ETHICAL READING AND THE MEDIEVAL ARTES AMANDI:
The Rise of the Didactic in Andreas Capellanus, Jean de Meun, and John Gower

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by
Annika Farber

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The dissertation of Annika Farber was reviewed and approved* by the following:

Robert R. Edwards  
Edwin Erle Sparks Professor of English and Comparative Literature  
Dissertation Adviser  
Chair of Committee  

Caroline D. Eckhardt  
Professor of Comparative Literature and English  
Head of the Department of Comparative Literature  

Norris J. Lacy  
Edwin Erle Sparks Professor of French and Medieval Studies  

Stephen Wheeler  
Associate Professor of Classics  

*Signatures are on file in the Graduate School
Abstract

Ovid, in his *Ars amatoria*, adopts the didactic framework in order to elevate the tradition of Latin love elegy and make a name for himself as a poet. In contrast, three of his most famous medieval successors—Andreas Capellanus, Jean de Meun, and John Gower—invert the balance, exploiting the subject of love to instruct their readers in other topics, such as religion, philosophy, and morality. This shift in balance is related to the practice of “ethical reading,” which emerged in medieval *grammatica* as a way of approaching classical authors by emphasizing the ethical (and thus educational) potential of their texts. Previous scholarship has established the ethical focus of medieval grammar education and the ways in which that ethical focus influenced medieval readings of classical texts, but this scholarship has rarely continued on to discuss the influence of grammar education on medieval authors. Andreas, Jean, and Gower first encountered imaginative literature in the medieval curriculum, where the texts of classical authors were used to teach students the Latin language. In the grammar classroom, they would have been taught interpretive methods that trained them to identify the utility of what they were reading, whether that utility was conceived of in philological, ethical, philosophical, or even theological terms. Conditioned to read imaginative literature for these didactic purposes, Andreas, Jean, and Gower discovered, in Ovid’s *Ars amatoria*, a text that used love as a platform for didacticism, and a model around which to build their own literary inventions. The literary works that they created—Andreas’s *De amore* (late 12th c.), Jean’s continuation of *Roman de la Rose* (late 13th c.), and Gower’s *Confessio Amantis* (late 14th c.)—are dense, challenging, and multilayered texts that illustrate the process of learning through reading and dialogue, and use the literary discourse of love to teach their students the art of reading.
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To my parents, Maddie and Jerry,
for their constant love and support
Introduction:

Love and Didacticism in Ovid, Andreas, Jean, and Gower

omne tuit punctum qui miscuit utile dulci,
lectorem delectando pariter que monendo.
hic meret aera liber Sosiis; hic et mare transit
et longum noto scriptori prorogat aevum.

(Horace, Ars poetica, 343-46)\(^1\)

“He gets the vote who combines the useful with the pleasant, and who, at the same time he
pleases the reader, also instructs him. That book will earn money for the Sosii, this one will
cross the sea and extend immeasurably the life of a famous writer.”\(^2\)

This project is a study of the interaction between love and didacticism in four texts:
Ovid’s Ars amatoria (1\(^{st}\) c. BC-1\(^{st}\) c. AD), Andreas Capellanus’s De amore (12\(^{th}\) c.), Jean de
Meun’s continuation of Roman de la Rose (13\(^{th}\) c.), and John Gower’s Confessio Amantis (14\(^{th}\)
c.). Attempting to blend dulce and utile, these four authors carved out a place for their works in
the history of literature, but they also sparked endless controversies, angered authorities, and
challenged generations of scholars. What links these texts is the way they achieve the mixture of
contrasting elements that Horace calls for. Dulce and utile refer to two distinct effects, each of
which corresponds to a wide range of textual possibilities; in the texts under consideration, the
synergy of these two effects is achieved by the combination of love as pleasing subject matter
with a didacticism that shapes the text both in its broad outlines and in its particulars. (One
might even say that this combination of love and the didactic amounts to a kind of formula that
ensures the presence of both of the elements that Horace prescribes.) In these texts, the two
elements create a tension that the author must resolve by playing the two off against each other,
and it is this tension that simultaneously intrigues and challenges their readers. Despite these

\(^2\) Translated by Leon Golden, in Horace for Students of Literature: The “Ars Poetica” and its Tradition, ed. O.B.
similarities, however, there is an obvious disparity between Ovid’s playful lessons on how to find a girl and the dense, encyclopedic discourse of Andreas, Jean, and Gower. This disparity cannot be sufficiently explained by referring to Andreas, Jean, and Gower as “medieval” Ovids, especially since we have Old French adaptations of the *Ars amatoria* which do little more than transport Ovid’s *praeeceptor amoris* from the streets of ancient Rome to the streets of medieval France. In the hands of Andreas, Jean, and Gower, Ovid’s *praeeceptor* is, in effect, taken off the streets and placed in the medieval classroom. These authors are “medieval” Ovids, but more specifically, they are “scholastic” Ovids.

In this study, I make two overall arguments: 1) Ovid, in his *Ars amatoria*, adopted the didactic framework in order to elevate the tradition of Latin love elegy and make a name for himself as a poet, while three of his most famous medieval successors—Andreas Capellanus, Jean de Meun, and John Gower—inverted the balance, exploiting the subject of love to instruct their readers in other topics, such as religion, philosophy, and morality; and 2) this shift in balance is related to the practice of “ethical reading,” which emerged in medieval grammar classrooms as a way of justifying the use of classical authors by emphasizing the ethical (and thus educational) potential of their texts. Previous scholarship has established the ethical focus of medieval grammar education and the ways in which that ethical focus influenced medieval readings of classical texts, but this scholarship has rarely continued on to discuss the influence of grammar education on medieval authors. Bridging the gap between education and literature, this project situates literary texts within a specific intellectual context. What happens when a medieval author, thoroughly trained in Latin and raised on the ethical interpretation of the *auctores*, goes on to write a classically inspired text? How does education shape a medieval author’s understanding and use of classical literature? By studying Andreas, Jean, and Gower as
readers who have become writers, we can gain new insight into the complexities of their intriguing and demanding *artes amandi*. And by studying Andreas, Jean, and Gower as students who have become teachers, we can learn more about the nature of ethical reading and about the didactic potential of love literature.

**Ovid and the Medieval Artes Amandi**

Despite the extensive scholarship on Ovid’s *Ars amatoria* and its medieval reception, there is no definitive study on the *artes amandi* as a category of literature. This project, which focuses on the interaction between love and didacticism in Ovid and three of his medieval successors, cannot attempt to fill that need. However, it is my intention to lead the way for such a discussion by providing a definition of *ars amandi* and by sketching the outlines of this literary tradition.

The category of literature that I am calling *ars amandi* can be defined as a type of literature that uses the didactic mode to address the subject of love. The primary examples are Ovid’s *Ars amatoria*, Andreas Capellanus’s *De amore*, and the adaptations of those two texts, such as Maître Elie’s *Ci commence de Ovide de arte* (early 13th c.) and Drouart la Vache’s *Livre d’amours* (late 13th c.), that stay fairly close to the original and claim to be teaching their readers about love. Taken more broadly, the term *artes amandi* can also be used for texts which combine elements from this primary group of texts with elements from other literary traditions and genres—that is, texts for which instruction in love is only part of the agenda. The *Roman de la Rose* of Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, for example, brings together the *ars amandi* and courtly narrative, and Aurigenia’s *Facetus* (12th c.) includes the *ars amandi* as part of its general instruction on courtliness. In both of those texts, the concept of an *ars amandi* still plays
a major role, but at the farthest reaches of the literary tradition we also find texts that use *ars amandi* only as a topos, sometimes citing Ovid, as in the *Concilium Romarici Montis* (12th c.), where the instruction provided in Ovid’s *Ars amatoria* is referred to as “praecepta Ovidii, doctoris egregii” (“the precepts of Ovid, illustrious teacher”; ln. 27), and sometimes without citing Ovid, as in *Carmina Burana* 1 (12th-13th c.), which contains a brief reference to “Veneris gymnasia” (“the school of Venus”; stanza 2). In Chapter 3, I provide an extended discussion of the *artes amandi*, with examples drawn from the categories described above. In this introduction, I will summarize the scholarship on Ovid, Andreas, Jean, and Gower, with an emphasis on studies of love and didacticism in these texts, and then I will discuss the relevance of medieval education and classical reception to the study of medieval authorship.

Ovid’s *Ars amatoria* is, on the surface, a didactic poem on the art of love, written in elegiac meter. The novelty of this enterprise has led scholars to question every aspect of Ovid’s stated intentions. Scholars who write on the didactic nature of Ovid’s text find themselves having to prove to their readers that the *Ars* is indeed didactic (or at least mock-didactic). Confronted by the poem’s lack of seriousness and its unsuitable subject matter, some scholars (Jerzy Krókowski, Alexander Dalzell, Katharina Volk) make their arguments for the poem’s inclusion in the genre of didactic poetry by situating it next to more canonical didactic works and drawing comparisons in tone and rhetorical technique. Other scholars (Molly Myerowitz, Duncan F. Kennedy) focus solely on Ovid’s poem and take up the issue of what exactly Ovid is claiming to teach. The question of subject matter is a highly contentious one, and the most

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popular viewpoint is that Ovid is not in fact teaching anything about love—rather, he is teaching about love poetry or art itself (E.D. Blodgett, Joseph B. Solodow, Peter L. Allen). However, as Solodow makes clear when he suggests that Ovid’s playfulness contributes to his attempt to validate the significance of love, one does not have to assert that Ovid is teaching the art of love to consider how love functions within his work. Solodow’s conclusion, however, reverts to the common argument that the real subject of Ovid’s work is not love, but art. This argument, and the assessment of the poem as parody (Robert Durling, A.S. Hollis, Alexander Dalzell), are by far the two most pervasive topics in scholarship on Ovid’s Ars amatoria. Scholars seem content to agree on one point: Ovid’s poem is not an art of love.

