

Introduction

This collection of essays grew out of a conference on "Love, Marriage, Friendship and Sexuality in the Middle Ages," held at the National Humanities Center in April 1986. The impetus for the conference came from Jean Hagstrum, Professor Emeritus at Northwestern University and Senior Fellow at the Center. Professor Hagstrum proposed a series of conferences on the theme of love, beginning with love in the ancient world and moving forward toward the modern period. These conferences would test in the domains of history and literature whether companionate and reciprocal love, love as requisite to marriage, emerged in any significant way before the later seventeenth century. Hagstrum proposed that sanctioned erotic attachments not only preceded any modern ideal of marriage but also made it historically intelligible.¹ The motto he invoked to describe the nature of these attachments was borrowed from the eighteenth-century English poet James Thomson—"esteem enlivened by desire."²

The essays in this volume present revised versions of the papers given at the conference on the Middle Ages and essays added subsequently to explore further the contexts of medieval love.³ The focus of the book, like the initial theme of the conference, has developed through conversation and reflection. Our subject remains desire, friendship, sexuality, and especially the *olde daunce* of love. What we have found, however, is not a petrified ideal of love but an essentially contested term. Love as a social value in domestic and moral life does not remain invariable; it is not an abstract notion simply enacted in history and unambiguously represented in literature. Rather, it functions as part of a diversified cultural discourse. The essays collected here therefore explore medieval love and desire as they relate to diverse issues, including companionship, equality, power, creativity, voyeurism, faith, violence, and even hate.

It makes sense, then, to speak of love as much more than a theory to be examined for its internal consistency and historical application. The fact that medieval culture could imagine legitimized forms of love and erotic reciprocity is clear enough from the historical and literary records. The interpretive question is, what function did they serve? The answer, as our essays indicate, varies with the specific contexts. Accordingly, we have organized the essays into three groups that deal respectively with the historical context of marriage, representations of love and marriage in continental vernacular literature, and Chaucer's treatment of love.

The first group of essays concentrates chiefly on the formulation of marriage given within Church doctrine. They study Augustine's notions of marriage; the concept of *maritalis affectio* in doctrine, canon law, and popular preaching; and the theological debate on marriage in the learned and vernacular traditions. Our concentration complements the work of historians who have documented the experience of medieval marriage and social relations as they were lived in ordinary life. Georges Duby and David Herlihy, for example, have substantially added to our detailed understanding of medieval social reality, especially the reality of everyday practice.⁴ At the same time, their work has challenged many of the suppositions governing a historical understanding of marriage. Jean-Louis Flandrin and Philippe Ariès have contested the assumption that Church doctrine offers an adequate picture of medieval practice.⁵ Flandrin questions whether doctrine truly reflected medieval practice. One way of reading the vast literature of marriage precepts, he suggests, is to see doctrine as a repeated attempt to enforce and consolidate standards that often differed from behavior. On this view, the exhortations of moralists and theologians witness the conjugal eroticism that the Church wished to discourage.

Ariès sees both continuity and distinction within marriage. He says, "Fecundity, the modesty of the wife and mother, the dignity of the mistress of a household, such are the enduring qualities which, right up to the eighteenth century, have marked the contrast between married love and love outside marriage" (p. 133). Within this continuity, however, he finds profound distinctions between medieval and modern conceptions of married love. It was only after the eighteenth century, says Ariès, that marital eroticism found general approval. Still, he concedes that it is hard for the historian to penetrate the silence concerning love and sexuality in medieval married life:

... marriage existed where a vast area of public life touched on a tiny secret place, secret rather than private. Privacy implies an enclosed space, withdrawn from the external world but known and sought out, accessible in certain conditions. But that which is secret is hidden away, except from a few initiates, as if it did not exist, protected by its cloak of religious silence, which binds the initiates also to silence. Revelation would destroy it: more than unspoken, it is the unutterable. So conjugal love could be one of the secret places of the old society. [p.136-37]

A second distinction can be made, he argues, between custom and doctrine. In the earlier Middle Ages, marriage took two forms. Among the aristocracy, it was a private, familial function centered on a promise and contract that joined not only the principals but also the two families. Its ceremonies, including the bedding of the couple, were conducted within the sphere of feudal, secular authority. Alongside this domestic contract, the Church introduced a second form of marriage, which had sacramental status. Ariès contends that it is not until the twelfth century that the Church fully appropriated the familial form of marriage.

