

## European College of Liberal Arts

Syllabus for Winter 2011, AY/BA 1<sup>st</sup> year Core Course

# FORMS OF LOVE

Seminar leaders: Ewa Atanassow, David Hayes, Geoff Lehman, Laura Scuriatti, Judith Wolfe

## Introduction

It is undeniable that love has been and still is a distinctive and fundamental value in Western cultural tradition (amongst others) – a value whose meaning has undergone numerous changes throughout different historical moments, but which has constantly defined interpersonal relationships and social, as well as political, behaviour in Western culture. Indeed, we can say that specific definitions of love are both the products and the producers of different conceptualizations of human nature, of gender identity and of social and political systems.

This course focuses on classical antiquity, early Christian and medieval traditions, to end with a brief excursus into early modern literary forms. In these periods the experience of love was privileged as one of the highest forms of interpersonal relationship and as a way of understanding the relation between human beings and the divine. Accordingly, this experience has been the subject of many different philosophical, theological and psychological discourses which attempted to understand a phenomenon which, by its very nature, seems to exceed conceptualization. In this course we will investigate these traditional discussions on the theme of love in order to develop a conceptual vocabulary and a framework for our own questioning. Although the texts in the course are presented as far as possible in chronological order, the historical development of the concept of love is not the ultimate focus of the course, but, rather, a background on the basis of which we may be able to critically question and investigate this topic, also in the light of its meaning and significance in contemporary society.

Music and musical performances play a central role in the course. Troubadoric poetry was sung and accompanied by music, so that poetic and musical forms may be seen at this point as producing a specific form of love and being simultaneously produced by it. In this context, we will trace the persistence of and changes within the inextricable relationship between love and musical forms (songs, ballads, operas) throughout the broad period in question from the point of view of its philosophical, cultural and aesthetic significance.

Throughout the term we will consider the interrelationship among forms of love, as expressed in a range of literary, religious and musical material. The progression of the course will be primarily driven by this interrelationship, specifically through the sequence and juxtaposition of texts we read. Plato's *Symposium*, with its various speeches in praise of love, opens up a range of perspectives on, and interpretations of, love that are relevant to many of the other texts we read

later in the term. The focus in weeks two is on Latin texts, through which we will investigate the development of a specific literary genre connected to the concept of *eros* as it migrated and mutated within the context of Latin culture. In this week we will also focus on the dialogic relationship between love and friendship in Roman culture – a relationship which will characterise much of the reflection on love in later texts. The investigation of Christian texts from week three onwards will introduce a new aspect: love as *agape* (“the fatherly love of God for man, as well as man’s reciprocal love for God” and, by extension, the love of one’s fellow human beings). Furthermore, in reading parts of the New Testament, Augustine’s *Confessions*, and other religious texts, we will examine the relationship between this new ideal of *agape* and a Christian notion of *eros* as a yearning for God. From week seven onwards, we will read literary texts whose form and language were deeply innovative; in this part of the course our investigation will also involve the analysis of the way in which specific concepts of love give shape to different literary forms, and, in turn, we will reflect on how the literary tradition which these texts have produced propagated and, so to say, ‘naturalized’ ideals of love and of the individual, which we may recognize also from our contemporary perspective.

In weeks six and seven, dedicated to lyric poetry, we address first the ancient biblical text, the “Song of Songs”, and then the medieval and Renaissance tradition of love poetry and song. We will also consider the relationship between secular love poetry and the mystical tradition, in which the yearning for the divine coexists, in poetic expression, with physical, earthly desire. In certain ways almost indistinguishable from mystical religious poems, these secular songs also embody another ideal of love, one grounded in the interpersonal and the individual, the courtly love of the troubadours. We will consider texts in which this courtly ideal finds narrative expression, and sexual love finds affirmation in quasi-religious terms. In week eight, we will look at Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, and at the way he brings many of the strands running throughout the course together – plenitude and yearning, the sensual and the spiritual, the individual and the universal, the earthly/physical and the divine – in texts oriented around the transformative power of love. The final weeks juxtapose texts which propose through different forms the tragic and comic aspects of love: in the story of *Tristan and Isolde* we are confronted with a form of love in which physical and spiritual yearnings cannot be fulfilled simultaneously, thus leading to tragic failure and death. In Shakespeare’s *As You Like It* characters contend with the problem of the authenticity and conventionality of love, with the potential evil stemming from love and desire and how these can be turned to good. *As You Like It* has been defined as “the most Mozartian” of Shakespeare’s comedies, and following this hint, we will end the term by attending a performance of Mozart’s opera *The Marriage of Figaro*.