The same critical tendency towards denying the stated subject matter of the text resurfaces in the scholarship on Andreas Capellanus. Ever since scholars turned away from the interpretation of Andreas initiated by nineteenth-century philologists, for whom the De amore was an accurate representation of the practice of courtly love in twelfth-century France, there has been preoccupation with the apparent inconsistencies between Andreas’s first two books, which favorably outline the rules of love, and the third, which is a moral diatribe against love and women in general. Confounded by this apparent shift in perspective, most critics have stamped

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7 “[Ovid] often notably subverts central features of Roman political and cultural life, suggesting that they are really important only in so far as they serve the cause of the lover; ultimately, at least in Ovid’s playful account, their final reference is to love, and love is therefore even more important than they are” (112).
8 Solodow, 127.
10 In his De l’amour, published in 1822, Stendhal writes: “Il y a eu des cours d’amour en France, de l’an 1150 à l’an 1200. Voilà ce qui est prouvé” (“There were courts of love in France, from the year 1150 to the year 1200. This is something that has been proved” [Paris: Éditions de Cluny, 1938], 336; my translation). As evidence, Stendhal offers Andreas’s De amore and François Juste Marie Raynouard’s discussion of courts of love (with special
the first two books with the label of irony (or sometimes parody) and moved on, never turning back. The main proponent of this position is D.W. Robertson Jr., who asserts that the *reprobatio* of Book Three is the only part of the work that Andreas, as a medieval Christian author, could have possibly supported and that the first two books are actually an ironic condemnation of love in which Andreas subtly demonstrates the ridiculous behavior of lovers, thus preparing his readers for the actual condemnation of love in Book Three.\(^1\) Robertson’s argument was a major influence on Alfred Karnein and Paolo Cherchi, who found support for the ironic reading of *De amore* in the thirteenth-century reception of Andreas’s text (Karnein) and in a comparison between Andreas’s conception of love and that of the troubadours (Cherchi), and it was taken to its extreme by scholars such as Michael D. Cherniss and Betsey Bowden, who attempted to resolve the inconsistencies in Andreas’s text by reading all three books as parodies.\(^2\) These ironic and parodic readings, which have their origin in scholarly discomfort with the contradictions and inconsistencies in Andreas’s treatise, are ultimately inadequate for helping us understand the work, as Donald A. Monson explains:

> The modern debate over ironic intentions in the *De amore* is among the most eloquent witnesses to the work’s complexity. The ironic interpretations proposed, ranging from the Christian to the crypto-erotic, often stand in sharp contrast to each other, yet each can find a basis of support in the treatise itself. Together they illustrate our modern discomfort with the complexities of twelfth-century culture reflected in the *De amore* and the attendant temptation to reduce those complexities to something more manageable. At the same time, they point to ironic discrepancies within the treatise that are probably best explained in terms of Andreas’s inability to dominate all the heterogeneous and

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contradictory material that he has assembled on this most complex aspect of the human experience.\textsuperscript{13}

Although the majority of the interpretations of Andreas simplify his treatise in the manner of Robertson or the nineteenth-century philologists, there is an undercurrent of serious (i.e., non-ironic) interpretations of the \textit{De amore} that seek to highlight rather than erase its complexities. Douglas Kelly, for example, argues that Andreas establishes a hierarchy of love in his text, according to which courtly love is held up as the ideal for readers who are unwilling to pursue the religious love described in Book Three.\textsuperscript{14} Peter L. Allen, emphasizing the opposition between Book Two and Book Three, describes Andreas as a “Naso nouus” who reproduces Ovid’s \textit{Ars} within a twelfth-century context and “invites his readers to imagine a world in which ecclesiastical morality has a limited domain and in which literature may function as fantasy, provided that it is kept within limits.”\textsuperscript{15} And Monson, in a series of articles from 1984 onwards that culminated in his invaluable 2005 book, \textit{Andreas Capellanus, Scholasticism, and the Courtly Tradition}, delineates the multiple literary, social, and philosophical influences on Andreas’s treatise in order to reinforce the complexity of the \textit{De amore} and the challenge it poses for modern readers.\textsuperscript{16}

In the extensive scholarship on \textit{Roman de la Rose}, we find a similar preoccupation with unity and disunity. There is a difference, however, between the disagreements instigated by

\begin{itemize}
\item Donald A. Monson, \textit{Andreas Capellanus, Scholasticism, and the Courtly Tradition} (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 346-47.
\item Allen, \textit{Art of Love}, 62.
\end{itemize}
Andreas’s contradictory treatise and the controversies that arise out of the *Rose*. As Kelly puts it, “some texts not only divide scholars, they invite divisiveness,” for they “go to the heart of personal convictions and tastes, posing moral and aesthetic problems that seem insoluble; they force issues that compel debate, yet are not susceptible of definitive solution. The *Roman de la Rose* is one of those works.” Andreas’s text may instigate disagreements, but the *Rose*, especially Jean’s *Rose*, thrives on them. The debate over its interpretation began in the fifteenth century, when Christine de Pizan voiced her outrage about the obscene and misogynistic *Rose*, and others replied by moralizing the text to render the offensive parts invisible. To an extent, modern criticism has followed a similar pattern: some scholars delve into the *Rose* and mine certain parts of the poem (such as individual personifications, mythological exempla, or the use of source texts) for the focused insights they provide, while others take a more global view, often striving to present the entire poem as edifying. A highly influential example of the latter approach would be that of Robertson, who reads the *Rose* as an allegory of man’s fall from grace. For our purposes, the relevant scholarship is that which concerns itself with love and authority in Jean’s text, and with Jean’s use of classical sources. The most contentious debate in this smaller body of scholarship is on the question of Reson’s authority. Using arguments that often mirror the discussions on Ovid’s *praeeptor* and Gower’s Genius, some scholars focus on Reson’s limited theological perspective and her failings as a teacher (Cherniss, Winthrop Wetherbee, Donald W. Rowe), while others are more willing to consider her authoritative status.

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Equally important for a discussion of Jean’s text as an ars amandi is the question of Jean’s literalism. Is the Rose, as Alastair Minnis says, “unflinchingly literal”?\footnote{Alastair Minnis, Chaucer and Pagan Antiquity (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1982), 16. Fleming questions Minnis’s description of Jean’s literalism, and points out that it is the character Amans, and not Jean himself, who is overly literal (“Jean de Meun and the Ancient Poets,” in Rethinking the “Romance of the Rose,” ed. Kevin Brownlee and Sylvia Huot [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992], 93). Minnis responds to Fleming in Magister amoris, upholding his argument that Jean’s Rose is predominantly literal, even while conceding that Jean does occasionally make use of allegory (Magister amoris: The “Roman de la Rose” and Vernacular Hermeneutics [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001], 85-86).} Or is literalism primarily the domain of Amans? As with the debate concerning Reson’s authority, the most useful interpretation is undoubtedly the one that mediates between extremes rather than reinforcing them. Jean does invite divisiveness, but in the process, he teaches us how to learn from contradictory lessons.

Although the topics of love and didacticism are central to Gower’s Confessio Amantis, Gower has never been included in studies that trace the medieval reception of Ovid’s Ars amatoria. And there are features of his work, such as the political nature of his preface and his inclusion of Latin commentary, that serve to extend the range of interpretive possibilities beyond what we find in the scholarship on Ovid, Andreas, and Jean de Meun. Despite the length and the heterogeneity of the Confessio, critics have not struggled with the tensions created by oppositional elements in the work to the extent that they have in the scholarship on the other three authors. Perhaps we can attribute this difference to Gower himself, who states at the outset of the Confessio that he will write a book which takes the “middel weie” between “lust” and...
“lore” (P.17-19). In J. Allan Mitchell’s words, “Gower is the first ‘reader’ of his own text to open it up to complex and opposing responses.” Taking their cue from this “middel weie” rhetoric, several critics have based their studies around contrasting elements, such as confession and courtly romance (John J. McNally), social and individual ethics (Russell A. Peck), Latin and vernacular (R.F. Yeager, Wetherbee), persona amans and auctor sapiens (Minnis), and, of course, love and morality (Yeager, Peter Nicholson). The emphasis throughout is on synthesis rather than opposition. As Yeager writes,

Gower’s poem proceeds contrapunctally, sometimes in apparent opposition—an amorous, and a less obvious but omnipresent Christian moral dimension. Far from being confused by this duality, Gower capitalizes on it, incorporating its tension into the heart of his poem. By the conclusion, these elements have been merged to give the Confessio Amantis a single meaning.

Although the concept of a “single meaning” has been challenged by Kurt Olsson and Mitchell (among others), there seems to be a general agreement that an understanding of the tensions and disagreements in the work (whether binary or multiple) is integral to an understanding of the text and its effect on the reader. As Olsson writes: “Perhaps no medieval poet contributes more than Gower to creating a ‘complete’ work that is so incomplete, a text enlarged and ‘finished’ through

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23 Ethics and Exemplary Narrative in Chaucer and Gower (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2004), 41.


25 Yeager, John Gower’s Poetic, 160.
an apparatus probably of his own devising that forces readers not only to learn from reading what wisdom is, but to intervene, judge wisely, and thereby become wise.”

By acknowledging the significance of opposing elements in the artes amandi of Andreas, Jean, and Gower, and by emphasizing the interaction of these elements rather than their separate existence, critics such as Olsson, Kelly, and Monson are able to show us how the tensions in these works can function not as sites of contention or authorial insufficiency but as sources of meaning. My approach builds on their insights, with the caveat that I am focusing my attention on only one set of opposing elements: love and didacticism. In addition to the above-mentioned critics, I am also influenced by the functionalist interpretation of literature outlined by Wolfgang Iser in The Act of Reading, which advocates a focus on process, potential, and effect, or, in other words, on “what literature does and not what it means.” Although I ultimately argue that Ovid exploits didacticism in favor of love, and that the medieval authors use love to strengthen the didactic potential of their texts, my intention is not to show how these authors privilege one topic while rendering the other irrelevant. On the contrary, it is the relationship between the two elements, the interplay between dulce and utile, rather than the eventual dominance of one or the other, that provides insight into the distinct character of these texts and their effect on the reader.

Grammatica and Medieval Authorship

Andreas, Jean, and Gower are didactic authors, and their didacticism is grounded in medieval pedagogy. In fact, I will argue that we cannot understand how and why the artes

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amandi tradition is reshaped by these authors without establishing this pedagogical context. Such a project, however, presents a daunting set of challenges. First of all, these three figures, covering a span of over two centuries, do not share a common historical setting, and we lack the sort of biographical information that would enable us to provide a detailed description of the specific grammar curriculum that each author would have encountered. What we do know, largely from internal evidence, is that all three authors were fluent in Latin language and culture. Obviously, then, all three authors received a solid education in Latin, which means that they learned how to read and write within an educational system that, as we shall see, privileged didactic and ethical approaches to imaginative literature.