The essays in the first section of this volume in some ways parallel the revisionist history of Flandrin and Ariès. These essays suggest, among other things, that doctrine, like social practice, has its own history and development; hence that it is not a static structure to be contrasted to the changing norms of human behavior. Elizabeth A. Clark's opening essay examines the development of Augustine's ideas about the essential constituents of marriage. Clark points out that Augustine presents rather contradictory views on marriage. His positions were chiefly determined, she argues, by polemics against extreme ascetics, Manicheans, and Pelagians; they reflect as well the age's view of women and confusion in Roman law about the consensual and physical factors in marriage. Clark contends that Augustine possessed a socially-oriented ideal of marriage emphasizing consensual and affective elements, but that theological controversies forced an emphasis on the goodness of the sexual and reproductive domains. Nevertheless, Augustine was the first major Western theologian to assert that the marriage of Mary and Joseph, though celibate, was complete. A marriage is made by "the pledge of affection of the soul," not by the "voluptuous connection of the body," he argued, and mutual consent is in itself sufficient to make a marriage. Had his view not

been mediated by controversy and polemic, Clark concludes, Augustine would have developed a theory of marital friendship unique for its time and place.

Michael Sheehan's essay further examines the ideology of marriage by discussing its sources in Scripture and Roman law. Father Sheehan observes that, although the Middle Ages emphasized the importance of consent in marriage, we have scant information about the actual substance of consent. Citing the scholarship of John T. Noonan, Jr., and others, he argues that by the time of Justinian "marital affection" referred to both legal consent and the emotional texture of a relationship. Affection remains, however, an undefined quality within the legal definitions of marriage. Like Clark, Sheehan traces a central idea within a shifting field. Gratian, for example, went beyond Roman law to assert that wherever there was marital affection, a marriage could come into being and nothing short of death could end it. He also developed the crucial distinction that consent involves accepting another person as a spouse while marital affection is the resultant relation of spouses. Pope Alexander III (1159–81) stressed that marital affection ought to thrive within marriage. Sheehan remarks, "a static notion was replaced by one implying the desirability of growth." Turning to confessors' handbooks, liturgical books, and sermons, he finds sources that address the practical moral lives of men and women. Sheehan's guide through this literature, much of which still awaits proper editorial attention, suggests the local circumstances in which ideas like partnership and mutuality took on specific meaning in the Middle Ages.

Erik Kooper's essay addresses the theological and philosophical views that evolved in Church doctrine over the problematic notion of equality in marriage. Kooper distinguishes a monastic-Augustinian view of marital equality from the philosophical-Aristotelian perspective. Hugh of St. Victor, Kooper notes, developed Augustine's and Bernard of Clairvaux's ideas about marriage to assert the near-equality of man and woman. Hugh declared that woman was created as a *socia* rather than a servant or a mistress. The fact that Eve was taken from the middle of Adam's body, not from the highest or lowest regions, indicates her equality of association, said Hugh—though he added that her being made from man's body shows a kind of inferiority. Later interpretation of the "rib-topos," Kooper shows, extended the claim of equality to all human beings. He observes that other commentators, including Thomas Aquinas, connected equality to Aristotelian notions of friendship. Like Sheehan, Kooper finds the abstract concerns of the

theologians translated to popular audiences through the homily, and he turns to *ad status* sermons, addresses to people in specific states of life, as a source for ideas about love, equality, and happiness in marriage.