**Please read C.S. Lewis, *Four Loves* and Plato’s *Symposium* over the Christmas break.**

It is also recommended that students start reading the following texts:

Dante, *Divine Comedy*, “Inferno”

Augustine, *Confessions*

## Week 1: Plato

10<sup>th</sup> January - 14<sup>th</sup> January

Reading: C.S. Lewis, *Four Loves*

Plato, *Symposium*

Monday: Overview of the course and discussion of C.S. Lewis's *Four Loves* (Laura Scuriatti and Judith Wolfe)

Wednesday: "Circles, Ladders, and Other Forms of Love in Plato's *Symposium*" (David Hayes)

Thursday: seminar on Plato's *Symposium*

Plato's *Symposium* is composed of a series of speeches dedicated to the praise of *eros*. The culmination of this series is Socrates' depiction of his encounter with Diotima and her account of the nature of *eros*. Through the symbolism of its dramatic setting and its philosophical reflection on the nature of the erotic this text develops an understanding of *eros* which has been one of the most influential in the Western tradition. We begin the course with this text in order to refer back to the previous semester and to lay an important foundation for the many later treatments of love which will both appropriate Plato and move beyond him.

## Week 2: Eros, Love and Friendship in Latin literature

17<sup>th</sup> January - 21<sup>st</sup> January

Readings for the week:

Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and *Erotic Poems* (selection)

Propertius, *Poems* (selection)

Catullus, *The Poems* (selection)

Monday: "Love and Literature in Rome" (Marco Formisano, Freie Universität, Berlin).

Rome is renowned not only for its political power but also for its splendid literary culture which is both a new configuration of Greek literature and a highly creative and dynamic system in itself. Within Latin literature, love enjoyed such a high status that an entirely new literary genre arose: the erotic elegy. In this lecture we are going to read and discuss texts written on love, *eros* and literature between the first century BC and the first century AD by Catullus, Propertius and Ovid.

Wednesday: "Amor et Amicitia (Love and Friendship)", Craig Williams (Brooklyn College, City University of New York, New York).

An unresolved tension between love and friendship runs throughout the Western literary tradition. On the one hand, friendship has been idealized as the highest form of love, surpassing all others:

Montaigne's essay *De l'amitié* and Shakespeare's sonnets are but two influential texts. Yet love often stands in opposition to friendship, as when Oscar Wilde writes: "Friendship is far more tragic than love. It lasts longer." In this lecture we will explore the tension between love and friendship, *amor* and *amicitia*, in Latin literature, focusing on poetry of the first century BC in particular, paying attention to gender, and exploring the concept of the homosocial.

### **Week 3: The New Testament (Agape and Christian Eros)**

24<sup>th</sup> January-28<sup>th</sup> January

Monday and Wednesday:

Gospel of John, 1 Corinthians 13-15, 1 John, Apocalypse of S. John (Judith Wolfe)

Thursday: seminar on the texts selected for this week

Saturday midnight: Essay submission deadline

These sessions examine the wellsprings of the Christian belief in Christ's life, death and resurrection as an implicit response to Platonic *eros*. The early gospels and apostolic letters are read as a declaration that the unattainable Good has come down to Earth in bodily form, and has therein revealed that the human desire for the Good is not isolated, but a response to God's desire for them. The consequence is that now the appropriate form of love is no longer primarily *eros* but *agape*: Humans no longer need to desire what is unattainable, but to pass on the overflowing love God has already shown to them.

The discussion thus far has bracketed an important dimension of the Christian understanding of love. For although it is true that Christianity sees itself as acting out of a plenitude already received, it also sees itself as declaring a fundamental lack or incompleteness in the world and in each individual: If humans are made in God's image and their deepest desire is a response to God's desire (as Christ's manhood is understood as showing forth), then they remain essentially incomplete until they are united to God after death or in the eschaton. Christianity, as it encounters us in passages of the gospels and the letters, as well as in the Apocalypse of St John, is a call to keep alive desire for joy beyond a world of immediate pleasures.