But also, because the present study will be a literary one, rather than an inquiry into the history of medieval education, it will be necessary to rely on the existing scholarship and research in this field. Thus, this study presents no new evidence on medieval pedagogy. Instead, it draws from scholarship on the history of grammar education (from antiquity through the late Middle Ages), on medieval hermeneutics, and on the reception of classical literature in the Middle Ages, in order to establish a context for the pedagogical formation of Andreas, Jean, and Gower. Establishing this context will provide an essential complement to a literary analysis of these texts and will help us to understand how and why the artes amandi tradition is reshaped by the three authors in question. In the following paragraphs, I will return to Andreas, Jean, and Gower to address the issue of each author’s educational background. Next, I will provide a brief overview of the significance of medieval grammar education, and of the accessus ad auctores (which will be examined at length in Chapter 1). And finally, I will review the most relevant scholarship on the connections between medieval pedagogy and medieval literature, to locate my own argument within this larger discussion.
We know almost nothing about Andreas Capellanus, author of the De amore, beyond what we can learn from the text itself. It is generally agreed, based on Andreas’s reception in the thirteenth century and on a small number of internal references to contemporary events, that the De amore was written sometime around the end of the twelfth century, or possibly the beginning of the thirteenth. But unless we accept as historically accurate the persona Andreas creates for himself within his text, there is no evidence that he was associated with a specific court, that he was a member of the clergy, or that he was named Andreas. Even the title of his text is the creation of modern scholars. Dating aside, the most significant evidence that we have about Andreas’s text is the fact that the De amore is in Latin. Moreover, Andreas’s command of Latin is impressive, and, as Monson has recently shown, so is his familiarity with a range of secular and religious authorities, as well as with the learned discourses of scholastic philosophy, Christian theology, and medieval psychology and physiology. In short, what we know about Andreas, whoever he was, is that he was educated, probably at the height of the twelfth-century Renaissance, and that he took full advantage of that education in writing his treatise.

29 For the evidence concerning the dating of Andreas’s text, see Andreas Capellanus on Love, ed. and trans. P.G. Walsh (London: Duckworth, 1982), 1-2.
30 The search for the historical Andreas Capellanus (André le Chapelain) has been based solely on internal evidence. Andreas was first sought at the court of Champagne, and his name was found in twelfth-century court documents from Champagne, but there is no evidence to connect the Andreas mentioned in those documents to the author of the De amore (for a summary of this argument, see John F. Benton, “The Evidence for Andreas Capellanus Re-examined Again,” Studies in Philology 59 [1962]: 471-78). It is now more generally accepted that if we are to trust Andreas’s self-references at all, we should be looking for him at the court of the king of France, since he refers to himself as “amatoris Andreae aulae regiae capellani” (“the lover Andreas, chaplain to the royal court”; 1.6.385). But Andreas has not been found there either (see John W. Baldwin, The Language of Sex: Five Voices from Northern France Around 1200 [Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1994], 16-17).
31 Andreas’s self-reference is the only evidence for his clerical status. Of course, it is likely, based on Andreas’s command of Latin and his discussions concerning clerics in the De amore, that he was a cleric. But this is still internal evidence, and thus not much of a step towards finding the historical Andreas.
32 The most compelling discussion of the historical Andreas comes from Peter Dronke (“Andreas Capellanus,” The Journal of Medieval Latin 4 [1994]: 51-63), who brings to our attention allusions to a lost vernacular romance about an “Andreas of Paris” who died out of love for the Queen of France. Based on this evidence, Dronke suggests that the author of the De amore may have used the name “Andreas” as a pseudonym, and that Andreas’s self references (especially those which hint at past experience in love) would have been read as obvious references to this romance.
33 For a full discussion of manuscript rubrics see Monson, Andreas Capellanus, 12-15.
34 See Monson, Andreas Capellanus, esp. pp. 3-6.
A similar argument can be made for Jean de Meun. Despite a lack of biographical information, scholars have been able to draw some inferences about his education, mainly from the university controversies that he refers to in his work, and from the breadth of his knowledge. Although his exact connection to the university and to thirteenth-century academic circles remains unknown, we can reasonably assume that he was affiliated with the university, either formally or informally, and that he was well educated. He translated Boethius, Abelard, and Vegetius, which obviously required great skill in Latin, and he exhibits a broad familiarity with Latin literature, philosophy, and theology. This was material that one learned in school. John Fleming, who refers to Jean as a “scrupulous Latinist,” describes Jean’s Rose as having been “built on the abandoned site of Guillaume de Lorris out of the carefully chosen debris of a liberal education.” Fleming argues, and I agree, that “Jean considers himself to a considerable and quite self-conscious degree to be a translator working in the classical tradition rather than a romance poet augmenting a vernacular corpus.” As a result of this education, Jean’s Rose is thoroughly didactic, not just in the content of the work but in the tone as well, as Paré reminds us:

Cela se découvre à chaque page de son roman: elle est remplie d’allusions à l’enseignement, aux écoles, aux méthodes pédagogiques, à la licence d’enseigner; non seulement Jean de Meun vulgarise les spéculations des maîtres de l’Université, mais il prend parti dans leurs querelles (Guillaume de Saint-Amour); ses procédés de composition et sa langue même trahissent leur influence.

35 On Jean de Meun’s potential education, see Gérard Paré, Les Idées et les lettres au XIIe siècle: “Le Roman de la Rose” (Montreal: Université de Montréal, 1947), 8-10; Rowe, 100-02; Fleming, “Jean de Meun,” 83; David F. Hult, Self-Fulfilling Prophecies: Readership and Authority in the First “Roman de la Rose” (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 108; Minnis, Magister Amoris, 1-3; and Daniel Heller-Roazen, Fortune’s Faces: The “Roman de la Rose” and the Poetics of Contingency (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 78.
36 Reason and the Lover, 60; “Jean de Meun,” 91.
37 “Jean de Meun,” 84.
38 Paré, 9-10.
In his continuation of Guillaume’s *Rose*, Jean shows himself to be profoundly influenced by his education, during which he learned not only how to write Latin and engage himself in the controversies of his day, but also how to read, to interpret, and to think, and the methods of reading and interpretation that he learned are reflected in his poetic achievements.

Our knowledge about Gower’s life and education is equally sparse. His reference to “rayed” (striped) sleeves in *Mirour de l’Omme* and his use of legal terminology have led some scholars to argue that he may have been a lawyer, or that he was at least “bred to the law,” as G.C. Macaulay says, “though he may not have practised it for a living.” As with Andreas and Jean, though, our best evidence about Gower’s education comes from his writings, particularly from the *Vox Clamantis*, the *Cronica Tripertita*, and the “hard Latin” verses and commentary of the *Confessio*. The high degree of fluency in Latin that Gower possessed could have come only from a formal education, as did his knowledge of classical authors (especially Ovid). We may not know where he went to school, or what his textbooks were, but there is no doubt that Gower received an education in Latin language and literature, and that this education left an indelible mark on his literary career.

What is significant here is not the specific details of the grammatical curriculum in, say, Jean de Meun’s Paris or John Gower’s London, but the implications of *grammatica* as a discipline, and as a path to literacy. Martin Irvine and David Thomson explain this aspect of medieval education:

> Knowledge of *grammatica* defined one’s position in literate culture. From the time of Bede to the age of Dante, Chaucer and Gower, it was the precondition for having a

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literate culture at all. It gave readers and writers what we now call a “literate subjectivity”, a position in a network of texts and language that defined how to read and what could be written. It provided the cultural category of the literary as such, which meant an available network of writings and a textual genealogy extending back to the early auctores. It provided the first assumptions, the main presuppositions, of any understanding of language, writing and texts. Grammatica meant literacy, but literacy in a specific kind of language and with a specific canon of texts.\footnote{Martin Irvine and David Thomson, “Grammatica and Literary Theory,” in The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism, vol 2: The Middle Ages, ed. Alastair Minnis and Ian Johnson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 40-41.}

Despite regional and temporal variation in the selection of individual texts for the grammatical curriculum, grammatica was a conservative discipline; moreover, it was uniquely positioned at the entrance to the medieval path to literacy.\footnote{Irvine and Thomson offer a description of the conservative yet varied nature of medieval grammar education: “We are used to having multiple paths and teaching methods for literacy and multiple literary canons taught in schools and universities and embraced by different cultural groups. From the eighth to fifteenth centuries, Europe really only had one gateway and methodology. There were, of course, variations in emphases, new philosophical traditions about language that got folded into the tradition, local limitations of access to literary works, and other modifications to what was very much a living tradition” (41; see pp. 37-40 for an extended discussion of the medieval grammar curriculum). Paul F. Gehl provides even more detail on these variations: “Medieval education, and especially grammar, was an essentially conservative field, but its conservatism functioned first on a social and ethical level, secondarily on the level of technique and preference for individual texts, and only in a very weak and inconsistent way in the matter of systematic curricula” (A Moral Art: Grammar, Society, and Culture in Trecento Florence [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993], 11). On the connections between Latin grammar schools in England and their counterparts in western Europe, see Nicholas Orme, Medieval Schools: From Roman Britain to Renaissance England (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 86-127 (esp. pp. 86-88).} As such, it both enabled and perpetuated a “model for textual culture,” in Irvine’s words, which had “implications that extend far beyond the apparent objective contents of a discipline.”\footnote{The Making of Textual Culture: ‘Grammatica’ and Literary Theory, 350-1100 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 1.}

The foundational nature of medieval grammatica is important because grammar instructors were responsible for providing much more than a basic education in the Latin language. They were also responsible for providing an introduction to literary culture, and, as educators, they were responsible for the moral well-being of their students. This connection between grammar, literature, and ethics, which medieval educators inherited from their classical predecessors, became inextricably tied, in late antiquity, to the struggle between Christianity and
pagan literature. “It was in the classroom,” Wetherbee explains, “that the emergent Christian culture came to terms with its pagan heritage, and the negotiations this involved largely determined the shape of education and literary criticism throughout the medieval period.” For some educators, of course, the only solution was to remove pagan literature from the classroom. But since it is unlikely that students trained in such schools would develop the extensive knowledge of the pagan auctores found in the texts of Andreas, Jean, and Gower, we can exclude those schools from consideration. In the schools that continued to teach the pagan auctores, the basic assumption that all literature—including secular literature—should provide moral guidance for readers endured throughout the Middle Ages, and was strengthened in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries with the “rediscovery” of a greater range of classical texts and the emergence of the European universities (which, by their very existence, led to a reformulation of the pre-university grammar school curriculum).