The historical grounding given in the first part of this collection emphasizes the decisive, if complex, role of Augustine, and the elaboration of doctrine in the ecclesiastical culture of the High Middle Ages. The second part turns to the literary representation of love in the vernacular and examines how desire and companionate partnership—what Guibert de Tournai called *dilectio carnalis* and *dilectio socialis* respectively—found imaginative expression in the literature of Europe. Our sense of the expectations of that literature and its audience has been shaped in large measure by the way the literary history of the Middle Ages has been written for much of the last century. Over fifty years ago C. S. Lewis presented in *The Allegory of Love* a highly influential view of the nature of love in the Middle Ages. Lewis stressed that one of the main qualities of such love was that it existed outside of marriage; it was “always what the nineteenth century called ‘dishonourable’ love.”⁶ Although he was principally concerned with love as a poetic convention, Lewis suggested that it reflected and derived from actual belief and practice. In medieval life, Lewis argued, passion was often denounced as wicked, and in feudal society marriage had nothing to do with love. From this cleavage between the Church and the court, and between love and marriage, he concluded, emerged the tradition of courtly love, characterized by humility, courtesy, the religion of love, and adultery. Courtly love seemed to exist with equal force as a social practice and as a literary motif. Subsequent studies like Denis de Rougemont’s *Love in the Western World* developed and refined the view that a secret and illicit form of love represented an ideal within medieval culture.⁷ In many respects, these scholars established the commonplaces by which subsequent writers describe a general notion of love in the Middle Ages.

Later scholarship has challenged such formulations, both in general and in the particulars. Critics have noted that many texts do not conform to Lewis’s definition of courtly love.⁸ The love courts where this ideal of love supposedly took shape are also very poorly documented. John F. Benton, for example, has cast serious doubt on the notion that Marie de Champagne presided over such a court, or would even have been interested in immoral love.⁹ One of the most notable of the courts for which there is some evidence of courtly love conventions in the later Middle Ages, the *cour*

amoureuse of Charles VI, seems to have been based on a charter that represents fictional elaborations of a modest original.¹⁰

If the historical background of the courtly love tradition has proved uncertain, its literary and social dimensions are no less debated. Several scholars have contested the view that courtly love was an ideal within medieval culture. D. W. Robertson, Jr., and other Patristic critics, for example, maintain that the dominant value in literature of the period was necessarily *caritas*: the love of God and of one's neighbor for the sake of God. Secret, adulterous love exemplifies the much inferior *cupiditas*, the love of oneself, one's neighbor, or something for its own sake. From this perspective, an idealized view of adultery can only be an ironic demonstration of its own inadequacy as passionate and unreasoning cupidity. Robertson contends, in fact, that Andreas Capellanus's famous treatise on love, the *De amore*, did not seriously promote sexual sin, but rather was often satiric in setting forth the rules of love. The warnings in the third book of the *De amore*, that concupiscence offends God, injures one's neighbor, and is inimical to charity, make explicit the implications of the preceding books.¹¹

E. Talbot Donaldson, who in other contexts offers spirited arguments against the Patristic approach, agrees with Robertson about Andreas's intentions. Donaldson doubts that the proposition that love can exist only extra-maritally ever had much counterpart in reality: Andreas's treatise, he suggests, "has about as much to do with erotic practices in Champagne at the end of the twelfth century as the debate of the *Owl and the Nightingale* has to do with ornithology."¹² Donaldson notes the observation, made by Gervase Mathew and others, that Middle English portrayals of love rarely involve adultery. The notion that love must be illicit, he concludes, is more relevant for Chaucer's fabliau characters than for his serious lovers.

