CHAPTER 1

COURTLY LOVE

‘When in the world I lived I was the world’s commander.’

SHAKESPEARE

I

The allegorical love poetry of the Middle Ages is apt to repel the modern reader both by its form and by its matter. The form, which is that of a struggle between personified abstractions, can hardly be expected to appeal to an age which holds that ‘art means what it says’ or even that art is meaningless—for it is essential to this form that the literal narrative and the *significacio* should be separable. As for the matter, what have we to do with these medieval lovers—‘servants’ or ‘prisoners’ they called themselves—who seem to be always weeping and always on their knees before ladies of inflexible cruelty? The popular erotic literature of our own day tends rather to sheikhs and ‘Salvage Men’ and marriage by capture, while that which is in favour with our intellectuals recommends either frank animalism or the free companionship of the sexes. In every way, if we have not outgrown, we have at least grown away from, the *Romance of the Rose.* The study of this whole tradition may seem, at first sight, to be but one more example of that itch for ‘revival’, that refusal to leave any corpse ungalvanized, which is among the more distressing accidents of scholarship. But such a view would be superficial. Humanity does not pass through phases as a train passes through stations: being alive, it has the privilege of always moving yet never leaving anything behind. Whatever we have been, in some sort we are still. Neither the form nor the sentiment of this old poetry has passed

away without leaving indelible traces on our minds. We shall understand our present, and perhaps even our future, the better if we can succeed, by an effort of the historical imagination, in reconstructing that long-lost state of mind for which the allegorical love poem was a natural mode of expression. But we shall not be able to do so unless we begin by carrying our attention back to a period long before that poetry was born. In this and the following chapter, I shall trace in turn the rise both of the sentiment called 'Courtly Love' and of the allegorical method. The discussion will seem, no doubt, to carry us far from our main subject: but it cannot be avoided.

Every one has heard of courtly love, and every one knows that it appears quite suddenly at the end of the eleventh century in Languedoc. The characteristics of the Troubadour poetry have been repeatedly described.[1] With the form, which is lyrical, and the style, which is sophisticated and often 'aureate' or deliberately enigmatic, we need not concern ourselves. The sentiment, of course, is love, but love of a highly specialized sort, whose characteristics may be enumerated as Humility, Courtesy, Adultery, and the Religion of Love. The lover is always abject. Obedience to his lady's lightest wish, however whimsical, and silent acquiescence in her rebukes, however unjust, are the only virtues he dares to 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'. He addresses her as *midons*, which etymologically represents not 'my lady' but 'my lord'.[2] The whole attitude has been rightly described as 'a feudalisation of love'.[3] This solemn amatory ritual is felt to be part and parcel of the courtly life. It is possible only to those who are, in the old sense of the word, polite. It thus becomes, from one point of view the flower, from another the seed, of all those noble usages which distinguish the gentle from the vilein: only the courteous can love, but it is love that makes them courteous. Yet this love, though neither playful nor licentious in its expression, is always what the nineteenth century called 'dishonourable' love. The poet normally addresses another man's wife, and the situation is so carelessly accepted that he seldom concerns himself much with her husband: his real enemy is the rival.[4] But if he is ethically careless, he is no light-hearted gallant: his love is represented as a despairing and tragical emotion—or almost despairing, for he is saved from complete wanhope by his faith in the God of Love who never betrays his faithful worshippers and who can subjugate the cruellest beauties.[5]

The characteristics of this sentiment, and its systematic coherence throughout the love poetry of the Troubadours as a whole, are so striking that they easily lead to a fatal misunderstanding. We are tempted to treat 'courtly love' as a mere episode in literary history—an episode that we have finished with as we have finished with the peculiarities of Skaldic verse or Euphuistic prose. In fact, however, an unmistakable continuity connects the Provençal love song with the love poetry of the later Middle Ages, and thence, through Petrarch and many others, with that of the present day. If the thing at first escapes our notice, this is because we are so familiar with the erotic tradition of modern Europe that we mistake it for something natural and universal and therefore do not inquire into its origins. It seems to us natural that love should be the commonest theme of serious imaginative literature: but a glance at classical antiquity or at the Dark Ages at once shows us that what we took for 'nature' is really a special state of affairs, which will probably have an end, and which certainly had a beginning in eleventh-century Provence. It seems—or it seemed to us till lately—a natural thing that love (under certain conditions) should be regarded as a noble and ennobling passion: it is only if we imagine ourselves trying to explain this doctrine to Aristotle, Virgil, St. Paul, or the author of *Beowulf*, that we become aware how far from natural it is. Even our code of etiquette, with its rule that women always have precedence, is a legacy from courtly love, and is felt to be far from natural in modern Japan or India. Many of the features of this sentiment, as it was known to the Troubadours, have indeed disappeared; but this must not blind us to the fact that the most momentous and the most revolutionary elements in it have made the background of European literature for eight hundred years. French poets, in the eleventh century, discovered or invented, or were the first to express, that romantic species of passion which English poets were still writing about in the nineteenth. They effected a change which has left no corner of our ethics, our imagination, or our daily life untouched, and they erected impassable barriers between us and the classical past or the Oriental present. Compared with this revolution the Renaissance is a mere ripple on the surface of literature.

There can be no mistake about the novelty of romantic love: our only difficulty is to imagine in all its bareness the mental world that existed before its coming—to wipe out of our minds, for a moment, nearly all that

makes the food both of modern sentimentality and modern cynicism. We must conceive a world emptied of that ideal of 'happiness'—a happiness grounded on successful romantic love—which still supplies the motive of our popular fiction. In ancient literature love seldom rises above the levels of merry sensuality or domestic comfort, except to be treated as a tragic madness, an ἄτη which plunges otherwise sane people (usually women) into crime and disgrace. Such is the love of Medea, of Phaedra, of Dido; and such the love from which maidens pray that the gods may protect them.[6] At the other end of the scale we find the comfort and utility of a good wife acknowledged: Odysseus loves Penelope as he loves the rest of his home and possessions, and Aristotle rather grudgingly admits that the conjugal relation may now and then rise to the same level as the virtuous friendship between good men.[7] But this has plainly very little to do with 'love' in the modern or medieval sense; and if we turn to ancient love-poetry proper, we shall be even more disappointed. We shall find the poets loud in their praises of love, no doubt,

> τίς δε βίgος, τί δε τερπνὸν ἄτερ χρυσης 'Αφροδίτης;

'What is life without love, tra-la-la?' as the later song has it. But this is no more to be taken seriously than the countless panegyrics both ancient and modern on the all-consoling virtues of the bottle. If Catullus and Propertius vary the strain with cries of rage and misery, this is not so much because they are romantics as because they are exhibitionists. In their anger or their suffering they care not who knows the pass to which love has brought them. They are in the grip of th ἄτη. They do not expect their obsession to be regarded as a noble sorrow—they have no 'silks and fine array'.

Plato will not be reckoned an exception by those who have read him with care. In the *Symposium*, no doubt, we find the conception of a ladder whereby the soul may ascend from human love to divine. But this is a ladder in the strictest sense; you reach the higher rungs by leaving the lower ones behind. The original object of human love—who, incidentally, is not a woman—has simply fallen out of sight before the soul arrives at the spiritual object. The very first step upwards would have made a courtly lover blush, since it consists in passing on from the worship of the

beloved’s beauty to that of the same beauty in others. Those who call themselves Platonists at the Renaissance may imagine a love which reaches the divine without abandoning the human and becomes spiritual while remaining also carnal; but they do not find this in Plato. If they read it into him, this is because they are living, like ourselves, in the tradition which began in the eleventh century.