A rich source of information about literary culture in the Middle Ages, and, in particular, about the ways in which classical texts were interpreted is to be found in the accessus ad

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45 “From Late Antiquity to the Twelfth Century,” *Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, 2:99.
47 Vincent Gillespie cautions us not to accept the conventional story that the rise of the universities led to the eventual triumph of logic over grammar: “Although the logic of language came to be studied with new rigour, it would be wrong to suggest that the old ways of learning decayed. The interplay between disciplines and institutions was always more subtle and profound than medieval satirists and modern social historians care to allow: even logicians must learn to read, and must sit at the knee of Dame Grammar. So, although the Paris schools became the centre of the new learning, the influence of the older liberal arts schools, particularly Chartres and Orléans, never disappeared, despite their transmutation into centres for vocational training. The basic hermeneutical skills of students, their awareness of the impact and effect of the power of words, were acquired, as they had been in previous centuries, through their exposure to the analysis of Latin literature in grammar and liberal arts schools and within the ambit of institutions of cultural privilege and social power” (“From the Twelfth Century to c.1450,” in *Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, 2:145-46). See also Philippe Delhaye, “L’Enseignement de la philosophie morale au XIIe siècle,” *Mediaeval Studies* 11 (1949): 77-99; Delhaye, “‘Grammatica’ et ‘Ethica’ au XIIe siècle,” *Recherches de theologie ancienne et medievale* 25 (1958): 59-110; Irvine, “Medieval Grammatical Theory and Chaucer’s *House of Fame,*” *Speculum* 60 (1985): 850-51; Gehl, *Moral Art*, 6; and Orme, 100.
auctores (introductions to the authors), or “academic prologues,” as Minnis calls them.⁴⁸ These are brief prefatory documents that often circulated along with the commentaries and provided an overview of the text and its author. In general, the content of these accessus involved literary topics such as the life of the author, the structure of the work, and the author’s intention in composing the work, but in the twelfth century specifically, a type of accessus emerged that asked, in addition to the standard literary questions, “cui parti philosophiae supponitur” (“to which part of philosophy does it belong”). The most common response—unsurprising, given that literature provides abundant examples of human behavior—was “ethicae supponitur” (“it belongs to ethics”).⁴⁹ After having read these “ethical” literary texts, readers would be expected to store practical examples of moral behavior in their memory, with the understanding that these examples could be useful in situations where the reader might need assistance dealing with life’s moral dilemmas.

The accessus ad auctores have played a large role in the scholarship on medieval education and classical reception, since they offer concise descriptions of how some medieval


⁴⁹ For example, in the collection of accessus edited by Huygens, seventeen out of the twenty seven texts introduced are classified under ethics. Of the remaining ten, five are described without any mention of philosophy (or, in one case, with no response to the question of philosophical classification, even though it is mentioned at the outset of the accessus), one is classified under physicae (physical science), one is classified under logicae (logic), and three have a double classification (in the accessus to Horace’s Ars poetica, for example, the commentator mentions that the text could be classified under ethics or logic). The practice of classifying texts under the parts of philosophy betrays the origins of this particular type of accessus, which was initially used for introductions to philosophical texts. The overwhelming emphasis on ethics, however, speaks to a larger discussion about the value of imaginative literature and the moral responsibilities of grammar instructors. Irvine addresses this topic in his discussion of late antique commentaries on Virgil: “Vergil’s works, and other canonical writers, became the core of an ethically and ideologically centered literary education. The commentaries provoke important questions about canonicity, literariness, and the nature of literature itself as an institutional formation, questions which serve to distance the modern from the medieval era. The classification of poetry under the ethical division of philosophy in the twelfth through fourteenth centuries simply made explicit what was presupposed in earlier medieval grammatica.” (Making of Textual Culture, 161).
readers might have interpreted specific classical texts. It is also true, though, that they present a number of difficulties. Even among the accessus that have been made available in modern editions, there are often missing (or duplicate) questions, lacunae, syntactical problems, and other such hindrances to comprehension. And although the conventions of the accessus seem to indicate that they were intended as introductions to commentaries, it is true that they could also circulate separately, or in collections, which often were compiled “haphazardly and without any advance planning in respect of arrangement.”

Moreover, as I discuss in Chapter 1, the scholars who work on medieval commentaries often point out that there is very little connection between the broad interpretive claims outlined in the accessus and the linguistic instruction found in the commentaries, even when the two documents appear in the same manuscript. Despite all of these difficulties, though, the accessus do “offer us a golden opportunity for comprehensive study of the principles of literary theory,” provided we use them wisely.

Once we have established, using the scholarship on grammar education and classical reception, a context for the pedagogical formation of medieval readers, it is possible to extend the discussion towards medieval literature, and consider the implications of this educational process for medieval authors. The most thorough scholarship on the connection between grammar education, ethics, and medieval literature is that of Minnis, particularly in a series of articles from 1980-83 (followed by a book in 1984) in which he identified a feature in medieval commentary that he called the “Heroides-paradigm,” wherein the love stories of Ovid’s Heroides were taken as exemplary tales about good and bad lovers. Minnis showed how Chaucer and

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51 *Medieval Literary Theory*, 15.
Gower, both of whom could have had access to commentaries on the *Heroides*, were influenced by this particular interpretation of Ovid. In later books and articles, Minnis has drawn similar parallels between scholastic commentary and the poetry of specific medieval authors, such as Jean de Meun and Juan Ruiz. What happens, though, when we look beyond direct parallels? Can the ideology of scholastic commentary—as opposed to the individual character of specific commentaries, or even of multiple commentaries on specific texts—be relevant for the interpretation of medieval literature? Or, as Mary Carruthers puts it:

> When one’s first relationship with a text is not to encounter another mind (or subdue it, as one suspects sometimes) or to understand it on its own terms, but to use it as a source of communally experienced wisdom for one’s own life, gained by memorizing from it however much and in whatever fashion one is able or willing to do; when one’s head is constantly filled with a chorus of voices available promptly and on any subject, how does such a relationship to the works of other writers differently define the meanings of such literary concepts as “reader,” “text,” “author”?

This study argues that, for authors who were educated in Latin language and literature, an understanding of the methodologies introduced in the grammar classroom provides new insight on medieval authorship. In this sense, I am following John Dagenais, who argues that “we can understand medieval authors best by seeing them as a special (and especially interesting) case of reader,” and Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, who asks: “How did the way medieval clerks read ancient myth condition the ways they rewrote these myths and made them meaningful, not only for the subject matter at hand but also for a definition of the medieval writing process?” In addition to studying writers as readers, both Dagenais and Blumenfeld-Kosinski both discuss ethics in relation to medieval reading. But Dagenais introduces this ethical focus without

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53 *Medieval Theory of Authorship*; “De Vulgari Auctoritate”; “Authors in Love”; and *Magister Amoris*.  
explaining its origins, and Blumenfeld-Kosinski makes only brief mention of medieval education and commentary. For Dagenais, the ethical approach to literature is so characteristically medieval that “ethical reading” can function as a synonym for “medieval reading.” The difference between my approach and that of these scholars lies in my use of scholarship on medieval grammar education, and in my discussion of what constitutes “ethical reading.” My approach also differs from that of J. Alan Mitchell, who, writing on ethics and reading outside the context of education and reception, uses the phrase “reading for the moral” and aligns exemplary literature with moral casuistry. It is not enough simply to point out that medieval readers approached texts from an ethical standpoint. We must also consider the context in which they learned this approach. The medieval practice of ethical reading, developed in grammar schools as a method of emphasizing the didactic and ethical potential of imaginative fiction, would have been ingrained in the minds of Latin students, and thus, in the minds of Latinate authors, from the very beginning of the long road to literacy. It would have guided their approach to poetry, to language, to authority, and, above all, to their own writing.

Chapter Summaries

Chapter 1 examines the role of literature and ethics in the medieval grammar curriculum and introduces the concept of “ethical reading,” which, as I argue in Chapters 4-6, was a formative influence on the didacticism of Andreas, Jean, and Gower. Since, in my analysis, ethical reading functions as an intermediate level of interpretation in between two more familiar methods—literal reading and allegorical interpretation—my main argument falls into two parts. First, I address the function of ethics in the accessus ad auctores, focusing on the difference

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56 Dagenais, 8.
57 Mitchell, 8-21.
between literal and ethical reading, and on the rhetorical strategies used in these *accessus* to establish the ethical and didactic potential of a text. And second, I examine the difference between ethical reading and allegorical interpretation, using examples from Conrad of Hirsau’s *Dialogus super auctores*, the commentary on the *Aeneid* attributed to Bernardus Silvestris, and Alan of Lille’s *Anticlaudianus*.

Chapter 2 offers an interpretation of Ovid’s *Ars amatoria* that sets the stage for the discussions of Andreas, Jean, and Gower. From an analysis of the relationship between love and didacticism in Ovid’s text, I argue that the Ovid represented in the *Ars* is, first and foremost, a love poet, and that he exploited the framework of didactic poetry in order to expand the scope, and thus, the potential audience, of love poetry. The tradition of Latin elegiac love poetry established by Ovid’s predecessors, Tibullus and Propertius, was characterized by a tension between the world of the lover and the world of Roman society. Ovid enters this elegiac tradition, but then changes its course by creating the figure of the *praecceptor amoris*, who takes control and subordinates the outside world to the world of love. In the hands of the *praecceptor amoris*, everything in Roman society, from the topography of Rome to its legendary history, is significant only for what it can tell us about love. What this means for Ovid, as a love poet, is that themes typically reserved for the loftier genres of epic and didactic poetry become part of the love poet’s repertoire. In Book Three, Ovid and his *praecceptor amoris* become virtually indistinguishable—particularly at the end, with the proclamation “Naso magister erat” (3.812)—and Ovid, in his usual playful and disarming fashion, makes his final claims for the value of his love poetry. Spurred on by his high ambitions, Ovid blended the didactic and the amatory to create a new kind of love poem.
Chapter 3 is an overview of the translations and adaptations of Ovid’s *Ars amatoria*, and of the broader literary tradition that I am calling the *artes amandi*. Following the three-part scheme described at the beginning of this introduction, I provide a brief discussion of each example, focusing on its connection to the *artes amandi* tradition as well as on the ways in which it differs from the other texts in this tradition. While not all ostensibly Ovidian in nature, these three groups of texts—those that are close to the original model, those that combine elements from the first group with elements from other literary traditions and genres, and those in which *ars amandi* appears only as a topos—are connected by a certain kind of relationship to Ovid’s text. They all show a familiarity with Ovid in some form, whether it be from a full reading of Ovid’s text or from a fragmentary knowledge of the *magister amoris* through *florilegia*, *accessus*, commentaries, and *vitae*. In other words, the medieval *artes amandi* can be said to inhabit a literary world in which the existence of an *ars amandi* (i.e., love as an art that can be learned) has already been established. By locating Andreas, Jean, and Gower within this tradition, we can get a more complete picture of how these authors responded to Ovid’s *Ars amatoria*.