#### **Week 4: Augustine**

**31<sup>st</sup> January- 4 February**

Readings: Augustine, *Confessions*

Monday: Augustine, *Confessions* (Johannes Zachhuber, Trinity College, Oxford)

Wednesday: Augustine, *Confessions* (Ewa Atanassow)

Thursday: seminar on Augustine, *Confessions*

Augustine was one of the most influential Christian thinkers of all times, and his *Confessions* created the genre of autobiography. A passionate personality by nature, he struggled throughout his life and work with the meaning and proper direction of love. This week examines both his sometimes violent rejection of worldly love in its numerous forms and his attempt to find in human love an image of the Trinity, revealing a rich and complex thinker and a major influence on subsequent Christian thought.

#### **WEEK 5: STATE OF THE WORLD WEEK (NO CORE COURSE CLASSES)**

**Week 6: Erotic Mysticism**  
**14<sup>th</sup> February-18<sup>th</sup> February**

Readings: "Song of Songs" and selected poems.

Monday and Wednesday: "Song of Songs" (Elie Assis, Bar-Ilan University)

Thursday: Provençal poetry. Plenum session (Geoff Lehman)

Evening session: performance of Troubadouric music (The Oxford Troubadours)

Religious *eros* is arguably most intensely experienced (and, in any case, literarily most fully expressed) in mysticism. These lectures will focus on the ancient Hebrew love lyric known as the "Song of Songs", a text that has been read as sensual, earthly love poetry, but that has also been variously understood in light of metaphorical, eschatological, and mystical interpretations. During the week we will also explore the connections between the religious *eros* of the "Songs of Songs" and the medieval poetry and music of the provençal Troubadours. In many ways, the medieval love lyric grew from the same tradition that mystical religious poetry did. As a musical form, rooted in an oral, performance-based practice, it also travelled Europe, crossing linguistic boundaries. This week we will have the chance to explore this connection in depth also through the analysis of the music which used to accompany the poetry, performed live for us by an ensemble playing the original scores.

Saturday midnight: Essay submission deadline

**Week 7: Love Lyric. Tradition and Innovation**  
**21<sup>st</sup> February- 25<sup>th</sup> February**

Readings: Petrarch, *Canzoniere* (selection), Shakespeare, Sonnets, poems by Donne and Wyatt

Monday: Introductory lecture about poetical form and about the transition from Provençal poetry to Petrarch, to Wyatt, Shakespeare, Donne. (David Hayes)

Wednesday: Shakespeare and Donne (David Hayes)

Thursday: music performance: contemporary versions of troubadouric lyric and music (Barrie Ryan & band).

Following a broad historical route through the European lyric canon, this week we will consider the ways in which the expression of an individual, person-to-person love in Troubadouric poetry helped give birth to one of the principal modern conceptions of love, epitomized in written literary

form in the sonnets of Petrarch's *Canzoniere* (Book of Songs), and, in turn, how the specific form of the love sonnet developed in Renaissance England with William Shakespeare, Thomas Wyatt and John Donne. Through the study of this poetry we will explore the complex ways in which the poetic self constitutes itself as struggling with desires, contradictions and moral uncertainties through the poetic dialogue with a (often unobtainable) beloved. Finally, we will listen to a live musical performance and investigate how this poetic figure has migrated into the form and content of contemporary love songs inspired by this particular poetic tradition.

### **Week 8: Dante**

**28<sup>th</sup> February- 4<sup>th</sup> March**

Readings: Dante, *Divine Comedy* (All of *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*, selected cantos)

Monday: Dante, *Divine Comedy* (Laura Scuriatti)

Wednesday: Dante, *Divine Comedy* (Manuele Gragnolati – to be confirmed)

Thursday: seminar on *Divine Comedy*

Dante's *Divine Comedy* presents divine love as the animating principle of the universe. Although human beings are animated and shaped by this love, they also possess free will and the possibility of misunderstanding or forgetting this ultimate source of human capacities. The *Divine Comedy* is a poetic illustration of the ways in which love can become alienated from its source and also how divine love can also re-orient and reanimate desire to its fullest possibilities.

