## Maintaining Love

Book two focuses on how to keep love once one has found it. However it covers a number of other related issues such as how to increase love or decrease it. Chapter 1, 'How Love, When It Has Been Acquired, May Be Kept' focuses on the main topic of the book and from there the subject matter branches off. In chapter two, 'How A Love, Once Consummated, May Be Increased' explains how a man can interact with a woman to get her to love him more and in chapter three, 'In What Ways Love May Be Decreased' Capellanus reviews all the factors that threaten the intensity of love. Chapter four, 'How Love May Come To An End' explains all the different factors that can kill courtly love.

Chapter five, 'Indications that One's Love Is Returned' explains the rules by which the return of love can be recognized in a woman who claims to have lost it and chapter six, 'If One of the Lovers is Unfaithful to the Other' reviews how to solve the problems associated with maintaining two relationships of courtly love or changing in between them. Chapter seven, 'Various Decisions in Love Cases' explains how the Countess of Champagne has ruled concerning disputes between courtly lovers.



Chapter eight, 'The Rules of Love' summarizes the lessons of the book into thirty one rules written by 'The King of Love' that are oddly discovered by a story character within the chapter, a Briton, trying to win the hand of his beloved.

## Rejecting Love

The theme of book three is why love should be rejected. Despite having given an enormous amount of advice on how to acquire love and maintain it, Capellanus seems to believe that courtly love is, on net, a cost to those who engage in it. In order to undermine the rest of his claims, Capellanus proceeds to argue that love should be rejected.

The argument divides into two sections. The first section is to argue that courtly love should be rejected for religious reasons. For instance, Capellanus argues that courtly love makes the beloved one's highest priority when one's highest priority should always be God. Further, because courtly love is held between individuals outside of wedlock it is a constant temptation towards adultery, which is a grievous sin. Capellanus argues that love of neighbor is often destroyed by love and that love, unlike mere sins of the mind, defile both the mind and the body when it pushes one to engage in fornication. Men who love are caught up in a kind of slavery and poverty as well. Further, nearly all excesses are associated with love.

The second argument comes from the nature of the bond between men and women and the nature of women generally. First, courtly love is said to weaken the male body, that he becomes less wise when he is in love, that women are incapable of loving men with the richness that men are capable of loving women. According to Capellanus, women are greedy, jealous, slanderous, materialistic, fickle, deceptive, disobedient, arrogant, hateful of other women, vain, drunk, loud-mouthed, gossipy, and lack devotion, being also inclined to vice among others.



# Style

## Perspective

Andreas Capellanus, the author of *The Art of Courtly Love*, was likely the chaplain for Countess Marie de Troyes of Champagne, a woman involved in developing and extending the practice of courtly love. Apparently she requested that he write the book, although close attention to the text indicates that he did not want to write the book and was rather pressured into it. For instance, assuming that Capellanus was compelled is one way to explain why he praises love in the first two books, but then completely changes his opinion in book three where he implores Walter to reject it. Perhaps the first two books were written at the behest of the Countess and the last in order to express Capellanus's real opinion.

Capellanus's perspective displays a deep expertise on the structure and nature of courtly love. The author recognizes detailed courtship rituals and is able to give lengthy advice about almost any subject related to the practice. He also seems to have deep religious convictions, as many of his opinions are rooted in the ideas of sin and God's will, such as his judgments about who love can be shared with. Book Three is perhaps most revealing of Capellanus's perspective because it contains his own arguments about why Walter should reject love. First, he expresses the opinion that courtly love almost inevitably leads to sin, which a Christian must always strive to avoid. For this reason, courtly love seems only a step away from being condemned by God. His second set of arguments concern the many flaws he sees in females as a whole, which indicates a deep antipathy for women.

## Tone

The tone of *The Art of Courtly Love* varies from book to book. In Book One, Capellanus is initially at his most scholarly and least opinionated. While he initially praises love, the tone of approval seems modest, which can be explained by the fact that he does not believe his praises, thinking that the costs of love outweigh the benefits. Capellanus also focuses on careful analysis of the concept of love and the rules associated with the practice of courtly love. The vast majority of book one is made up of the eight dialogues where Capellanus does not speak in his own voice, but the tone is still distinctive because all eight dialogues show a man of a certain rank pursuing a woman of another. The tone is one of flattery and combat, as the man and woman argue about the appropriateness of sharing courtly love.

Book two explains how to retain love and the tone in the book seems to express some concern about how unstable courtly love can be. Capellanus is quick to proscribe rules for how to maintain love because he seems concerned about the dangers that can result from not managing it properly. In this book, Capellanus's tone increases in





concern because he apparently does not want to be hurt by losing love that he has acquired.

However, the most intense part of the tone is reserved for Book Three, where it becomes intensely passionate and worried. Capellanus seems totally committed to convincing Walter to avoid engaging in the practice of courtly love and engages in pious and misogynistic arguments to convince him otherwise.