Turning from Ovid and the *artes amandi* to the three medieval authors featured in this study, I make the case in Chapter 4 for a non-ironic interpretation of Andreas Capellanus’s *De amore*. Andreas’s treatise is a dense, multi-generic, inconsistent text, one which makes two simultaneous yet contradictory arguments about love, and it is tempting, I admit, to want to simplify the discussion by using irony to argue for the unity of the work. But I suggest that, rather than impose a unity on this text, we need to give full recognition to the contradictions it contains. And, in fact, the most consistent aspects of the *De amore*—Andreas’s cautious pessimism about love, his conflicted attitude toward teaching the subject, and his failed attempts
to reconcile love and morality—should encourage us to emphasize rather than erase the work's complexities. Moreover, when we consider the *De amore* in light of the literary and interpretive traditions discussed in this study, the *artes amandi* and the practice of ethical reading, we see that the problems Andreas struggles with are by no means unique to his text. From the tradition of love poetry and Ovid, Andreas inherited the tensions between love and society that the elegiac poets struggled with, and that Ovid resolved by creating a fictionalized version of Rome in which the lover’s world and the world of Roman society were one and the same. From the tradition of ethical reading and the classroom use of pagan literature, Andreas inherited the educator’s dual responsibility: to teach a subject matter, and to use that subject matter to guide his students towards ethical behavior. Ultimately, Andreas resolves these problems by abandoning his instruction in love and concluding in favor of Christian virtue, but not until he has exhausted the possibilities of his moral interpretation of love, represented by the figure of the *sapiens amans*.

In Chapter 5, I argue that Jean de Meun uses Guillaume de Lorris’s incomplete narrative to launch a program of instruction that will teach both Latin and vernacular readers how to learn from a vernacular love story. Central to this reading is the dialogue between Reson and Amant, which functions as both the preface to Jean’s text and the mechanism by which Jean turns Guillaume’s narrative into his own. In her dialogue with Amant, Reson establishes the teacher-student relationship that will be echoed throughout the text, and she broadens the perspective of the poem by subjecting love to philosophical analysis and using it to teach topics such as fortune, free will, and justice. All of the characters who are introduced after Reson must position themselves in relation to Reson, either by siding with Amant against her and providing more practical love advice (Ami, La Vieille), or by continuing the theoretical instruction that Reson began (Nature, Genius). By building his didactic lesson onto the framework of Guillaume’s text
and by interweaving practical and theoretical *artes amandi*, Jean presents us with a love story, an exemplum, and a lesson in ethical reading, all at the same time.

Chapter 6 is a discussion of the respective roles of Amans and Genius in Gower’s *Confessio Amantis*, focusing on the methods of instruction that Gower uses in his text. Amans, the conventional lover-student, functions as an exemplary figure and a stand-in for the reader, providing an example from which the reader is expected to learn, while receiving lessons that are meant for a wider audience. At the same time, he also constitutes a didactic technique, since Gower uses him to drive the story and give structure and purpose to Genius’s lessons. Genius, meanwhile, primarily functions as a teacher, and more specifically, a teacher who performs the interpretive functions of a *grammaticus*. As I demonstrate, using Genius’s interpretations of the tale of Phebus and Daphne (Book 3) and Ceyx and Alcyone (Book 4), Genius is teaching Amans (and the reader) the process of ethical reading, offering exemplary scenarios that highlight specific ethical situations in order to provoke discussion on moral issues. Through Genius’s lessons, the *Confessio* both illustrates and teaches a process of learning from exemplary narrative that readers could be expected to pass on to others, thus perpetuating the transmission of learning Gower mentions in his prologue. Gower’s prologue, in fact, merely makes explicit what we have already learned from Ovid, Andreas, and Jean: wisdom is passed down to future generations through books, and the best way to ensure that your book will survive is to learn, as Ovid did, how to navigate the difficult terrain between “lust” and “lore.”
Chapter 1:

Literature, Ethics, and the Grammar Curriculum

Medieval didactic love literature has a clear precursor in Ovid’s *Ars amatoria*. However, when we place Ovid’s text alongside that of one of his successors—alongside, for example, the *De amore* of Andreas Capellanus—it is obvious that the latter text is no mere imitation or reinterpretation of Ovid. In fact, the identification of Ovid as a model raises more questions than it answers, forcing critics to look elsewhere—towards scholastic discourse, for example, or courtly romance—to find sources that would enable them to establish a confident reading of the medieval text and of its place in the Ovidian tradition. At the same time, when the critics who are reluctant to argue that Andreas is simply a “second Ovid” try to leave Ovid out of the discussion altogether, they find that he is always there, lurking in the background, complicating any reading that tries to reduce Andreas to a purely medieval commentator on love.

It is a commonplace of medieval literary criticism to remind one’s readers that medieval authors could not have read Ovid (or any other author) as we read Ovid. We also know, of course, that medieval authors could not have read Ovid as Ovid’s contemporaries did. This fact remains true even for authors who could have had access to a complete or nearly-complete text of Ovid’s *Ars amatoria*, because material concerns are not the only factor in determining the medieval interpretation of a classical text. Without any detailed biographical information from these authors, it is impossible to reconstruct the circumstances under which they would have encountered a specific text. We can, however, gain insight into their response by taking into consideration the intellectual context in which classical authors such as Ovid were transmitted: that is, the medieval grammar school, which relied on imaginative literature as a means of
teaching students Latin, and thus served as the primary method by which literate readers were introduced to classical authors.¹

The significance of medieval education becomes clear when we realize that the interpretive methods developed by medieval grammarians informed the production of commentaries, glosses, accessus (introductions), and other such scholarly apparatus, all of which circulated with the texts of the auctores. Medieval readers would inevitably have been influenced by the interpretations offered in this apparatus, much as modern readers are influenced (whether consciously or not) by the perspective offered in the introduction and notes of a scholarly edition. As Judson Boyce Allen explains,

it would be possible to conceive of a medieval reader who had never read commentary on some single poem, but not possible to believe one could remain innocent of commentary if he read many poems. Thus Dante, Langland, Chaucer, Jean de Meun, or whoever—no medieval poet could have learned his Latin without having submitted his reading to a school accessus, nor could he have read at all widely without having encountered more or less marginal commentary.²

In this way, the methods of reading taught in the classroom would lend their influence even to reading done outside the classroom.

¹ Throughout this study, I will use terms such as “grammar school” and “grammar classroom” to refer to the type of schools that teach grammar, and “grammatica” to refer to the discipline of grammar education and to the literary culture which developed as a result of grammar education. On the classification of schools based on schoolwork (grammar, logic, etc.) as opposed to organization (chantry, cloister, etc), see Nicholas Orme, Medieval Schools: from Roman Britain to Renaissance England (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 54-55. On grammatica as a discipline and as a literary culture, see Martin Irvine, The Making of Textual Culture: ‘Grammatica’ and Literary Theory, 350-1100 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 1-22; and Martin Irvine and David Thomson, “Grammatica and Literary Theory,” in The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism, vol 2: The Middle Ages, ed. Alastair Minnis and Ian Johnson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 15-22.

In this chapter, I will review the evidence on literature and ethics in medieval grammatica to reassert the significance of the ethical perspective and to make the case for “ethical reading” as an interpretive method that exists alongside the more familiar medieval methods of reading secular texts (the literal and the allegorical). My argument will be divided into three parts. First, I will provide a brief overview of the role of ethics and literature in the development of the medieval grammar curriculum. Second, I will address the function of ethics in the accessus ad auctores, focusing on the difference between literal and ethical reading, and on the rhetorical strategies used in these accessus to establish the ethical and didactic potential of a text. And third, I will compare references to multilevel readings in Conrad of Hirsau’s Dialogus super auctores, the commentary on the Aeneid attributed to Bernardus Silvestris, and Alan of Lille’s Anticlaudianus, in order to challenge our understanding of secular hermeneutics and illustrate the difference between ethical reading and allegorical interpretation.

To be clear, I am not arguing that medieval educators used the phrase “ethical reading,” or that they routinely acknowledged the existence of this category. What I am arguing is that, though we are still a long way from any comprehensive understanding of the role of ethics in the grammar curriculum, we would benefit from the introduction of a well-defined concept of “ethical reading” into our scholarly discourse—a concept derived from the medieval perception of the educative function of literature and from the interpretive methodologies developed in order to understand that function. Previous discussions of ethics and medieval interpretation have provided useful insight on the significance of the ethical approach to literature, but to do so, they have often had to sacrifice specificity and context. Thus, we find such generalizing statements as J.B. Allen’s “to define ethics in medieval terms is to define poetry, and to define poetry is to
define ethics,” and John Dagenais’s substitution of “ethical reading” for “medieval reading.”

Although I agree that the broad influence of ethics in medieval literary culture deserves further study, to argue that medieval poetry and hermeneutics are inherently ethical is overstating the case. Ethical reading is, first and foremost, a product of medieval pedagogy. In this specific context, ethical reading can be defined as a method of interpretation that challenged readers to view imaginative literature as a source of practical wisdom, even if that wisdom was not always apparent on the literal surface of the text. It is significant for medieval literature because it would have played a role in the pedagogical formation of literate (i.e., Latin educated) authors such as Andreas Capellanus, Jean de Meun, and John Gower.

The Development of the Medieval Grammar Curriculum

According to the traditional model of education that was bequeathed to the Middle Ages, grammatica was divided into two branches: linguistic and interpretive. Grammar instructors were primarily responsible for teaching the Latin language. However, because the material for teaching this language was the poetry of an established canon of authors, there was always a secondary focus—an interpretive one—that served to transmit a body of cultural knowledge from generation to generation, adapting it to fit the needs of each individual era.

In considering this tradition, it is significant to note that what we would regard as literary texts were present at every stage. These texts were used to teach students to read—they were essential to the process of becoming a literate member of society—and at the same time, they

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served to indoctrinate young readers into that society’s ethical codes. The ancient paradigm, then, presupposes a literature that is itself an ethical model, and thus worthy of being incorporated into the school curriculum. Education and literature are interdependent: the poet is an educator, and the educator is an interpreter of the poets.⁵

In order to get a sense of the role ethics played in the formation of grammatica, we can turn to Quintilian, who provides us with a description of the ideal grammar curriculum in his *Institutio Oratoria* (1st c.). Quintilian discusses the linguistic branch first, and then moves to reading and interpretation: “in primis, ut tenerae mentes tracturaeque altius quidquid rudibus et omnium ignaris insederit, non modo quae diserta, sed vel magis quae honesta sunt, discant” (“above all, these tender minds, which will be deeply affected by whatever is impressed upon them in their untrained ignorance, should learn not only eloquent passages but, even more, passages which are morally improving”; 1.8.4).⁶ The logic is clear: if you are going to teach Latin to young boys, you might as well use passages that exemplify good conduct, both in writing and in life. But what do you do when your students are ready to move beyond simple proverbs and moral *sententiae*?