Perhaps the most characteristic of the ancient writers on love, and certainly the most influential in the Middle Ages, is Ovid. In the piping times of the early empire—when Julia was still unbanished and the dark figure of Tiberius had not yet crossed the stage—Ovid sat down to compose for the amusement of a society which well understood him an ironically didactic poem on the art of seduction. The very design of his *Art of Love* presupposes an audience to whom love is one of the minor peccadilloes of life, and the joke consists in treating it seriously—in writing a treatise, with rules and examples *en rège* for the nice conduct of illicit loves. It is funny, as the ritual solemnity of old gentlemen over their wine is funny. Food, drink, and sex are the oldest jokes in the world; and one familiar form of the joke is to be very serious about them. From this attitude the whole tone of the *Ars Amatoria* flows. In the first place Ovid naturally introduces the god Amor with an affectation of religious awe—just as he would have introduced Bacchus if he had written an ironic *Art of Getting Drunk*. Love thus becomes a great and jealous god, his service an arduous *militia*: offend him who dares, Ovid is his trembling captive. In the second place, being thus mockingly serious about the appetite, he is of necessity mockingly serious about the woman. The real objects of Ovid’s ‘love’, no doubt, he would have ordered out of the room before the serious conversation about books, or politics, or family affairs began. The moralist may treat them seriously, but the man of the world (such as Ovid) certainly does not. But inside the convention of the poem they are the ‘demnition charmers’, the mistresses of his fancy and the arbitresses of his fate. They rule him with a rod of iron, lead him a slave’s life. As a result we find this sort of advice addressed to the ’prentice lover:

> Go early ere th’ appointed hour to meet
> The fair, and long await her in the street.

Through shouldering crowds on all her errands run,
Though graver business wait the while undone.
If she commands your presence on her way
Home from the ball to lackey her, obey!
Or if from rural scenes she bids you, ‘Come’,
Drive if you can, if not, then walk, to Rome,
And let nor Dog-star heats nor drifted load
Of whitening snows deter you from the road.
Cowards, fly hence! Our general, Love, disdains
Your lukewarm service in his long campaigns.[8]

No one who has caught the spirit of the author will misunderstand this. The conduct which Ovid recommends is felt to be shameful and absurd, and that is precisely why he recommends it—partly as a comic confession of the depths to which this ridiculous appetite may bring a man, and partly as a lesson in the art of fooling to the top of her bent the last baggage who has caught your fancy. The whole passage should be taken in conjunction with his other piece of advice—‘Don’t visit her on her birthday: it costs too much.’[9] But it will also be noticed—and this is a pretty instance of the vast change which occurred during the Middle Ages—that the very same conduct which Ovid ironically recommends could be recommended seriously by the courtly tradition. To leap up on errands, to go through heat or cold, at the bidding of one’s lady, or even of any lady, would seem but honourable and natural to a gentleman of the thirteenth or even of the seventeenth century; and most of us have gone shopping in the twentieth with ladies who showed no sign of regarding the tradition as a dead letter. The contrast inevitably raises in our minds a question as to how far the whole tone of medieval love poetry can be explained by the formula, ‘Ovid misunderstood’; and though we see at once that this is no solution—for if it were granted, we should still have to ask why the Middle Ages misunderstood him so consistently—yet the thought is a good one to keep in mind as we proceed.[10]

The fall of the old civilization and the coming of Christianity did not result in any deepening or idealizing of the conception of love. The fact is important, because it refutes two theories which trace the great change in

our sentiments respectively to the Germanic temperament and to the Christian religion—especially to the cult of the Blessed Virgin. The latter view touches on a real and very complex relationship; but as its true nature will become apparent in what follows, I will here content myself with a brief and dogmatic statement. That Christianity in a very general sense, by its insistence on compassion and on the sanctity of the human body, had a tendency to soften or abash the more extreme brutalities and flippancies of the ancient world in all departments of human life, and therefore also in sexual matters, may be taken as obvious. But there is no evidence that the quasi-religious tone of medieval love poetry has been transferred from the worship of the Blessed Virgin: it is just as likely—it is even more likely—that the colouring of certain hymns to the Virgin has been borrowed from the love poetry.[11] Nor is it true in any unequivocal sense that the medieval church encouraged reverence for women at all: while it is a ludicrous error (as we shall presently see) to suppose that she regarded sexual passion, under any conditions or after any possible process of refinement, as a noble emotion. The other theory turns on a supposedly innate characteristic in the Germanic races, noted by Tacitus.[12] But what Tacitus describes is a primitive awe of women as uncanny and probably prophetic beings, which is as remote from our comprehension as the primitive reverence for lunacy or the primitive horror of twins; and because it is thus remote, we cannot judge how probably it might have developed into the medieval *Frauendienst*, the service of ladies. What is certain is that where a Germanic race reached its maturity untouched by the Latin spirit, as in Iceland, we find nothing at all like courtly love. The position of women in the Sagas is, indeed, higher than that which they enjoy in classical literature; but it is based on a purely commonsensible and unemphasized respect for the courage or prudence which some women, like some men, happen to possess. The Norsemen, in fact, treat their women not primarily as women but as people. It is an attitude which may lead in the fullness of time to an equal franchise or a Married Women's Property Act, but it has very little to do with romantic love. The final answer to both theories, however, lies in the fact that the Christian and Germanic period had existed for several centuries before the new feeling appeared. 'Love', in our sense of the word, is as absent from the literature of the Dark Ages as from that of classical antiquity. Their favourite stories were not, like ours, stories of how

a man married, or failed to marry, a woman. They preferred to hear how a holy man went to heaven or how a brave man went to battle. We are mistaken if we think that the poet in the Song of Roland shows restraint in disposing so briefly of Alde, Roland's betrothed.[13] Rather by bringing her in at all, he is doing the opposite: he is expatiating, filling up chinks, dragging in for our delectation the most marginal interests after those of primary importance have had their due. Roland does not think about Alde on the battle-field: he thinks of his praise in pleasant France.[14] The figure of the betrothed is shadowy compared with that of the friend, Oliver. The deepest of worldly emotions in this period is the love of man for man, the mutual love of warriors who die together fighting against odds, and the affection between vassal and lord. We shall never understand this last, if we think of it in the light of our own moderated and impersonal loyalties. We must not think of officers drinking the king's health: we must think rather of a small boy's feeling for some hero in the sixth form. There is no harm in the analogy, for the good vassal is to the good citizen very much as a boy is to a man. He cannot rise to the great abstraction of a *res publica*. He loves and reverences only what he can touch and see; but he loves it with an intensity which our tradition is loath to allow except to sexual love. Hence to the old vassal in the English poem, parted from his lord,

> Þynceþ him on mode þæt he his monndryhten
> Clyppe and cysse and on cneo lecge
> Honda ond heafod, swa he hwilum ær
> On geardagum giefstoles breac . . .

The feeling is more passionate and less ideal than our patriotism. It rises more easily to heroic prodigality of service, and it also breaks more easily and turns into hatred: hence feudal history is full of great loyalties and great treacheries. Germanic and Celtic legend, no doubt, had bequeathed to the barbarians some stories of tragic love between man and woman—love 'star-crossed' and closely analogous to that of Dido or Phaedra. But the theme claims no preeminence, and when it is treated the interest turns at least as much on the resulting male tragedy, the disturbance of vassalage or sworn brotherhood, as on the female influence which produced it. Ovid, too, was

known to the learned; and there was a plentiful literature on sexual irregularities for the use of confessors. Of romance, of reverence for women, of the idealizing imagination exercised about sex, there is hardly a hint. The centre of gravity is elsewhere—in the hopes and fears of religion, or in the clean and happy fidelities of the feudal hall. But, as we have seen, these male affections—though wholly free from the taint that hangs about 'friendship' in the ancient world—were themselves lover-like; in their intensity, their wilful exclusion of other values, and their uncertainty, they provided an exercise of the spirit not wholly unlike that which later ages have found in 'love'. The fact is, of course, significant. Like the formula 'Ovid misunderstood', it is inadequate to explain the appearance of the new sentiment; but it goes far to explain why that sentiment, having appeared, should make haste to become a 'feudalization' of love. What is new usually wins its way by disguising itself as the old.