Henry Ansgar Kelly observes that courtly love was a "widespread delusion" even before Lewis wrote, having begun as a "small tumor" in an essay by Gaston Paris in 1883.¹³ Paris had asserted that the first characteristic of courtly love is that it is illicit and furtive, and therefore incompatible with the calm and public possession of a lady in marriage. But Kelly argues that it was quite common for medieval marriages themselves to be both illicit and furtive rather than calm and public. He adds that the idea that love required adultery is patently unhistorical, and he notes that there was never a seriously or generally held opinion that love was impossible within marriage.¹⁴ On the contrary, the idea that true love should lead to mutuality in marriage, says

Kelly, was well known by Chaucer's time: it is inherent in Jean de Meun's portion of the *Roman de la Rose*, and Thomas Usk espoused it vigorously in the *Testament of Love*, written a year or so after the *Troilus* (p.67). Chaucer himself was especially careful in matters of sexual morality, he notes, citing D. S. Brewer: "Chaucer nowhere celebrates illicit love"; his serious love stories always contain "an explicit connection between love and marriage."¹⁵

George Kane demonstrates that there never was a single medieval code of love. Indeed, he argues, the lack of definition in Chaucer's understanding of *fin amour* (which Chaucer calls "fyn lovyng") resulted from initial ambiguity and subsequent modifications of the convention.¹⁶ Kane shows that perceptions of *fin amour* developed in various phases. The Northern French romances, for example, radically transformed the tradition, linking the ennobling force of love to military prowess and taking for granted, in romances after Chrétien, that romantic, exalted love could exist within marriage. Kane also notes that the thirteenth-century French romances displayed a marked interest in the mentality of the lovers and that this analytical tendency is continued in the *Roman de la Rose*. Italian poets had their own distinct conceptions of love, Kane argues. And he adds that fourteenth-century French verse, notably Machaut's, manifests a further adaptation of *fin amour*. The thematic multiplicity in these diverse depictions of love was compounded, Kane observes, by the long-standing awareness that *fin amour* is essentially self-contradictory and preposterous. He concludes that the differences in the representations of *fin amour* would have promoted eclecticism in Chaucer's work, and he adds that nowhere does Chaucer appear to be committed to the cult.

Lewis's claim that courtly love was a distinctly medieval convention, marking one of the three or four real changes in sentiment in Western history, has also been challenged. Peter Dronke maintains that one of the chief characteristics of this love—that it elevates and ennobles the lover—has in fact been present throughout the Western tradition. The notion owes as much to neo-Platonism as to orthodox Christianity, and analogues reach far back into early classical civilization.¹⁷ A more radical critique of the early contentions about courtly love has emerged from structuralist and poststructuralist criticism. These approaches call into question not only the historical foundations of literary representations but the possibility of representation itself.

Paul Zumthor's theory of the "circularity of the song" in the High Middle Ages proposes that the lyric poetry of the troubadours

and *trouvères* is self-enclosed and self-referential. There is no representation of historical reality in poems; biography and fiction alike are discarded, for the "great courtly song" is concerned with neither actual nor imaginary events. The poems present instead, Zumthor suggests, a series of gestures made toward and about a social circle that is identical with the poet himself.¹⁸ The sources for this theory lie in Robert Guette's essays on the highly formal quality of the Old French lyrics. But the fullest articulation comes in critics like Pierre Guiraud, who finds an equivalence, if not an identity, in the key terms *amar*, *trobar*, and *chantar*. Love, song, and poetic making thus designate the same act. But on this view it is an act that has no contact with the world outside the text.¹⁹