Quintilian commends the practice of beginning grammar lessons with Homer and Virgil, and adds an intriguing suggestion: “quamquam ad intellegendas eorum virtutes firmiore iudicio opus est: sed huic rei superest tempus, neque enim semel legentur. interim et sublimitate heroi carminis animus adsurgat et ex magnitudine rerum spiritum ducat et optimis inbuatur” (“Of course it needs a more developed judgement to appreciate their virtues, but there is time enough

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⁵ H.I. Marrou has shown us that the reciprocal relationship between literature and moral education can be traced back at least as far as the influence of Homer on Hesiod at the end of the eighth century B.C. (A *History of Education in Antiquity*, trans. George Lamb [London: Sheed and Ward, 1956], 9). It also played a role in the development of Roman literature, since the Romans, in adapting Greek education to their own culture, wanted their own literature to use in their schools (Marrou 251).

for this, for they will be read more than once. Meanwhile, let the mind be uplifted by the sublimity of the heroic poems, and inspired and filled with the highest principles by the greatness of their theme”; 1.8.5). The classical model of education, as described by Quintilian, is built on the principle that reading and learning are lifelong activities, and that grammatica provides the foundation for these studies by developing the linguistic skill and capacity for interpretive judgment required to fully appreciate authors such as Homer and Virgil. Since these classroom auctores will be read multiple times, the goal of reading, especially during the intermediate stages of literacy, is not a complete understanding of the text for its own sake, but an understanding of its usefulness to each particular stage of learning. Moreover, in addition to the multiple readings, there are multiple types of literacy (linguistic and hermeneutic), and it is understood that the student will progress in both simultaneously, and that this process coincides with the development of moral judgment.

As Quintilian continues, he establishes a curriculum based on the ethical utility of certain literary genres: “utiles tragoediae: alunt et lyrici, si tamen in his non auctores modo, sed etiam partes operis elegeris: nam et Graeci licenter multa et Horatium in quibusdam nolim interpretari” (“Tragedy is useful; and even lyric poets are educative, so long as you select not only the authors but the parts of their works to be read, because the Greeks have a good deal that is licentious, and there are some things in Horace that I should not care to explain in class”; 1.8.6). Quintilian’s comment about Horace reminds us that the responsibility for determining the moral worth of authors is entirely in the instructor’s hands, and that these moral guidelines serve both to protect students from “licentious” content and to protect instructors from having to explain that content.

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7 “[...] grammatices amor et usus lectionis non scholarum temporibus, sed vitae spatio terminetur” (“The love of grammaticē and the habit of reading do not end with schooldays, but only with life”; Institutio 1.8.12). In the Metalogicon, John of Salisbury quotes this line from Quintilian in support of his arguments about the necessity of grammatical training for further philosophical study (1.21.13-15).
to their students. The influence of ethics in building the curriculum can be seen in Quintilian’s suggestions that elegy should be banned, or at least, set aside for later years, and that comedy is important for students to read, but only “cum mores in tuto fuerint” (“once the moral character is secure”; 1.8.7). Quintilian builds into his curriculum some flexibility regarding which authors and genres should be taught, but, at the same time, he maintains the assumption that the determining factor will be the perceived ethical content of the text (as opposed to its aesthetic value or linguistic difficulty).  

Medieval educators inherited the theory and the framework of the ancient model that Quintilian so thoroughly described. Because of this, we can see these same principles at work in the structure and ideology of the medieval grammar curriculum. Although the exact list of authors would, in part, be shaped by what texts the teachers had access to, there was also a concern for the moral development of the student, and thus for the ethical utility of each text.

For an example of a medieval reading list, we can look to the *Dialogus super auctores* of Conrad of Hirsau (early 12th c.), a fictional dialogue between a *magister* and his *discipulus* on the texts and authors commonly taught in school. After a brief discussion about terminology, Conrad presents a full curriculum of grammar-school readings that can be roughly separated into four sections. The first section begins with Donatus (the essential book on Latin grammar), followed by a list of introductory texts: the *Disticha Catonis* (moral couplets attributed to Cato) and the fables of Aesop and Avianus. From there, Conrad suggests that the student should proceed on to the Christian writers, starting with Bible versifiers such as Sedulius and Juvencus and ending with Prudentius. Next, he should read the prose authors: Cicero, Sallust, and

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8 Quintilian’s brief list of authors in Book 1.8 is particularly significant because he also provides an extensive list of authors in Book 10.20-131. The second list comes near the end of Quintilian’s treatise, and is arranged according to the usefulness of each text for the advanced study of rhetoric. It is only at the beginning of the educational process (i.e., *grammatica*) that ethics is the primary organizing principle for reading lists.
Boethius. And after he has progressed through that entire curriculum, the student will be ready to read the classical poets, starting with Lucan and Horace and ending with Statius and Virgil.

Despite this wide range of authors, however, Conrad is unwilling to recommend Ovid. The discipulus raises this issue when he interrupts the magister’s accessus on Horace to ask:

“Cur ovidianus libris Christi tyrunculus docile summittat ingenium, in quibus etsi potest aurum in stercore inveniri, querentem tamen polluit ipse fetor adiacens auro, licet avidum auri?” (“Why should the young recruit in Christ’s army subject his impressionable mind to the writing of Ovid, in which even though gold can be found among the dung, yet the foulness that clings to the gold defiles the seeker, even though it is the gold he is after;” Ins. 1328-30) The magister responds:

Rationabili spiritu duceris mentem avertens ab errore falsitatis, quia etsi auctor Ovidius idem in quibusdam opusculis suis, id est Fastorum, De Ponto, De nuce et in alii utcumque tolerandus esset, quis eum de amore croccitanem, in diversis epistolis turpiter evagantem, si sanum sapiat, toleret? Nonne auctorem eundem maximam dixerim partem ydolatriae in Metamorfosion, id est in transformatione substantiarum.

(Ins. 1331-37)

(Your aversion to the error of falsehood is grounded in good sense. Even though some of the writing of that same author Ovid might have been tolerated up to a point, namely the Fasti, The Letters from Pontus, The Nut, and some others; who in his right mind would endure him croaking about love, and his base derivations in different letters? Should I not name him as the inventor of a large part of idol-worship in his Metamorphoses, that is the transformation of substances?)

Concerned about the ethical implications of reading Ovid, Conrad turns his own objections and his reservations about particular texts into a moral lesson for his students.

Conrad’s reading list provides a more balanced curriculum of Christian and pagan authors than we usually see in reading lists of this time period, but the overall organization of the

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list is fairly standard. The texts are arranged, as in Quintilian’s *Institutio*, according to both linguistic and hermeneutic difficulty. The latter is tied to ethics, since the further the ethical content is from the surface of the text, the harder the student will have to work to unearth it. Students are expected to progress in both areas simultaneously, taking on greater interpretive challenges as they gain a deeper understanding of the Latin language. At the beginning of Conrad’s dialogue, the *discipulus* confesses that he had previously ignored the introductory texts in favor of more prominent authors, only to fail in his studies because he had strayed from the proper path. Because of this, Conrad’s *magister* reiterates the importance of the hierarchical curriculum throughout the dialogue. In the *accessus* on Sedulius, for example, the *magister* explains how Sedulius composed his verse gospels as a remedy for the overwhelmingly secular nature of the early grammar curriculum, and then concludes: “quicquid enim tenera aetas primis imbibet annis, artius retinet ad fructum vitae provectioris” (“For the young take a fast grip on whatever knowledge they have imbibed in their earliest years, to their great advantage in later life”; Ins. 563-64). Young minds are vulnerable, but they are also receptive.

**Ethical Reading and the *accessus ad auctores***

Conrad’s reading list in the *Dialogus* provides us with an example of how ethics could help determine the structure of the grammar curriculum. But how did ethics influence the interpretation of specific texts? As I mentioned in the introduction, the type of *accessus* that was popular in the twelfth century often asked the question: “cui parti philosophae supponitur” (“to which part of philosophy does it belong”). The response, for the majority of the school authors, was “ethicae supponitur” (“it belongs to ethics”). In her study of medieval glosses on Horace’s *Satires*, Suzanne Reynolds mentions this particular tradition of classifying the texts of the
auctores under the heading of ethical philosophy in order to explain that for a text such as the Satires, which wears its morality on the surface, this classification was not a difficult task. For “salacious” texts such as Ovid’s Ars amatoria, however, Reynolds suggests that commentators had to try harder to obtain the “ethical credentials” necessary for the granting of auctoritas.\textsuperscript{11}

This type of argument—in particular, the characterization of cui parti philosophiae supponitur as an ethical checkpoint that commentators must pass through in the accessus in order to begin their linguistic instruction (during which, presumably, the ethical standpoint is thoroughly abandoned in favor of philological literalism)—is common among scholars who have spent a significant amount of time with grammatical manuscripts, and with good reason. The extant glosses and commentaries on classical texts are unquestioningly geared towards linguistic (as opposed to ethical) instruction. As Ralph Hexter writes, “once vita auctoris, titulus, materia, utilitas, and cui parti philosophiae supponatur have been dispatched in the opening paragraph, they are forever forgotten.”\textsuperscript{12} Or, in Robert Black’s words, “Moralizing accessus were an ideal way to pay lip-service to the moralistic aims of education, which teachers felt under no obligation to make into a reality in the classroom.”\textsuperscript{13} The argument, according to these scholars, is clear: since we have not found echoes of ethical reading in the glosses and commentaries, the placement of the auctores under ethical philosophy must have been, at best, a prerequisite that had to be fulfilled before continuing on to the main topic of the course: learning to read Latin.

We can, I would argue, acknowledge that the main function of grammatica was Latin instruction and that the extant glosses and commentaries are primarily linguistic, without reducing the ethical component to the status of red tape. Accessus and commentaries serve

\textsuperscript{11} Reynolds, Medieval Reading, 14-15.
\textsuperscript{12} Hexter, Ovid and Medieval Schooling, 212.
\textsuperscript{13} Humanism and Education in Medieval and Renaissance Italy: Tradition and Innovation in Latin Schools from the Twelfth to the Fifteenth Century (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 315.
different functions, and, as Vincent Gillespie notes, “the disjunction between accessus and commentary does not devalue their reflections on texts and authors.”