The new thing itself, I do not pretend to explain. Real changes in human sentiment are very rare—there are perhaps three or four on record—but I believe that they occur, and that this is one of them. I am not sure that they have 'causes', if by a cause we mean something which would wholly account for the new state of affairs, and so explain away what seemed its novelty. It is, at any rate, certain that the efforts of scholars have so far failed to find an origin for the content of Provençal love poetry. Celtic, Byzantine, and even Arabic influence have been suspected; but it has not been made clear that these, if granted, could account for the results we see. A more promising theory attempts to trace the whole thing to Ovid;[15] but this view—apart from the inadequacy which I suggested above—finds itself faced with the fatal difficulty that the evidence points to a much stronger Ovidian influence in the north of France than in the south. Something can be extracted from a study of the social conditions in which the new poetry arose, but not so much as we might hope. We know that the crusading armies thought the Provençals milk-sops,[16] but this will seem relevant only to a very hardened enemy of *Frauendienst.* We know that this period in the south of France had witnessed what seemed to contemporaries a signal degeneracy from the simplicity of ancient manners and an alarming increase of luxury.[17] But what age, what land, by the same testimony, has not? Much more important is the fact that landless knighthood—knighthood without a place in the territorial hierarchy of feudalism—seems to have

been possible in Provence.[18] The unattached knight, as we meet him in the romances, respectable only by his own valour, amiable only by his own courtesy, predestined lover of other mens' wives, was therefore a reality; but this does not explain why he loved in such a new way. If courtly love necessitates adultery, adultery hardly necessitates courtly love. We come much nearer to the secret if we can accept the picture of a typical Provençal court drawn many years ago by an English writer,[19] and since approved by the greatest living authority on the subject. We must picture a castle which is a little island of comparative leisure and luxury, and therefore at least of possible refinement, in a barbarous country-side. There are many men in it, and very few women—the lady, and her damsels. Around these throng the whole male *meiny*, the inferior nobles, the landless knights, the squires, and the pages—haughty creatures enough in relation to the peasantry beyond the walls, but feudally inferior to the lady as to her lord—her 'men' as feudal language had it. Whatever 'courtesy' is in the place flows from her: all female charm from her and her damsels. There is no question of marriage for most of the court. All these circumstances together come very near to being a 'cause'; but they do not explain why very similar conditions elsewhere had to wait for Provençal example before they produced like results. Some part of the mystery remains inviolate.

But if we abandon the attempt to explain the new feeling, we can at least explain—indeed we have partly explained already—the peculiar form which it first took; the four marks of Humility, Courtesy, Adultery, and the Religion of Love. To account for the humility we need no more than has already been said. Before the coming of courtly love the relation of vassal and lord, in all its intensity and warmth, already existed; it was a mould into which romantic passion would almost certainly be poured. And if the beloved were also the feudal superior the thing becomes entirely natural and inevitable. The emphasis on courtesy results from the same conditions. It is in courts that the new feeling arises: the lady, by her social and feudal position, is already the arbitress of manners and the scourge of 'villany' even before she is loved. The association of love with adultery—an association which has lasted in continental literature down to our own times—has deeper causes. In part, it can be explained by the picture we have already drawn; but there is much more to be said about it than this. Two

things prevented the men of that age from connecting their ideal of romantic and passionate love with marriage.

The first is, of course, the actual practice of feudal society. Marriages had nothing to do with love, and no 'nonsense' about marriage was tolerated.[20] All matches were matches of interest, and, worse still, of an interest that was continually changing. When the alliance which had answered would answer no longer, the husband's object was to get rid of the lady as quickly as possible. Marriages were frequently dissolved. The same woman who was the lady and 'the dearest dread' of her vassals was often little better than a piece of property to her husband. He was master in his own house. So far from being a natural channel for the new kind of love, marriage was rather the drab background against which that love stood out in all the contrast of its new tenderness and delicacy. The situation is indeed a very simple one, and not peculiar to the Middle Ages. Any idealization of sexual love, in a society where marriage is purely utilitarian, must begin by being an idealization of adultery.

The second factor is the medieval theory of marriage—what may be called, by a convenient modern barbarism, the 'sexology' of the medieval church. A nineteenth-century Englishman felt that the same passion—romantic love—could be either virtuous or vicious according as it was directed towards marriage or not. But according to the medieval view passionate love itself was wicked, and did not cease to be wicked if the object of it were your wife. If a man had once yielded to this emotion he had no choice between 'guilty' and 'innocent' love before him: he had only the choice, either of repentance, or else of different forms of guilt.

This subject will delay us for a little, partly because it introduces us to the true relations between courtly love and Christianity, and partly because it has been much misrepresented in the past. From some accounts we should conclude that medieval Christianity was a kind of Manicheeism seasoned with prurience; from others, that it was a sort of carnival in which all the happier aspects of Paganism took part, after being baptized and yet losing none of their jollity. Neither picture is very faithful. The views of medieval churchmen on the sexual act within marriage (there is no question, of course, about the act outside marriage) are all limited by two complementary agreements. On the one hand, nobody ever asserted that the act was intrinsically sinful. On the other hand, all were agreed that some

evil element was present in every concrete instance of this act since the Fall. It was in the effort to determine the precise nature of this concomitant evil that learning and ingenuity were expended. Gregory, at the end of the sixth century, was perfectly clear on this question: for him the act is innocent but the desire is morally evil. If we object to the conception of an intrinsically wicked impulse towards an intrinsically innocent action, he replies by the example of a righteous rebuke delivered in anger. What we say may be exactly what we ought to have said; but the emotion which is the efficient cause of our saying it, is morally bad.[21] But the concrete sexual act, that is, the act *plus* its unavoidable efficient cause, remains guilty. When we come down to the later Middle Ages this view is modified. Hugo of St. Victor agrees with Gregory in thinking the carnal desire an evil. But he does not think that this makes the concrete act guilty, provided it is 'excused' by the good ends of marriage, such as offspring.[22] He goes out of his way to combat the rigorous view that a marriage caused by *beauty* is no marriage: Jacob, as he reminds us, married Rachel for her beauty.[23] On the other hand, he is clear that if we had remained in the state of innocence we should have generated *sine carnis incentivo.* He differs from Gregory by considering not only the desire but the pleasure. The latter he thinks evil, but not morally evil: it is, he says, not a sin but the punishment of a sin, and thus arrives at the baffling conception of a punishment which consists in a morally innocent pleasure.[24] Peter Lombard was much more coherent. He located the evil in the desire and said that it was not a moral evil, but a punishment for the Fall.[25] Thus the act, though not free from evil, may be free from moral evil or sin, but only if it is 'excused by the good ends of marriage'. He quotes with approval from a supposedly Pythagorean source a sentence which is all-important for the historian of courtly love—*omnis ardentior amator propriae uxoris adulter est*, passionate love of a man's own wife is adultery.[26] Albertus Magnus takes a much more genial view. He sweeps away the idea that the pleasure is evil or a result of the Fall: on the contrary, pleasure would have been greater if we had remained in Paradise. The real trouble about fallen man is not the strength of his pleasures but the weakness of his reason: unfallen man could have enjoyed any degree of pleasure without losing sight, for a moment, of the First Good.[27] The desire, as we now know it, is an evil, a punishment for the Fall, but not a sin.[28] The conjugal act may therefore be not only innocent

but meritorious, if it has the right causes—desire of offspring, payment of the marriage debt, and the like. But if desire comes first ('first' in what sense I am not quite sure) it remains a mortal sin.[29] Thomas Aquinas, whose thought is always so firm and clear in itself, is a baffling figure for our present purpose. He seems always to take away with one hand what he holds out to us with the other. Thus he has learned from Aristotle that marriage is a species of *amicitia*.[30] On the other hand, he proves that sexual life would have existed without the Fall by the argument that God would not have given Adam a woman as a 'help' except for this purpose; for any other, a man would obviously have been so much more satisfactory.[31] He is aware that affection between the parties concerned increases sexual pleasure, and that union even among the beasts implies a certain kindliness—*suavem amicitiam*—and thus seems to come to the verge of the modern conception of love. But the very passage in which he does so is his explanation of the law against incest: he is arguing that unions between close kinsfolk are bad precisely because kinsfolk have mutual affection, and such affection would increase pleasure.[32] His general view deepens and subtilizes that of Albertus. The evil in the sexual act is neither the desire nor the pleasure, but the submergence of the rational faculty which accompanies them: and this submergence, again, is not a sin, though it is an evil, a result of the Fall.[33]