Against such views, however, stands Larry D. Benson's argument that by the fourteenth century the conventions and especially the language of courtly love were accepted and practiced in aristocratic circles.²⁰ Benson confirms that adultery was not essential to this form of love. But the other qualities that C. S. Lewis cited—humility, courtesy, and the religion of love—were fundamental to love as it was by then understood. The reading of romances, Benson observes, became part of the ordinary education of many aristocratic children, and the new courtly culture sought to emulate the speech of love poetry: for the gentlemen of the time, courtly love offered the only words with which to express desire. (This, he adds, led to the first class dialect in English of which we have any clear indication.) Aristocrats fell in love in ways prescribed by courtly literature, and they often sought to earn their ladies' love in the manner of the old romances. As late as the sixteenth century, Benson observes, courtiers were living the lives of courtly lovers. Henry VIII himself tries, without quite succeeding, to use the style of courtly love in a letter to Anne Boleyn: he begins with traditional declarations of love and service, but in the last line Henry declares that he wants to "kiss her duckies"! Here and in the earlier instances, the conception of love and the way it was expressed were often diverse. The affinity, doubtless unwitting, is more to Chaucer's balade "To Rosemounde" than to the *Troilus*, but as Chaucer says in the *Troilus*, "Scarsly ben ther in this place thre / That have in love said lik, or don, all."

The essays in the second and third parts of this collection explore the diverse and sometimes surprising ways in which love, friendship, and sexuality were portrayed in medieval literature. A. C. Spearing examines the moral compromise inherent in writing and enjoying love poetry, specifically the imaginative voyeurism

into which the poet and his audience are necessarily drawn. Beginning with Andreas Capellanus's emphasis on sight as the origin of desire (which was later confirmed by Freud), Spearing explores the essential paradox that the stories expose the private, often most secret actions that the characters urgently try to protect. The poet both describes a private life and finds pleasure in observing its secrets. The public nature of literary presentation makes narrative part of erotic discourse, in this case the near equivalent of rumor and scandal spread by the *lauzengeors* who threaten betrayal. Sometimes, as in Beroul's *Tristan* or Chaucer's *Troilus*, the poet writes his act of surveillance into the text in the form of characters who wish to observe the lovers. In the first part of the *Roman de la Rose*, Spearing finds the poet's metaphorical and thematized voyeurism made literal, in the actions of the dreamer: "in order to describe, he has to watch carefully, obsessively even, and the act of watching an erotic performance with such enthrallment obviously has sexual implications." The radical extension of this poetic surveillance lies for Spearing in a work like William Dunbar's *The Golden Targe*, which explicitly shows voyeurism as the only role for a male poet in a courtly dream-world pervaded by his fantasies of female aggression. Yet the fantasy is dangerous, for the women being observed seek to destroy the observer.

Spearing's essay traces a dimension of medieval writing about love that extends from the High to the Late Middle Ages. In his study of Chrétien de Troyes's *Yvain* and the *Lais* of Marie de France, by contrast, R. W. Hanning focuses on a moment of dramatic social change. Hanning contends that the twelfth century saw a profound social transition from aggression and martial prowess to the rediscovered power of love and creativity. Chrétien and Marie offer, he claims, fictional representations of this rejection of culturally-sanctioned violence. *Yvain* tells the story of a knight whose adventures test the limits of ritualized justice achieved through force. In the tale, says Hanning, trial by combat is transformed into an iconography of love and self-sacrifice. And the qualities that effect the reconciliation of the hero and his wife at the end of the tale are love and artfulness. In Marie's *Lais*, Hanning suggests, love and art are also closely aligned. The young knight Guigemar's success in winning his lady in the lai of *Guigemar* depends on his ability to speak eloquently of love. In another of Marie's tales, *Yonec*, a woman finds fulfilling love and escape from a tyrannical marriage in the embodiment of a lover she has wished into existence through the power of her imagination. This

creative act, Hanning points out, can be described in the same terms that Marie uses to describe her own art. The tale is thus "an allegory of the artist's travails and ultimate triumphs."