Gillespie continues:

The broad and common taxonomy of literary analysis found in most medieval accessus encoded a way of thinking about a text (and not just the one under immediate study) that was transferable to other texts and contexts. [...] The accessus was a means of placing a text in the literary continuum of history, in the narrative continuum of an author’s work, or in the ethical and hermeneutic continuum of the textual community of its original and medieval readers. It taught a way of looking at and thinking about literature that was formative as well as summative. In other words, it sought to create the taste by which it was to be appreciated.

Gillespie’s assessment resolves “the disjunction between accessus and commentary” by underlining their differences. If we read commentaries expecting to find accessus categories, we will be disappointed, but we should not take that as a sign that the accessus were quickly abandoned once the commentary began. The significance of the accessus lies in the framework it establishes for further interpretations of the text, and in the model it provides for future study. It is no coincidence that so many of the extant accessus seem to echo each other, providing a relatively consistent literary theory that emphasizes—often with either an implicit or an explicit reference to Horace’s Ars poetica—the didactic potential of all texts, whether the subject of instruction is writing style (the linguistic branch of grammatica) ethics (the interpretive branch of grammatica), or both. Of course, some of the echoes can be attributed to direct copying, or to the transmission of standard accessus throughout the Middle Ages, but that evidence only serves to reinforce the significance of the accessus for grammatical instruction.

But it is not enough, of course, to simply assert the significance of the accessus for the interpretation of medieval texts. How did the accessus, and, more specifically, the ethical readings located in these accessus, influence medieval pedagogy? Here, again, we can turn to Gillespie, who, in an overview of texts that frequently appear in the medieval grammar

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14 Gillespie, 146.
15 Gillespie, 146-47.
curriculum, calls our attention to the “hermeneutic challenges” posed by texts such as the \textit{Elegies} of Maximian and Claudian’s \textit{De raptu Proserpinae}, which often appear in reading lists alongside the more ethically normative \textit{Disticha Catonis} and the Christian poetry of Sedulius and Prudentius, and which “required more substantial and ingenious interpretive reorientation to bring out their latent ethical force.”\textsuperscript{16} Describing the function of these texts, Gillespie implicitly assigns them to an intermediate stage: “Searching for the ethical core of texts of this kind developed skills of perspicacity and balance in a reader that were readily transferred to other texts of moral ambiguity and sophistication (the longer works of Ovid, for example) and by extension to the complexities of moral decisions to be found in the real world.”\textsuperscript{17}

Gillespie’s conception of the ethical claims of the medieval accessus, which present a “challenge to medieval readers,” and of the benefits derived from this method of interpretation, is far more productive than the conception of \textit{ethicae supponitur} as a required, yet virtually meaningless, phrase that instructors abandoned as soon as the “real” (i.e., linguistic) instruction began. It calls attention to the interpretive branch of grammar education, which existed alongside the linguistic branch, and taught students a set of interpretive skills that enabled them to find the \textit{utilitas} in even the most difficult fictions.

It is important to recognize, of course, that not all of these ethical accessus pose the type of challenge that Gillespie describes. Some commentators simply offer general statements about ethics without any further interpretation. The most explicit (and thus, frequently cited) example of this generalizing habit is from a twelfth-century accessus to the \textit{Metamorphoses}: “Ad ethicam spectat, quia omnes fere ad ethicam spectant auctores” (“It is concerned with ethics, because all

\textsuperscript{16} Gillespie, 156.
\textsuperscript{17} Gillespie, 157.
authors are generally concerned with ethics.” Similarily, some accessus use this category as a
place to provide a definition of ethics. In an accessus on Ovid’s Heroides, for example, the
commentator writes: “Ethicae supponitur, quae morum instructoria est et extirpatrix malorum”
(“It pertains to ethics, which inculcates good morality and eradicates evil behaviour”; ln. 5). And
then there are commentators who do nothing more than add the phrase “ethicae supponitur” to
their accessus, without expanding on the statement at all. But these are not the only methods
used by commentators to align their texts with moral instruction, and ethicae supponitur is not
the only part of these accessus that determines the ethical potential of the text that follows.

Consider, for example, the way in which one commentator uses ethics and utility to
provide a unified statement about the moral content of Ovid’s Heroides:

Ethicae subiacet quia bonorum morum est instructor, malorum vero exstirpator. Finalis
causa talis est, ut visa utilitate quae ex legitimo procedit et infortunii quae ex stulto et
illicito solent prosequii, hunc utrumque fugiamus et soli casto adhereamus. (Ins. 7-16)

(The work pertains to ethics, because [Ovid] is teaching good morality and eradicating evil behaviour. The ultimate end of the work is this, that, having seen the advantage gained from lawful love, we may shun both of these and may adhere to chaste love.)

What is significant in this accessus is the explicit nature of its ethical claim. Ovid’s Heroides
can be classified under ethics not merely because we can learn about ethics from the text, as in
the generalizing examples mentioned above, but because Ovid is teaching us ethics. In this
accessus, both the author and the audience are given new roles: Ovid becomes an instructor of
ethics, and the readers become his students. The explanation of Ovid’s finalis causa pushes this

19 “Accessus Ovidii Epistolarum (II),” ed. Huygens, 30; translated in Medieval Literary Theory, 20-21. As Hexter
points out, the subject of the “quia” clause in the first line is ambiguous (Ovid and Medieval Schooling, 158). The
translation quoted above reads “because he is teaching” (my emphasis). For clarity's sake, I have amended this to
“because [Ovid] is teaching,” but it is certainly possible that it could be Ovid's work (the Heroides) that is being
referred to rather than Ovid himself. This slight ambiguity, however, does not affect my argument. What is
significant here is that this commentator strengthens the force of “ethicae subiacet” at the beginning of this passage
by adding an explicit statement about Ovid (or his work) teaching us ethics, and by following that statement with an
explanation of the work’s utility that pushes the ethical responsibility of the text onto the reader.
interpretation even further, using first-person plural verbs such as fugiamus and adhereamus to direct the ethical force of Ovid’s instruction towards the reader, who is expected to live up to the ethical and hermeneutic challenges outlined in the accessus. By adapting the conventional rhetoric of the accessus to his needs, this commentator has laid the groundwork for a lesson in active reading.

This move toward the reader is not restricted to accessus on Ovid’s Heroides. It appears in discussions of other texts as well. In a brief accessus on the Ilias Latina (a condensed version of Homer’s Iliad in Latin), which appears in the same manuscript as the Heroides accessus discussed above, the commentator begins by providing two accounts of Homer’s materia, each of which is tied to its own utilitas.20 The first materia is “Troia vel Grecia” (“Troy or Greece”; ln. 11), and it is accompanied by a literal and historical utilitas: “cognitio troiani belli” (“knowledge of the Trojan war”; ln. 11). The second materia is the “illicito coniugio” (“illicit union”; ln. 12) of Paris and Helen, which is joined by an ethical intentio, “dehortari quemlibet ab illicito coniugio” (“to dissuade anyone from such an illicit union”; lns. 13-14) followed by a more forcefully ethical utilitas: “Utilitas est ut viso interitu reorum superum maiestatem tam levi quam gravi delicto timeamus offendere” (“The usefulness is that, having witnessed the destruction of the guilty, we may be afraid to offend the majesty of the gods by any offence, be it slight or serious”; lns. 15-17). The accessus ends with the requisite “ethicae subponitur”; however, as we can see, the ethical force of the accessus is contained not in that final statement but in the intentio and utilitas that follow from the second materia, which begins on the literal level with Paris and Helen and proceeds through the indefinite pronoun quemlibet before turning the focus to the reader with timeamus offendere. The dual utilitas in this accessus dramatizes the difference between literal reading and ethical reading. In the literal reading, we are told that the

text is useful because it can provide us with “knowledge of the Trojan war.” In the ethical reading, however, we find out that the utility of the text is the exemplary narrative about the Trojan war, which can help us live a more virtuous life.

A more explicit version of this type of example can be found in the accessus to a commentary, written by Arnulf of Orléans, on Lucan’s Bellum Civile (known to the Middle Ages as the Pharsalia). Arnulf’s accessus is extensive, and includes a vita of Lucan as well as a full summary of the historical events behind Lucan’s poem. In addition to this literal reading, Arnulf provides an ethical utilitas and a clear statement about the ethical content of the text:

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\text{Utilitas magna quia, uiso quid contingerit utrique de ciuili bello, uidelicet et Pompeio capite truncari, Caesari XX et IIII plagis in Capitolio perforari, caueamus nobis a bello consimili. Ethice supponitur, non ideo quod det precepta morum, sed quodam modo inuitat nos ad IIII uirtutes, fortitudinem, prudenciam, temperanciam, iusticiam, per conuenientes personas, ostendendo bonam moralitatem sicut in Catone et in ceteris bonis ciuibus qui ad politicas uirtutes nituntur que ethice supponuntur. (Ins. 15-22)}^{21}
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(The [work’s] usefulness is great because, when it is seen what happened to each of the protagonists as a result of the civil war, that is, that Pompey had his head cut off and Caesar was transfixed by twenty-four wounds on the Capitol, we may steer clear of any similar war. It pertains to ethics not because he gives moral instruction but because in a certain way he encourages us to practice the four virtues, courage, wisdom, self-control, and justice, by means of appropriate characters, showing us good morality as in the case of Cato and other citizens who strive after those virtues in the state which pertain to ethics.)

Arnulf’s graphic account of the results of the war echoes the graphic language of Lucan’s poem, gives the reader a preview of the monitory exemplum contained within the text, and pushes the ethical content towards the reader with the first-person plural caueamus nobis. But unless Arnulf were instructing future kings, his political lesson alone might not carry the weight necessary to teach students the function of exemplary tales. His extended discussion of ethicae supponitur, with its explicit move from didactic rhetoric (det precepta morum) to exhortative rhetoric (inuitat

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Ovid’s *Heroides*, the *Ilias Latina*, and Lucan’s *Bellum Civile* do not, on the literal level, offer the same type of experience for the reader. But through ethical reading—a somewhat deeper method of reading that explicitly guides the reader towards the ethical and didactic content of the text—all three are made to serve an exemplary function, teaching their readers about the intricacies of practical ethics. These examples also show us that the mere gesture of *ethicae supponitur* does not, in itself, constitute an ethical reading. In fact, it is the category of *utilitas* (*or* *finalis causa*) that often carries this weight, transforming authors into educators and turning passive readers into active students.