It will be seen that the medieval theory finds room for innocent sexuality: what it does not find room for is passion, whether romantic or otherwise. It might almost be said that it denies to passion the indulgence which it reluctantly accords to appetite. In its Thomist form the theory acquits the carnal desire and the carnal pleasure, and finds the evil in the *ligamentum rationis*, the suspension of intellectual activity. This is almost the opposite of the view, implicit in so much romantic love poetry, that it is precisely passion which purifies; and the scholastic picture of unfallen sexuality—a picture of physical pleasure at the maximum and emotional disturbance at the minimum—may suggest to us something much less like the purity of Adam in Paradise than the cold sensuality of Tiberius in Capri. It must be stated at once that this is entirely unjust to the scholastics. They are not talking about the same kind of passion as the romantics. The one party means merely an animal intoxication; the other believes, whether rightly or wrongly, in a 'passion' which works a chemical change upon

appetite and affection and turns them into a thing different from either. About 'passion' in this sense Thomas Aquinas has naturally nothing to say —as he has nothing to say about the steam-engine. He had not heard of it. It was only coming into existence in his time, and finding its first expression in the poetry of courtly love.

The distinction I have just made is a fine one, even as we make it centuries after the event with all the later expressions of romantic passion in mind. Naturally it could not be made at the time. The general impression left on the medieval mind by its official teachers was that all love—at least all such passionate and exalted devotion as a courtly poet thought worthy of the name—was more or less wicked. And this impression, combining with the nature of feudal marriage as I have already described it, produced in the poets a certain wilfulness, a readiness to emphasize rather than to conceal the antagonism between their amatory and their religious ideals. Thus if the Church tells them that the ardent lover even of his own wife is in mortal sin, they presently reply with the rule that true love is impossible in marriage. If the Church says that the sexual act can be 'excused' only by the desire for offspring, then it becomes the mark of a true lover, like Chauntecleer, that he served Venus

> More for delyt than world to multiplye.[34]

This cleavage between Church and court, or, in Professor Vinaver's fine phrase, between Carbonek and Camelot, which will become more apparent as we proceed, is the most striking feature of medieval sentiment.

Finally we come to the fourth mark of courtly love—its love religion of the god Amor. This is partly, as we have seen, an inheritance from Ovid. In part it is due to that same law of transference which determined that all the emotion stored in the vassal's relation to his *seigneur* should attach itself to the new kind of love: the forms of religious emotion would naturally tend to get into the love poetry, for the same reason. But in part (and this is, perhaps, the most important reason of the three) this erotic religion arises as a rival or a parody of the real religion and emphasizes the antagonism of the two ideals. The quasi-religious tone is not necessarily strongest in the most serious love poetry. A twelfth-century *jeu-d'esprit* called the *Concilium in*

Monte Romarici is here illuminating. It purports to describe a chapter of the nuns at Remiremont, held in spring time, at which the agenda were of a curious nature—*De solo negotio Amoris tractatum est*—and whence all men save a sprinkling of *honesti clerici* were excluded. The proceedings began like this:

> When the virgin senate all
> Had filled the benches of the hall,
> Doctor Ovid's Rule instead
> Of the evangelists was read.
> The reader of that gospel gay
> Was Sister Eva, who (they say)
> Understands the practick part
> Of the Amatory Art—
> She it was convoked them all,
> Little sisters, sisters tall.
> Sweetly they began to raise
> Songs in Love's melodious praise. . . . [35]

The service being ended, a *Cardinalis domina* arose in their midst and thus announced her business:

> Love, the god of every lover,
> Sent me hither to discover
> All your life and conversation
> And conduct a Visitation.[36]

In obedience to the she-cardinal, a number of the sisters (two of whom are named) made public confession of their principles and practice in the matter of love. It soon became apparent that the convent was divided into two distinct parties, whereof the one had been scrupulous to admit to their favours no lover who was not a clerk (*clericus*), while the other, with equal pedantry, had reserved their kindness exclusively for knights (*militares*). The reader, who has doubtless grasped what kind of author we are dealing with, will not be surprised to learn that the *Cardinalis domina* pronounces

emphatically in favour of the clerk as the only proper lover for a nun, and urges the heretical party to repentance. The curses denounced upon them in case of obstinacy or relapse are very exhilarating:

> In reward of their impiety,
> Terror, Travail, Grief, Anxiety,
> Fear and Discord, Strife and Gloom,
> Still attend them as their doom!
> Let all those who in their blindness
> Upon laymen waste their kindness
> Be a scorn and execration
> To the clerks of every nation,
> And let clerks at every meeting
> Pass them by without a greeting! . . .
> To which malediction we
> Say Amen, so may it be![37]

The whole poem illustrates the influence of Ovid, and the religion of love, very well; but it is by no means an instance of ‘Ovid misunderstood’. The worship of the god Amor had been a mock-religion in Ovid’s *Art of Love*. The French poet has taken over this conception of an erotic religion with a full understanding of its flippancy, and proceeded to elaborate the joke in terms of the only religion he knows—medieval Christianity. The result is a close and impudent parody of the practices of the Church, in which Ovid becomes a *doctor egregius* and the *Ars Amatoria* a gospel, erotic heterodoxy and orthodoxy are distinguished, and the god of Love is equipped with cardinals and exercises the power of excommunication. The Ovidian tradition, operated upon by the medieval taste for humorous blasphemy, is apparently quite sufficient to produce a love religion, and even in a sense a Christianized love religion, without any aid from the new seriousness of romantic passion. As against any theory which would derive medieval *Frauendienst* from Christianity and the worship of the Blessed Virgin, we must insist that the love religion often begins as a parody of the real religion.[38] This does not mean that it may not soon become something more serious than a parody, nor even that it may not, as in Dante, find a

modus vivendi with Christianity and produce a noble fusion of sexual and religious experience. But it does mean that we must be prepared for a certain ambiguity in all those poems where the attitude of the lover to his lady or to Love looks at first sight most like the attitude of the worshipper to the Blessed Virgin or to God. The distance between the 'lord of terrible aspect' in the *Vita Nuova* and the god of lovers in the *Council of Remiremont* is a measure of the tradition's width and complexity. Dante is as serious as a man can be; the French poet is not serious at all. We must be prepared to find other authors dotted about in every sort of intermediate position between these two extremes. And this is not all. The variations are not only between jest and earnest; for the love religion can become more serious without becoming reconciled to the real religion. Where it is not a parody of the Church it may be, in a sense, her rival—a temporary escape, a truancy from the ardours of a religion that was believed into the delights of a religion that was merely imagined. To describe it as the revenge of Paganism on her conqueror would be to exaggerate; but to think of it as a direct colouring of human passions by religious emotion would be a far graver error. It is as if some lover's metaphor when he said 'Here is my heaven' in a moment of passionate abandonment were taken up and expanded into a system. Even while he speaks he knows that 'here' is not his real heaven; and yet it is a delightful audacity to develop the idea a little further. If you go on to add to that lover's 'heaven' its natural accessories, a god and saints and a list of commandments, and if you picture the lover praying, sinning, repenting, and finally admitted to bliss, you will find yourself in the precarious dream-world of medieval love poetry. An extension of religion, an escape from religion, a rival religion—*Frauendienst* may be any of these, or any combination of them. It may even be the open enemy of religion—as when Aucassin roundly declares that he would rather follow all the sweet ladies and goodly knights to hell than go without them to heaven. The ideal lady of the old love poems is not what the earliest scholars took her to be. The more religiously she is addressed, the more irreligious the poem usually is.