Giovanni Sinicropi's analysis of the story of Nastagio degli Onesti in Boccaccio's *Decameron* traces a medieval story of love and eventual marriage back to its origins in pagan ritual and confirms Hanning's conclusion about the power of love. Boccaccio's tale is the culmination, as Sinicropi demonstrates, of the widespread motif of testing a woman's chastity by a parable of eschatological punishment. Examining the background of the story in Eastern, Western and classical stories deriving from early ritual or myth, Sinicropi shows that Boccaccio regenerates the tradition he received by transforming its ritualistic elements and their repetitious violence in favor of social stability. As they witness the re-enactment of an earlier story of thwarted love that ends in suicide and vengeance, his characters choose a different outcome: marriage. This choice represents the point of arrival for the long literary history of this motif. For Boccaccio does not depict the rejection of chastity as submission to the will of a god or acquiescence in sensuality, as in his sources. Rather, he harmonizes the rejection of chastity in the early sources with its idealization in Christian theology. The result is an affirmation of human love and of the power of life over death.

Jerome Mazzaro's study of Dante's transformation of *fin amour* to friendship traces the evolution of literary convention into a view of spiritual love that draws on much of the philosophical tradition used to define the terms of companionate marriage. Mazzaro sees in Dante's early work "the belief in the ennobling force of human love, the beloved's superiority to the lover, and love's emergence as an unsatiated, ever increasing desire." But, following Étienne Gilson, he finds that the discussion of friendship in the *Convivio* allows a reconception of the bonds that connect creatures to each other and to God.²¹ Aristotle's *Ethics*, Cicero's *De amicitia*, and Augustine's *Confessions* provide a context for analyzing the multiform relations of love in the *Comedy*, from the reprise of *fin amour* in the Paolo and Francesca episode to Beatrice's "friendship" with the poet to the soul's relation to God. The tradition of friendship, Mazzaro contends, is what permits Dante to go beyond courtly love and the problem of disparate states to imagine a spiritual community infused with both virtue and affect.

The final group of essays deals with the treatment of love in Chaucer, whose work stands as a sustained exploration of the

artistic and moral complexities that love presented to medieval poets. The first two essays explore Chaucer's treatment of love, friendship, marriage, and sexual relations with respect to the reading and writing of poetry. Robert R. Edwards begins by examining the retrospective view Chaucer takes of his early poetry in the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*. He argues that the Prologue juxtaposes the social and poetic texts of love. The former represents Cupid's attempt to impose a determinate, socially regulated meaning on the materials of literary tradition; the latter insists on the capacity of the stories to overturn narrow definitions and reflect moral and artistic complexity. Edwards's reading of the *Book of the Duchess* emphasizes the self-conscious fabrication of the Man in Black's erotic history, which qualifies the idealized portrait of Blanche. Similarly, the *Knight's Tale* incorporates a complex meditation on desire and social order in its portrayal of a courtly life that reconciles tragedy through a royal marriage. Returning to the *Legend*, Edwards reviews the ways in which Chaucer's retelling of the tales stresses the paradoxes of courtly values while carrying out Cupid's charge to tell stories that reflect the virtues of faithful women.

Chaucer's use of language as a form of sexual politics is the subject of John M. Fyler's essay. Tracing the use of names for man and woman in the Creation stories in Genesis and reviewing commentary on these passages in Hebrew and Latin, Fyler contends that Chaucer played on the ambiguity of *man* as "male" and "human being" and on the traditional relationship between naming and gender differentiation. Chaucer's word choice associates "woman" to a variety of terms and treats women as the victims as well as the causes of woe. The adjectives "manly" and "womanly" define not absolute values but relative qualities, while "man" and "men" often blur the indefinite and the particular. Fyler finds in the *Squire's Tale* Chaucer's most sophisticated treatment of the ambiguity of "man" as a term that hovers uncertainly between genders and species. He concludes that Chaucer is aware of both the confining nature of gender and the ways in which his own voice speaks from motives that cannot be abstracted from gender.