## Structure

The Art of Courtly Love is divided into three books that are made up of several chapters. The current edition features an extended editor's introduction, where the editor discusses the historical setting of the book, the mysteries about the author of the book, and a number of important points about the subject matter. Andreas Capellanus has a brief preface as well.

Book One, 'Introduction to the Treatise on Love' introduces the main concepts that Capellanus appeals to in the book and then explains how love is to be acquired and from whom love should not be acquired. It contains twelve chapters, most of which are brief. The first chapter, 'What Love Is' defines love and the second chapter, 'Between What Persons Love May Exist' explains the personality preconditions for love to arise. Chapter six is by far the longest chapter, for it contains eight dialogues between men and women of different classes. The dialogues are Capellanus's way of explaining how men of each class can convince women of each class to share courtly love with them.

Book Two, 'How Love May Be Retained' explains how to renew and extend love that have already been created. The first chapter covers how love can be kept, whereas chapter two explains how love can be increased. Chapter five, to give another example, explains how to recognize when love has returned and chapter seven reviews how the Countess of Champagne has decided disputes within courtly love on a number of occasions. Chapter eight is perhaps the most famous of the book. This chapter 'Rules of Love' contains the famous rules of love that made The Art of Courtly Love widely read for centuries.

Book Three, 'The Rejection of Love' is an extended argument to the effect that Walter should not pursue love both because he should prefer serving God and because women are evil and deficient in various respects.



## Quotes

"I know clearer than day that after you have learned the art of love your progress in it will be more cautious, in so far as I can I shall comply with your desire" (Preface, pg. 27.)

"Love is a certain inborn suffering derived from the sight of and excessive meditation upon the 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" (Chapter 1, pg. 28.)

"Nothing which a lover gets from his beloved is pleasing unless she gives it of her own free will" (Chapter 2, pg. 31.)

"The teaching of some people is said to be that there are five means by which [love] may be acquired: a beautiful figure, excellence of character, extreme readiness of speech, great wealth, and the readiness with which one grants that which is sought" (Chapter 6, pg. 33.)

"Lovers ought to make no more distinction between classes of men than Love himself does" (Chapter 6, pg. 45.)

"To fight under Love's protection may seem to anybody else liberty and a thing to lay hold of, but to me it seems the worst kind of servitude, a thing to be avoided at all costs" (Chapter 6, pg. 72)

"The freedom to love which is granted you cannot deprive you of your free choice, but your choice should be a just one so that you will be careful to love what you should." (Chapter 6, pg. 89.)

"Love cannot exist without jealousy, because, as I have already told you...jealousy between lovers is commended by every man who is experienced in love." (Chapter 6, pg. 102.)

"Love clearly teaches us that a lover is bound to keep himself chaste for the beloved" (Chapter 6, pg. 141.)

"Real love comes only from the affection of the heart and is granted out of pure grace and genuine liberality, and this most precious gift of love cannot be paid for at any set price or be cheapened by a matter of money" (Chapter 9, pg. 144.)

"When love has definitely begun to decline, it quickly comes to an end unless something comes to save it" (Book Two, Chapter 3, pg. 156.)

"This is the parchment on which are written the rules of love which the King of Love himself, with his own mouth, pronounced for lovers" (Book Two, Chapter 8, pg. 184.)



"Every act of a lover ends in the thought of his beloved" (Book Two, Chapter 8, pg. 185.)

"For God is more pleased with a man who is able to sin and does not, than with a man who has no opportunity to sin" (Book Three, pg. 187.)

"Since, then, all sorts of wickednesses come from love and nothing good can be found to spring from it, but only untold torments for mankind—why, O foolish young man, do you seek to love and to deprive yourself of the grace of God and of your everlasting heritage?" (Book Three, pg. 197.)

"Avoid then, Walter, practicing the mandates of love, and labor in constant watchfulness so that when the Bridegroom cometh, He may find you wakeful; do not let worldly delight make you lie down in your sins, trusting to the youth of your body and confident that the Bridegroom will be late, since, as He tells us Himself, we know neither the day nor the hour" (Book Three, pg. 212.)



## Topics for Discussion

What is courtly love? Under what historical circumstances did it arise?

What were the rules of courtly love? What connections did it permit? Which did it forbid?

In the eight dialogues, Capellanus analyzes the differences between how different classes initiate courtly love with one another. Discuss three of the relevant differences between at least two of the combinations.

What are good reasons to love for Capellanus? What are bad reasons?

Discuss the three rules of love you find most plausible. Explain why you find them plausible.

Analyze three of the arguments Capellanus gives to Walter to discourage him from engaging in courtly love. Assuming their worldview, are the religious arguments successful? Do you detect sexism in the arguments from the weaknesses of women?

In general, do you think the practice of courtly love would have been a good idea? Why or why not?