> I'm no the Queen o' Heavn, Thomas;
>   I never carried my head sae hee,

For I am but a lady gay
Come out to hunt in my follee.

Before we proceed to examine two important expressions of courtly love, I must put the reader on his guard against a necessary abstraction in my treatment of the subject. I have spoken hitherto as if men first became conscious of a new emotion and then invented a new kind of poetry to express it: as if the Troubadour poetry were necessarily 'sincere' in the crudely biographical sense of the word: as if convention played no part in literary history. My excuse for this procedure must be that a full consideration of such problems belongs rather to the theory of literature in general than to the history of one kind of poem: if we admit them, our narrative will be interrupted in every chapter by almost metaphysical digressions. For our purpose it is enough to point out that life and letters are inextricably intermixed. If the feeling came first a literary convention would soon arise to express it: if the convention came first it would soon teach those who practised it a new feeling. It does not much matter what view we hold provided we avoid that fatal dichotomy which makes every poem either an autobiographical document or a 'literary exercise'—as if any poem worth writing were either the one or the other. We may be quite sure that the poetry which initiated all over Europe so great a change of heart was not a 'mere' convention: we can be quite as sure that it was not a transcript of fact. It was poetry.

Before the close of the twelfth century we find the Provençal conception of love spreading out in two directions from the land of its birth. One stream flows down into Italy and, through the poets of the Dolce Stil Nuovo, goes to swell the great sea of the Divine Comedy; and there, at least, the quarrel between Christianity and the love religion was made up. Another stream found its way northward to mingle with the Ovidian tradition which already existed there, and so to produce the French poetry of the twelfth century. To that poetry we must now turn.

II

Chrétien de Troyes is its greatest representative. His *Lancelot* is the flower of the courtly tradition in France, as it was in its early maturity. And yet this

poet is not wholly the product of the new conceptions: when he began to write he seems scarcely to have accepted them.[39] We must conceive him as a poet of the same type with Dryden: one of those rare men of genius who can trim their sails to every breeze of novelty without forfeiting their poetic rank. He was among the first to welcome the Arthurian stories; and to him, as much as to any single writer, we owe the colouring with which the 'matter of Britain' has come down to us. He was among the first (in northern France) to choose love as the central theme of a serious poem: such a poem he wrote in his *Erec*, even before he had undergone the influence of the fully developed Provençal formula. And when that influence reached him, he was not only the first, but perhaps the greatest, exponent of it to his fellow countrymen; and, combining this element with the Arthurian legend, he stamped upon men's minds indelibly the conception of Arthur's court as the home *par excellence* of true and noble love. What was theory for his own age had been practice for the knights of Britain. For it is interesting to notice that he places his ideal in the past. For him already 'the age of chivalry is dead'.[40] It always was: let no one think the worse of it on that account. These phantom periods for which the historian searches in vain—the Rome and Greece that the Middle Ages believed in, the British past of Malory and Spenser, the Middle Age itself as it was conceived by the romantic revival—all these have their place in a history more momentous than that which commonly bears the name.

An appreciation of Chrétien's work as a whole would here be out of place. That he has claims on our attention, far beyond the restricted purpose for which I cite him now, must surely be admitted. It is his fate to appear constantly in literary history as the specimen of a tendency. He has deserved better. And the tragedy of the thing is that he himself was never really subdued to that tendency. It is very doubtful whether he was ever dazzled by the tradition of romantic adultery. There are protests in *Cligés* which seem to come from the heart.[41] He tells us in the opening lines of *Lancelot* that he wrote it at the command of the Countess of Champagne,[42] and that she furnished him with both the story and the treatment. What does this mean? I am probably not the first reader who has seen in the fantastic labours which Lancelot undergoes at the bidding of the Queen, a symbol of the poet's own genius bent to tasks unworthy of it by the whim of a fashionable woman. However this may be, there is assuredly something in

Chrétien beyond the reach of all changes of taste. After so many centuries, it needs no historical incantation to bring to life such lines as

> A! wher was so gret beautee maked?
> —God wroughte hir with His hond al naked,[43]

nor to appreciate the superb narrative power in the opening of the *Lancelot*. How irresistible is that cryptic knight who comes and goes we know not whence or whither, and lures the reader to follow as certainly as he lured the Queen and Kay. How nobly the poem of *Yvain* approaches to the romantic ideal of a labyrinthine tale in which the thread is never lost, and multiplicity does no more than illustrate an underlying singleness. For our present purpose, however, we must give Chrétien short shrift. What is of interest to us is that versatility which enables us to trace, in the distance between *Erec* and *Lancelot*, the extent of the emotional revolution which was taking place in his audience.

In *Erec*—almost certainly an early work[44]—the later rules of love and courtesy are outraged at every turn. It is indeed a love story; but it is a story of married love. The hero has married the heroine before the main action of the poem begins. This, in itself, is an irregularity; but the method of his wooing is worse. *Erec* sees *Enide* in her father's house, and falls in love with her. There are no passages of love between them: no humility on his part, no cruelty on hers. Indeed it is not clear that they converse at all. When he comes to the house, the maiden, at her father's command, leads his horse to stable and grooms it with her own hands. Later, when they are seated, the father and the guest talk of her in her presence as if she were a child or an animal. *Erec* asks her in marriage, and the father consents.[45] It does not seem to occur to the lover that the lady's will could be a relevant factor in this arrangement. We are given to understand that she is pleased, but only a passive role is expected of her, or indeed allowed to her. The whole scene, however true it may be to the marriage practices of the time, is strangely archaic compared with the new ideals of love. We are back in a world where women are merely the mute objects of gift or barter, not only in the eyes of their fathers, but even in the eyes of their lovers. When we pass on to the main story, this lack of 'courtesy' is even more striking. The

tale of *Erec*'s behaviour to his wife will be familiar to every one from Tennyson's *Geraint and Enid*. Chrétien renders it more credible by following a version in which the plot does not turn wholly on the absurd device of a soliloquy overheard,[46] and in which the husband has subtler and truer motives for his anger than Tennyson can give him. But this does not alter the inherent brutality of the theme. The story belongs to the same general type as that of Griselda—the story of wifely patience triumphing over ordeals imposed by the irresponsible cruelty of a husband—and, as such, it cannot possibly reconcile itself with even the most moderate ideal of courtesy. But Erec does not confine his discourtesy within the limits of the ordeal. Just as he had allowed Enide to groom his horse for him before their marriage, so, in their journeyings, he lets her watch and hold the horse all night, while he himself sleeps at ease beneath the cloak which she has taken from her own back to cover him.[47]

When we turn to the *Lancelot* all this is changed. The Chrétien of *Lancelot* is first and foremost the Chrétien who has translated Ovid's *Art of Love*,[48] and who lives at the court of my lady of Champagne—herself an ultimate authority on all questions of courtly love. As against the married life of Erec and Enide we have the secret love of Lancelot and Guinevere. The story turns mainly on the Queen's captivity in the mysterious land of Gorre, where those that are native can go both in and out but strangers can only go in,[49] and on her rescue thence by Lancelot. It is one of Chrétien's misfortunes that the dark and tremendous suggestions of the Celtic myth that lurks in the background of his story should so far (for a modern reader) overshadow the love and adventure of the foreground. He has, however, no conception of this. We think of the Middle Ages playing with the scattered fragments of classical antiquity, and failing to understand them, as when, by an intolerable degradation, they make Virgil a magician. But indeed they have dealt as roughly with the fragments of the barbarian past, and understood them as little: they have destroyed more magic than they ever invented. Lancelot sets out to find the Queen and almost at once loses his horse. In this predicament he is met by a dwarf driving a tumbril. To his questions, the dwarf—surly like all his race—replies, 'Get in, and I will bring you where you shall have news of the Queen'. The knight hesitates for a moment before mounting the cart of shame and thus appearing as a common criminal; a moment later he obeys.[50] He is driven through streets

where the rabble cry out upon him and ask what he has done and whether he is to be flayed or hanged. He is brought to a castle where he is shown a bed that he must not lie in because he is a knight disgraced. He comes to the bridge that crosses into the land of Gorre—the sword-bridge, made of a single blade of steel—and is warned that the high enterprise of crossing it is not for one so dishonoured as he. ‘Remember your ride on the cart’, says the keeper of the bridge. Even his friends acknowledge that he will never be rid of the disgrace.[51] When he has crossed the bridge, wounded in hands, knees, and feet, he comes at last into the presence of the Queen. She will not speak to him. An old king, moved with pity, presses on her the merits of his service. Her reply, and the scene that follows, deserve to be quoted in full:

> ‘Sire, alle his tyme is spilt for noght,
> For sooth to seyn he hath at me
> No thankes wonnen ne no gree’.
> Lancelot sory chere maketh
> Yet lyk a lovere al he taketh
> In meknesse and seyth humblely,
> ‘Dame, I am greved certeinly;
> Yet, for the cause of your chiding,
> I dar nat asken for no thing’
> Greet pleynte tho to make him liste
> If that the Quene wolde hit liste,
> But to encrese his were and wo,
> She yeveth him no wordes mo.
> Into a bour she paceth nouthe,
> And evere as ferforth as he couthe
> This Lancelot with eyen two
> Hir folwed and with herte also.[52]

It is only later that he learns the cause of all this cruelty. The Queen has heard of his momentary hesitation in stepping on to the tumbril, and this lukewarmness in the service of love has been held by her sufficient to annihilate all the merit of his subsequent labours and humiliations. Even

when he is forgiven, his trials are not yet at an end. The tournament at the close of the poem gives Guinevere another opportunity of exercising her power. When he has already entered the lists, in disguise, and all, as usual, is going down before him, she sends him a message ordering him to do his poorest. Lancelot obediently lets himself be unhorsed by the next knight that comes against him, and then takes to his heels, feigning terror of every combatant that passes near him. The herald mocks him for a coward and the whole field takes up the laugh against him: the Queen looks on delighted. Next morning the same command is repeated, and he answers, 'My thanks to her, if she will so'. This time, however, the restriction is withdrawn before the fighting actually begins.[53]

The submission which Lancelot shows in his actions is accompanied, on the subjective side, by a feeling that deliberately apes religious devotion. Although his love is by no means supersensual and is indeed carnally rewarded in this very poem, he is represented as treating Guinevere with saintly, if not divine, honours. When he comes before the bed where she lies he kneels and adores her: as Chrétien explicitly tells us, there is no *corseynt* in whom he has greater faith. When he leaves her chamber he makes a genuflexion as if he were before a shrine.[54] The irreligion of the religion of love could hardly go further. Yet Chrétien—whether he is completely unconscious of the paradox, or whether he wishes, clumsily enough, to make some amends for these revolting passages—represents his Lancelot as a pious man and goes out of his way to show him dismounting when he passes a church, and entering to make his prayer; by which, according to Chrétien, he proves both his courtesy and wisdom.[55]

Chrétien de Troyes, judged by modern standards, is on the whole an objective poet. The adventures still occupy the greater part of his stories. By the standard of his own times, on the other hand, he must have appeared strikingly subjective. The space devoted to action that goes forward only in the souls of his characters was probably beyond all medieval precedent.[56] He was one of the first explorers of the human heart, and is therefore rightly to be numbered among the fathers of the novel of sentiment. But these psychological passages have usually one characteristic which throws special light on the subject of this book. Chrétien can hardly turn to the inner world without, at the same time, turning to allegory. No doubt the Provençals here served him as a model; no doubt both the poet and his

audience loved the method for its own sake, and found it clever and refined. Yet it would not surprise us if Chrétien found some difficulty in conceiving the inner world on any other terms. It is as if the insensible could not yet knock at the doors of the poetic consciousness without transforming itself into the likeness of the sensible: as if men could not easily grasp the reality of moods and emotions without turning them into shadowy *persons.* Allegory, besides being many other things, is the subjectivism of an objective age. When Lancelot hesitates before mounting the cart, Chrétien represents his indecision as a debate between *Reason* which forbids, and *Love* which urges him on.[57] A later poet would have told us directly—though not, after all, without metaphor—what Lancelot was feeling: an earlier poet would not have attempted such a scene at all. In another place Lancelot is asked by a lady for the head of a knight whom he has just disabled. The knight begs for mercy, and two duties within the chivalrous code are thus brought into collision. The resulting state of Lancelot's mind becomes for Chrétien a debate between Largesse and Pitë. Each fears defeat and between them they hold him a prisoner.[58] Again, in *Yvain*, where Gawain and the hero, who are fast friends, meet without recognition and fight, the contrast between their amicable intentions and their hostile acts is worked up into a very elaborate allegory of Love and Hate—Hate looking from the windows, Hate mounting into the saddle, while Love (here used in its larger sense), who shares the same house, is upbraided for skulking in an inner room and not coming to the rescue.[59] This certainly seems frigid to a modern reader, and does not rise as naturally from the context as those which I have quoted from the *Lancelot.* Yet we should beware of supposing too hastily that the poet is merely being clever. It is quite possible that the house with many rooms where Love can be lost in the background, while Hate holds the hall and the courtyard, may have come to Chrétien as a real revelation of the workings of circumstance to produce such various actions from the emotions of a single heart. We have to worm our way very cautiously into the minds of these old writers: an *a priori* assumption as to what can, and what can not, be the expression of real imaginative experience is the worst possible guide. The allegory of the Body and the Heart[60]—also from *Yvain*—is an interesting example. That Chrétien has borrowed it from Provence does not in the least alter the fact that it is for him an expression—perhaps the only possible expression—of something

well and truly imagined. But he has not yet learned the art of dropping such tools when they have done their work. The glitter of the weapon takes his fancy when the thrust has already been given, and here we may feel almost confident that what begins as live allegory dies into mere virtuosity in the course of the next ten lines. The more commonplace, and reiterated, allegory of Death in *Cligés* will recur to the memory of any of its readers.[61]

The figure of Love personified himself is almost equally connected with the subject of the 'love-religion' and with that of allegory. The references to his archery in *Cligés*[62] belong to a familiar type, and might come out of any classical love-poet. The idea of Love as an avenging god, coming to trouble the peace of those who have hitherto scorned his power, belongs also to the Latin tradition, but it is more serious for Chrétien than for Ovid. The repentance of those who had been fancy free, and their self-surrender to a new deity, are touched with a quasi-religious emotion. Alexander, in *Cligés*, after a brief resistance, confesses that love chastens him thus in order to instruct him. 'Let him do with me as he will, for I am his.' Soredamors, in the same poem, acknowledges that Love has humbled her pride by force, and doubts whether such extorted service will find favour.[63] In the same spirit Yvain determines to offer no resistance to his passion: not only to resist love, but even to yield unwillingly, is an act of treason against the god. Those who have thus sinned against him deserve no happiness.[64] In *Lancelot* the same doctrine is carried further. It is only the noblest hearts which Love deigns to enslave, and a man should prize himself the more if he is selected for such service. We find also the conception of lovers as the members of an *order* of Love, modelled upon the orders of religion: of an *art* of Love, as in Ovid; and of a *court* of Love, with solemn customs and usages, modelled upon the feudal courts of the period.[65] It will be seen that no final distinction is possible between the erotic religion, the erotic allegory, and the erotic mythology.

III

In Chrétien de Troyes we see the developed theory of love put into action in the course of stories. His teaching takes the form of example rather than precept, and, to do him justice, the purely narrative interest is never for long subordinated to the didactic. Having thus studied the new ideal in the ὕλη,

embodied and partly concealed in story, we naturally look next for a professedly theoretical work on the same subject, wherewith to finish off our sketch. Such a work is ready for us in the *De Arte Honeste Amandi* of Andreas Capellanus[66] (André the chaplain). It was probably written early in the thirteenth century, and is in Latin prose. The style is agreeable and easy, though the author's favourite *cursus* often makes his sentences end like hexameters in a way strange to classical ears.