The next two essays offer readings of the *Franklin's Tale*, a pivotal text for an understanding of the role of married love in Chaucer's writings. George Lyman Kittredge regarded the tale as the culmination of one act in the human comedy that he took to be Chaucer's design for the *Canterbury Tales*. He asserted that the Franklin disputes the theory that love was incompatible with marriage because marriage implies mastery: "Love *can* be consistent

with marriage, he declares. Indeed, without love (and perfect *gentle* love) marriage is sure to be a failure. The difficulty about mastery vanishes when mutual love and forbearance are made the guiding principles of the relation between husband and wife.²² Despite scholarly debate over the Marriage Group and Kittredge's assumptions that the tale's announced values are universal ("A better has never been devised or imagined"), the tale remains a touchstone for critical analysis. That our two essays should come to the philosophical substratum of the *Franklin's Tale* from radically different ways is a measure of the poem's evocative power.

Alan T. Gaylord believes that "the story most richly apprehended invites several kinds of reading at once, in a contradictory yet complementary manner," and he demonstrates a method of reading texts "forwards" and "backwards," applying this approach to the issues of love and marriage that inform the tale. Reading forwards, he says, is a compliant and uncritical response to a text that follows its linear succession, as in listening to an oral performance. Reading backwards involves a resistance born of intense awareness: "reading with a certain kind of memory, employing a sifting that requires comparisons and contrasts, re-reading and reflection." It is a backwards reading of this sort that leads Gaylord to probe the "vavasorial temper" of the Franklin's tale, which "gesture[s] towards philosophy on the way to comforts untested by any fire or true pain." Juxtaposing the *Franklin's Tale* and the *Knight's Tale*, he shows how the former's appropriation of the latter blends all principles together as part of a strategy of control that disguises itself as affability.

James I. Wimsatt takes a different view of the philosophical sources behind the *Franklin's Tale*. Establishing a "family history" for Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*, the *Roman de la Rose*, Machaut's *Remede de Fortune*, and texts by Chaucer, he traces a "chain of borrowing, the passing on of literary as well as philosophical features" from one text to another. In this context, the Franklin's assertions in the prologue to his tale that marriage partners should be friends and that neither should attempt to assert mastery over the other acquire an authority that scholars must take into account. Wimsatt gives particular attention to the weight of friendship in the philosophical tradition in the tale, and he sees Machaut's *Remede* as a crucial intermediary between the *Roman* and Chaucer. While he stops short of describing the Franklin's account of marriage early in the tale as an ideal answer, Wimsatt concludes that it agrees with medieval authorities

on friendship and marriage, appeals to common sense, and provides "a benign and optimistic dénouement for Chaucer's marital discussion."

In the final essays, Stephen Spector and Marie Borroff consider the quality of the love in the *Prioress's Tale*. Noting the contradictions and mislocations that characterize the Prioress's love, Spector examines the intersection of love and hate in her tale. He argues that the profound conflicts in critical responses to the Prioress reflect the contraries in her makeup as well as the influence of modern experience and ideology. Spector briefly reviews the social position and historical experience of Jews in the late Middle Ages in order to challenge the claim that Chaucer necessarily shared in an inescapable intolerance toward Jews. Instead, he presents evidence of a crosscurrent of respect, friendship, and even intimacy between Christians and Jews. But he concludes that Chaucer's own attitude toward Jews is probably irretrievable. The immediate question, therefore, is how Madame Eglentyne's anti-Jewishness functions within her tale. Spector demonstrates a detailed self-referentiality between teller and tale and concludes that this accounts for the nun's empathy as well as her enmity. Borroff's essay, like Spector's, investigates aspects of the Prioress's prayer and tale that disclose the nature of Eglentyne's love. Inquiring whether the Prioress was inclined to or capable of "love celestial," Borroff discusses the simple and reductive polarities that inform the Prioress's vision. The world of the tale is fashioned from binary oppositions between good and evil, infant and adult, affective piety and reason, love and hate, innocence and experience. These contrasts are enhanced, Borroff adds, by complementary imagistic oppositions and by the distinction between song and speech. In this realm, the Christian relates to divine goodness with the thoughtful and instinctual bliss of the child surrounded by the loving care of its parents. This, she concludes, is celestial love as the Prioress knows it.