### **Week 9: Tragic Love: *Tristan and Isolde***

**7<sup>th</sup> March- 11<sup>th</sup> March**

Readings: Gottfried von Strassburg, *Tristan*

Monday: Gottfried von Strassburg, *Tristan* (Laura Scuriatti)

Wednesday: Gottfried von Strassburg, *Tristan* (Geoff Lehman)

Thursday: special seminar on Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* (Geoff Lehman)

Saturday midnight: Essay submission deadline

Many of the ideas about love expressed in medieval lyric poetry and song also appear in the context of narrative poems originating in northern Europe in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. The form

of love developed in this literary tradition, a love oriented towards a specific individual who at the same time remains in some essential sense unobtainable, has generally been referred to since the 19<sup>th</sup> century as 'courtly love'. The tale of Tristan and Isolde existed in numerous versions, both courtly and popular, from throughout this period, although its origins are considerably earlier. The adulterous relationship between the two principal characters, a person-to-person love that is both passionately physical and, arguably, in some sense ultimately unfulfillable, is the focus of the Tristan narrative and embodies the ideals and paradoxes inherent in the notion of courtly love. Gottfried von Strassburg's text, extant today in incomplete form, is one of the two principal courtly retellings of the story that have come down to us. Our investigation of the tragic aspects of love in the Tristan story will culminate with the attendance of a performance of Richard Wagner's opera *Tristan und Isolde* at the Deutsche Oper in week 10. A special seminar will offer stimulating reflections and information on the opera and its context to prepare us for this exciting event.

**Week 10: Love and Comedy: Shakespeare's *As You Like It* and Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro***  
14<sup>th</sup> March-18<sup>th</sup> March

Readings: William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*

Monday: William Shakespeare, *As You Like It* (Laura Scuriatti)

Wednesday: William Shakespeare, *As You Like It* (Ewa Atanassow)

This eventful last week of term is focused on the comical aspects of love in theatre and opera. William Shakespeare's *As You Like It* is a complicated pastoral comedy about the contrasted love relationships of a group of heterogeneous characters including jesters, shepherdesses and courtly lords and ladies, ending with a multiple marriage ceremony. In the play love functions as a key to understanding or unmasking the true nature of the self and of others, and to discovering the transformative power of desire; the (literary as well as social) expressions and conventions of love are questioned, their contradicting forms are taken apart, analyzed, at times mocked and reconfigured.

Thursday special event: Richard Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*, Deutsche Oper, Berlin (event linked to week 9).

Saturday special event: Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, *Die Hochzeit des Figaros*, Komische Oper, Berlin.

Mozart wrote *The Marriage of Figaro* in the mid 1780s, with a libretto by Lorenzo da Ponte based on a contemporary play of the same title. The work deals with the theme of revenge and, ultimately, forgiveness. The traditional *opera buffa* (comic opera) plot of elaborate scheming and



mistaken identities is transformed, through Mozart's music, into a story of love (and hate) among vividly characterized individuals, colored throughout by a music expressive of warm human feeling. It is for reasons such as these that the musicologist Alfred Einstein claimed *The Marriage of Figaro* went beyond the established genre of *opera buffa* to become, as the work's own subtitle suggests, a genuine "comedy in music."

## **Week 11 – No teaching**

Saturday midnight: Final paper submission deadline

### **Written Requirements**

Students will be asked to write 4 essays, 3 of which of 5-7 pages long; the last essay is longer (10-12 pages) and should be written on the basis of one of the previous essays, which will function as draft. Students may also decide to frame a new question for the final paper, provided it has been discussed and approved by their seminar leader.

The deadlines for submission of the essays are: Saturday midnight of weeks 3, 6 and 9. The deadline for the final paper is Saturday midnight of week 11. Each student will receive a tutorial of half an hour for each essay. The tutorial for the final paper will take place in the Spring Term.

### **Grading**

Essays: 15% each

Final paper: 25%

Participation (including Thursday seminars): 30%

Your seminar leaders should inform you of your participation grade at the end of each rotation.

### **General Guidelines**

Regular attendance and serious preparation for the AY/BA 1<sup>st</sup> year core are essential. Please make sure you sign the attendance sheet before each lecture begins. Please review the Academic Regulations for the full absences policy.