The *De Arte* takes the form of methodical instruction in the art of love-making given by the Chaplain to a certain Walter; but after a very few definitions and preliminary considerations the author proceeds to illustrate his subject by a series of ideal dialogues, adapted for the use of lovers in various social positions. We are shown by specimen conversations how a man who is *nobilis* ought to approach a woman who is *nobilior*, or how a *plebeius* should woo a *plebeia*; even how a *plebeius* ought to woo a *nobilis* or a *nobilior.* It thus comes about that during the greater part of his work Andreas is not speaking in his own person, and that he uses, through these imaginary mouthpieces, the most different kinds of argument. This would present us with a serious difficulty if it were our object to give an account of the author's mind; but it is less serious if we wish to study (what is very much more interesting) the characteristics of the theory of love as it existed in the general mind of the period. The occurrence of a given opinion in these imaginary dialogues does not tell us what Andreas thought; but it is tolerably good evidence that such an opinion was part of the body of floating ideas on the subject. We can hardly suppose that he would hold up, for the imitation of his pupil, speeches containing arguments and ideas which were not 'correct' by the standard of the best courtly tradition. I cannot promise that I shall not fall into such convenient expressions as 'Andreas says'; but all these are to be understood under the *caveat* given above.

The definition of love on the first page of this work rules out at once the kind of love that is called 'Platonic'.[67] The aim of love, for Andreas, is actual fruition, and its source is visible beauty: so much so, that the blind are declared incapable of love, or, at least, of entering upon love after they have become blind.[68] On the other hand, love is not sensuality. The sensual man—the man who suffers from *abundantia voluptatis*—is disqualified from participating in it.[69] It may even be claimed that love is a 'kind of

chastity' in virtue of its severe standard of fidelity to a single object.[70] The lover must not hope to succeed, except with a foolish lady, by his *formae venustas*, but by his eloquence, and, above all, by his *morum probitas.* The latter implies no mean or one-sided conception of character. The lover must be truthful and modest, a good Catholic, clean in his speech, hospitable, and ready to return good for evil. He must be courageous in war (unless he is a clerk) and generous of his gifts. He must at all times be courteous. Though devoted in a special sense to one lady, he must be ready to perform *ministeria et obsequia* for all.[71] With such a conception of the lover's qualifications, it is not surprising that Andreas should return again and again to the power of love for good. 'It is agreed among all men that there is no good thing in the world, and no courtesy, which is not derived from love as from its fountain.'[72] It is 'the fountain and origin of all good things'; without it 'all usages of courtesy would be unknown to man'.[73] The lady is allowed free choice in her acceptance or rejection of a lover in order that she may reward the merit of the best: she must not abuse this power in order to gratify her own fancies. By admitting a worthy lover to her favours she does well. Only women who are 'enlisted in the soldiery of love' are praised among men. Even a young unmarried woman should have a lover. It is true that her husband, when she marries, is bound to discover it, but if he is a wise man he will know that a woman who had not followed the 'commands of love' would necessarily have less *probitas.*[74] In fine, all that is *in saeculo bonum*, all that is good in this present world, depends solely upon love. And yet, if the author's ideal of the *probitas* demanded in a lover goes far to explain this praise of love, we must yet remember that that ideal has its clearly defined limits. Courtesy demands that the lover should serve all *ladies*, not all *women.* Nothing could mark more plainly the negative side of this courtly tradition than the short chapter in which Andreas explains that if you are so unfortunate as to fall in love with a peasant woman, you may, *si locum inveneris opportunum*, make use of *modica coactio.* It is hardly possible otherwise, he adds, to overcome the *rigor* of these creatures.[75]

As the source of all worldly goodness, love must be thought of as a state of mind; but the rules which Andreas lays down for its conduct remind us that it is also an art. The elaboration of the art has now become so subtle as to lead to hard cases which demand an expert solution; and he bases his

judgements on the decisions given by certain noble ladies to whom such problems have been referred. The whole of his curious chapter *De variis iudiciis amoris* is filled with them. Some of these problems arise concerning the limits of obedience. A lover has been commanded by his lady to cease to serve her. Later, hearing her defamed, he speaks in her defence. Is he then guilty of disobedience? The Countess of Champagne ruled that he was not: the lady's command, being wrong in the first instance, has no binding force.[76] What is the courtly law in the case of two lovers who find out that they are related within the degrees which would have forbidden their union by marriage? They must part at once. The table of kindred and affinity which applies to marriage applies also to loving *par amours.*[77] Rulings are given as to the presents which a lady may receive without being condemned as mercenary. The duty of secrecy in love—one of the legacies of this code to modern society—is strongly enforced, and the vice of detraction is blamed.[78] But perhaps no rule is made clearer than that which excludes love from the marriage relation. 'Dicimus et stabilito tenore firmamus amorem non posse suas inter duos iugales extendere vires.'[79] The disabling influence of marriage extends even after marriage has been dissolved: love between those who were formerly married to each other and are now divorced is pronounced by the lady of Champagne to be *nefandus.* And yet there are passages which suggest that the chivalrous code, however anti-matrimonial in principle, has already done something to soften the old harshness of the relations between husband and wife. Andreas finds it necessary to recognize the possibility of *maritalis affectio* and to prove at some length that it is different from *Amor.*[80] The proof is very illuminating. Conjugal affection cannot be 'love' because there is in it an element of duty or necessity: a wife, in loving her husband, is not exercising her free choice in the reward of merit, and her love therefore cannot increase his *probitas.* There are minor reasons too—conjugal love is not furtive, and jealousy, which is of the essence of true love, is merely a pest in marriage. But it is the first reason which puts this 'theory of adultery' before us in its most sympathetic, and therefore in its truest, light. The love which is to be the source of all that is beautiful in life and manners must be the reward freely given by the lady, and only our superiors can reward. But a wife is not a superior.[81] As the wife of another, above all as the wife of a great lord, she may be queen of beauty and of love, the distributor of favours, the

inspiration of all knightly virtues, and the bridle of ‘villany’;[82] but as your own wife, for whom you have bargained with her father, she sinks at once from lady into mere woman. How can a woman, whose duty is to obey you, be the *midons* whose grace is the goal of all striving and whose displeasure is the restraining influence upon all uncourtly vices? You may love her in a sense; but that is not love, says Andreas, any more than the love of father and son is *amicitia*.[83] We must not suppose that the rules of love are most frivolous when they are most opposed to marriage. The more serious they are, the more they are opposed. As I have said before, where marriage does not depend upon the free will of the married, any theory which takes love for a noble form of experience must be a theory of adultery.

To the love religion, or rather to the love mythology, Andreas makes interesting contributions. In the *Council of Remiremont* we have seen the god Amor already provided with a gospel, cardinals, visitations, and the power to curse his heretical subjects. Andreas goes far to complete his parallelism with the God of real religion. In one of the imaginary conversations a lady pleads to be excused on the ground that she does not reciprocate her lover’s feelings, and there’s an end of the matter. ‘At that rate’, retorts the lover, ‘a sinner might plead to be excused on the ground that God had not given him grace.’ ‘On the other hand’, says the lady, ‘just as all our works without charity cannot merit eternal bliss, so it will be unavailing to serve Love *non ex cordis affectione*.’[84] All that was left was to attribute to Love the divine power of reward and punishment after death, and this is actually done. The story which Andreas tells on this subject is one of the freshest passages of his work.[85] Looking forward from it, we can foresee a well-known tale in Boccaccio, Gower, and Dryden: looking backward, we perhaps come into touch again with the buried stratum of barbarian mythology. It begins, as a good story should, with a young man lost in a forest. His horse had wandered while he slept, and as he searches for it he sees three companies go by. In the first, led by a lovely knight, rode ladies, richly horsed and each attended by a lover on foot. In the second, there were ladies surrounded by such a crowd and tumult of contending servitors that they wished for nothing but to be out of the noise. But the third company rode bareback on wretched nags *macilentos valde et graviter trottantes*, unattended, clothed in rags, and covered with the dust of those that went before. As might be expected, the first party consists of ladies

who in their life on earth served love wisely; the second, of those who gave their kindness to all that asked it; and the third *omnium mulierum miserrimae*, of those implacable beauties who were deaf to every lover's prayer. The mortal follows this procession through the woods, until he is brought into a strange country. There stood the thrones of the king and queen of Love beneath the shadow of a tree that bears all kinds of fruit; and beside them rose a fountain as sweet as nectar, from which innumerable rivulets overflowed and watered the surrounding glades, winding their way in every direction among the couches which were there prepared for the true lovers who rode in the first company. But beyond and around this pleasant place, which is called *Amoenitas*, lay the realm of *Humiditas.* The streams from the central fountain had turned icy cold before they reached this second country, and there, collecting in the low ground, formed a great swamp, cold beneath, and treeless, but glaring under a fierce sun. Here was the appointed place for the ladies of the second company. Those of the third were confined in the outermost circle of all, the burning desert of *Siccitas*, and seated upon bundles of sharp thorn which the tormentors kept in continual agitation beneath them. Lest anything should be lacking to this extraordinary parody or reflection of the Christian afterworld, the story ends with a remarkable scene in which the mortal visitor is brought before the throne, presented with a list of the commandments of Love, and told to report on earth this vision which has been allowed him in order that it may lead to the 'salvation' of many ladies (*sit multarum dominarum salutis occasio*).[86] The second story which he tells is less theological; and though it also ends with the commandments of love, they are won, together with the Hawk of Victory, from Arthur's court and not from the next world.[87] Elsewhere, as usual, there are things that lie on the borderland between allegory and mythology. Such passages, however audacious they may appear, are clearly flights of fancy, far removed, indeed, from the comedy of the *Council*, but equally far removed from anything that could be regarded as a serious 'religion of love'. Andreas is at his gravest not here but in those places, which I referred to above, where he dwells upon the power of love to call forth all knightly and courtly excellences: love which makes beautiful the *horridus* and *incultus*,[88] which advances the most lowly born to true nobility, and humbles the proud. If this is not a religion, it is, at any rate, a system of ethics. Of its relation with the other, the Christian,

system, Andreas tells us a good deal. As against the author of the *Council*, he states plainly that nuns ought not to be the servants of Love—and ends the passage with a comic account of his own experiences which is not one of his most chivalrous passages.[89] With *Clerici*, on the other hand, the case is different. They are only men, after all, conceived in sin like the rest, and indeed more exposed than others to temptation *propter otia multa et abundantiam ciborum.* Indeed, it is very doubtful whether God seriously meant them to be more chaste than the laity. It is teaching, not practice, that counts. Did not Christ say '*secundum opera illorum nolite facere*?'[90] He is anxious to point out that the code of love agrees with 'natural morality'. 'Incestuous' and 'damnable' unions are equally forbidden by both.[91] He includes ordinary piety and a reverence for the saints among the virtues without which no man is qualified to be a lover. Heresy in the knight justifies a lady in withdrawing her favour from him. 'And yet', he says, in a very significant passage, 'some people are so extremely foolish as to imagine that they recommend themselves to women by showing contempt for the Church.'[92] We have a sudden glimpse of a party who had grasped the fundamental incompatibility between *Frauendienst* and religion, who delighted to emphasize it by a freedom (probably crude enough) of the tongue; and of another party, to which Andreas belongs, who want nothing less than emphasis. That may be the meaning, too, of the piety which Chrétien ascribes to Lancelot—an object-lesson for the ribald left wing of the courtly world. Yet while Andreas thus wishes to christianize his love theory as far as possible, he has no real reconciliation. His nearest approach to one is a tentative suggestion on the lines of Pope; 'Can that offend great Nature's God which Nature's self inspires?'—on which we can have no better comment than the words of the lady, in the same conversation, a few lines later, *sed divinarum rerum ad praesens disputatione omissa* . . . 'Leaving the religious side of the question out for a moment'—and then she turns to the real point.[93]

For the truth is that the rift between the two worlds is irremediable. Andreas repeatedly recognizes this. 'Amorem exhibere est graviter offendere deum.'[94] Marriage offers no compromise. It is a mistake to suppose that the *vehemens amator* can escape *sine crimine* by the impropriety (from the courtly point of view) of loving his own wife. Such a man is *in propria uxore adulter.* His sin is heavier than that of the unmarried

lover, for he has abused the sacrament of marriage.[95] And that is precisely why the whole world of courtesy exists only by ‘leaving the religious side of the question out for a moment’. Once bring *that* in, as the lover argues in the same passage, and you must give up, not only loving *par amours*, but the whole world as well.[96] As if this were not sufficiently clear, Andreas has a surprise for the modern reader at the beginning of the last book. Having written two books on the art of love, he suddenly breaks off and begins anew: ‘You must read all this, my dear Walter, not as though you sought thence to embrace the life of lovers, but that being refreshed by its doctrine and having well learned how to provoke the minds of women to love, you may yet abstain from such provocation, and thus merit a greater reward.’ All that has gone before, we are given to understand, has been written in order that Walter, like Guyon, may see, and know, and yet abstain. ‘No man through any good deeds can please God so long as he serves in the service of Love.’ ‘Quum igitur omnia sequantur ex amore nefanda’ . . . and the rest of the book is a palinode.[97]

What are we to make of this *volte-face*? That the Chaplain’s love-lore is pure joking, or that his religion is rank hypocrisy? Neither the one nor the other. It is more probable that he meant what he said when he told us that love was the source of everything *in saeculo bonum*, and it is our fault if we are apt to forget the limitation—*in saeculo*. It is significant that we cannot even translate it ‘worldly’ good. ‘Worldliness’ in modern, or at least in Victorian, language does not really refer to the values of this world (*hoc saeculum*) as contrasted with the values of eternity: it merely contrasts, inside a single world, what is considered baser—as avarice, personal ambition, and the like—with what is considered nobler, as conjugal love, learning, public service. But when Andreas talks of the *bonum in saeculo* he means what he says. He means the really good things, in a human sense, as contrasted with the really bad things: courage and courtesy and generosity, as against baseness. But, rising like a sheer cliff above and behind this humane or secular scale of values, he has another which is not to be reconciled with it, another by whose standard there is very little to choose between the ‘worldly’ good and the ‘worldly’ bad. That very element of parodied or, at least, of imitated religion which we find in the courtly code, and which looks so blasphemous, is rather an expression of the divorce between the two.[98] They are so completely two that analogies naturally

arise between them: hence comes a strange reduplication of experience. It is a kind of proportion sum. Love is, *in saeculo*, as God is, in eternity. *Cordis affectio* is to the acts of love as charity is to good works. But of course there is for Andreas, in a cool hour, no doubt as to which of the two worlds is the real one, and in this he is typical of the Middle Ages. When *Frauendienst* succeeds in fusing with religion, as in Dante, unity is restored to the mind, and love can be treated with a solemnity that is whole-hearted. But where it is not so fused, it can never, under the shadow of its tremendous rival, be more than a temporary truancy. It may be solemn, but its solemnity is only for the moment. It may be touching, but it never forgets that there are sorrows and dangers before which those of love must be ready, when the moment comes, to give way. Even Ovid had furnished them with a model by writing a *Remedium Amoris* to set against the *Ars Amatoria*:[99] they had added reasons of their own for following the precedent. The authors are all going to repent when the book is over. The Chaplain's palinode does not stand alone. In the last stanzas of the book of Troilus, in the harsher recantation that closes the life and work of Chaucer as a whole, in the noble close of Malory, it is the same. We hear the bell clang; and the children, suddenly hushed and grave, and a little frightened, troop back to their master.