A similar shift towards didacticism occurs in a number of *accessus* on Ovid’s *Ars amatoria*, a text which presents an interesting test case for the transformative power of *accessus* rhetoric, since it adopts a didactic framework in order to discuss a potentially unsuitable subject matter. Based on the six *accessus* from twelfth- and thirteenth-century manuscripts that have been published, Ovid’s *Ars* could be included under the heading of ethics because “*de moribus iuvenum et puellarum loquitur*” (“it speaks of the customs/behavior of young men and girls”; *Materiam habet*). But some of these *accessus* omit the discussion of ethics altogether, and so it

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22 In the discussion above, the six published *accessus* on Ovid’s *Ars amatoria* are identified by their incipits. The full publication details for these *accessus* are as follows: 1) *Circa hunc auctorem* (#56 in Frank T. Coulson and Bruno Roy, *Incipitarium Ovidianum: A Finding Guide for Texts Related to the Study of Ovid in the Middle Ages and Renaissance* [Turnhout: Brepols, 2000]) is edited by Hexter from MS Copenhagen, Kongelige Bibliotek, Gl. kgl. Saml. 2015 4° (*Ovid and Medieval Schooling*, 219). 2) *Flore iuuentatis* (#117) is edited by Hexter from MS Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, clm 631 (*Ovid and Medieval Schooling*, 304) as well as by Fausto Ghisalberti from MS Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, lat. 7994 and MS Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, lat. 7998 (“*Medieval Biographies of Ovid,*” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 9 [1946]: 45-46). 3) *In principio* (#173) is edited by John W. Baldwin from MS Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, lat. 5137 and MS Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, lat. 8302 (“*L’ars amatoria* au XIIe siècle en France: Ovide, Abéard, André le Chapelain et Pierre le Chantre,” in *Histoire et société: mélanges offerts à Georges Duby*, vol. 1 [Aix-en-Provence: Université de Provence, 1992], 25). 4) *Intentio sua* (#209) is edited by Huygens from MS Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, clm 19474, MS Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, clm 19475, and MS Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Pal. lat. 242 (*Accessus ad Auctores*, 33). 5) *Materiam habet* (#252) is edited by Ghisalberti
would be easy to assume that this topic rarely played a part in classroom discussions on Ovid’s *Ars amatoria*. As we have seen from the previous examples, however, the omission of *ethicae supponitur* is not necessarily an indication that commentators were unable or unwilling to provide an ethical reading of the text.

The *accessus* writers were on firmer ground when trying to establish Ovid’s *intentio* in the *Ars*, which was typically something along these lines: “Ouidius intendit iuuenes et puellas in amorem instruere” (“Ovid intended to instruct young men and girls about love”; *Circa hunc auctorum*). The *Materiam habet accessus*, however, provides a slightly different response: “Intencio sua est tractare de amore dando precepta et regulas” (“His intention is to treat of love by giving precepts and rules”). It is significant that both responses highlight the didactic framework of Ovid’s text by focusing on Ovid’s role as an instructor or the rules that he provides.

Statements about Ovid’s *utilitas* in the *Ars* often show a similar concern with precepts and the knowledge of love. For example, the *Flore iuuvenis accessus* states: “Vtilitas est artificiosa amoris peritia praceptorum collectione conparata” (“The utility is the systematic knowledge of love acquired through a collection of precepts”). The *Circa hunc auctorum accessus* provides a similar *utilitas*, but phrases it in a way that recalls Ovid’s three-part didactic intention: “Vtilitas est pericia, quas scilicet amare uolueris inueniendi, inuentam exorandii, exoratam diut<(us)> retinendi” (“The utility is the skill of finding who you want to love, of obtaining her after she has been found, and of keeping her after she has been obtained”).

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From this brief survey, we can see that Ovid’s *Ars* was valued primarily for its preexisting didactic framework, which allowed teachers to read the text on a literal level, despite the actual content of the work. There are hints of the potential for ethical readings; for example, the *iuuenes et puellas* can play a role both in the description of Ovid’s ethical content and in his *intentio*. Once an instructor has established that Ovid’s intention was *iuuenes et puellas in amorem instruere*, he would not have to reach much further to tell his students that the poem *de moribus iuvenum et puellarum loquitur*. Likewise, there is a potential connection between *pericia*, which is a practical type of knowledge derived from experience, and ethics, which was considered part of practical philosophy. I mention these comparisons not to suggest that the literal readings are actually ethical, but to demonstrate how the transition from one to the other is a matter of interpretive depth. Ethical reading was a pedagogical strategy available to instructors who were eager to push their students beyond the literal surface of the text.

The *Circa hunc auctorem accessus*, mentioned above in the descriptions of *intentio* and *utilitas*, is followed, in the manuscript, by a commentary on Ovid’s *Ars amatoria*. According to Hexter, this commentary seems to have been written for more advanced grammar students. Hexter points out that the commentator was primarily interested in Ovid’s rhetorical strategies: “the master is at pains to make explicit the course of Ovid’s argument, what he is teaching at any given point and how he proves his points by the use of examples.”23 The literal reading provided by the *accessus*, with its emphasis on didacticism and *pericia*, offers the ideal framework for a commentary on Ovid’s rhetoric. In this reading (as well as in the ethical reading of Ovid’s *Ars*, which, in these *accessus* at least, seems to exist only *in potentia*) what is important about the *Ars* is Ovid’s own didactic framework, which situates the literal reading within a discourse of

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23 *Ovid and Medieval Schooling*, 42-43.
knowledge, precepts, and rules, and which, at the deeper level, offers instructors a platform on which to build their own lessons.

**Ethical Reading and Allegorical Interpretation**

At the beginning of Conrad of Hirsau’s *Dialogus super auctores*, the *discipulus* requests instruction on a long list of grammar school topics. Interestingly, after inquiring about *accessus* headings, prefaces, poets, and other such topics, the *discipulus* asks: “quid distet […] inter allegoriam, tropologiam et anagogen” (“what is the difference […] between allegory, tropology and anagogy”; lns. 50-54). He concludes by asking the *magister* to add anything else that should be discussed in reference to “ecclesiasticis auctoribus seu gentilibus auctoribus” (“ecclesiastical or pagan authors”; ln. 57). This conflation of the religious and the secular is typical in the *Dialogus*, particularly during moments where the *magister* reminds his *discipulus* that the liberal arts are merely a propaedeutic for theological study. But still, the greater part of Conrad’s treatise is concerned with secular authors, not ecclesiastical authors. The Christian poets in Conrad’s reading list play a relatively minor role, providing the student with moral verse to guide him through the transition from Donatus, Cato and Aesop to Cicero, Sallust, and, ultimately, Virgil. It seems significant, then, that, despite this preponderance of secular authors, the *magister* nonetheless provides a full definition of exegetical terms in his preliminary discussion, right after an explanation of natural and artificial order, with reference to Virgil’s *Aeneid*:

*Magister*: Explanatio in libris quadrifaria accipitur: ad literam, ad sensum, ad allegoriam, ad moralitatem.

*Discipulus*: Quatuor ista resolve.

*Magister*: Explanatio est ad literam, ubi dicitur quomodo nuda litera intelligenda sit, ad sensum, <ubi dicitur> ad quid referatur quod dicitur, ad allegoriam, ubi aliud intelligitur et aliud significatur, ad moralitatem, ubi quod dicitur ad mores bonos excitandos.
colendosque reflectitur. Tropologia est sensus spiritualis vel moralis intelligentia, anagogen superior intellectus. (Ins. 198-208)

*(Teacher. In books a fourfold explanation is allowed: the literal explanation, the explanation in terms of the meaning, and the allegorical, and moral explanations.

Pupil. Explain these four kinds.

Teacher. The literal explanation is when one is told how the unadorned text is to be understood; the explanation in terms of meaning is <when one is told> what the author’s words really mean; the allegorical explanation arises when one thing is signified and something else is understood; the moral explanation is what is said is adapted to encourage and cherish good moral qualities. Tropology is the spiritual explanation or the understanding of a text in moral terms; anagogy is understanding that text on a higher level.)*

Immediately after this statement, Conrad’s *magister* changes the topic, turning to an explanation of low, middle, and lofty writing styles and then to a discussion on imitation, with reference to secular authors such as Terence, Horace, and Sallust. Is Conrad’s brief summary of exegesis evidence that the methods developed for Scripture can be applied to secular texts? Or, since Conrad’s text is, as L.G. Whitbread says, in an “unrevised state” (in other words, messy and occasionally confusing), was this summary intended for another section of the work, thus making its appearance at this moment in Conrad’s text the result of a careless error by Conrad or a scribe?24 Ultimately, the question might be one that we cannot answer; however, as a partial explanation, it is helpful to point out that Conrad is following Bernard of Utrecht’s *Commentum in Theodulum* (Commentary on [the Eclogues of] Theodulus), which also includes a brief definition of these exegetical terms, and that Bernard’s exegetical digression is also lodged between a discussion of narrative order and writing styles.25 In Bernard’s text, the transition from narrative order to exegesis is attributed to Servius, who lists *ordo librorum* and *explanatio*

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25 Bernard’s text is edited in Huygens, 55-69. There is no translation available, but Winthrop Wetherbee has a useful discussion of the text in “From Late Antiquity to the Twelfth Century,” in *Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, 2:123-25.
as the last two categories to be discussed in his *accessus*. The similarities between Bernard and Servius, however, end there. Servius, after his discussion of *ordo librorum*, writes: “sola superest explanatio, quae in sequendi expositione probabitur” (“The interpretation alone remains, which will be shown in the following exposition”). In other words, Servius’s *explanatio* is the commentary itself, which comes at the end of his *accessus*. For Bernard (and Conrad, who follows Bernard), *explanatio* is the brief definition of exegetical terms provided before the commentary (or, in Conrad’s case, before the discussion of specific texts).

Although Servius’s discussion of these topics does not exactly coincide with that of Bernard or Conrad, it is easy to see how the two later authors ended up providing interpretive terminology at this point in their texts. What we have here is actually a fascinating transference of meaning from Servius’s *explanatio*, which is actually the commentary itself, primarily (but not exclusively) made up of grammatical and lexical glosses, to Bernard’s *explanatio*, which is his list of the four levels of exegesis. The shift may have been inspired, in part, by Servius’s discussion of allegory in his commentary on the *Eclogues*, which Bernard mentions (after listing the four exegetical terms), in order to draw a connection between the *Eclogues* of Virgil and the *Eclogues* of Theodulus. But Servius’s discussion of allegory does not make reference to the other three levels of exegesis, and so what we are left with is Bernard, making the conceptual leap from *explanatio* to exegesis as a prologue to his discussion of Theodulus. Conrad follows Bernard, but, in doing so, he separates *explanatio* from the discussion of any specific author, treating it as a general category that students should be familiar with before they approach any text. He also adds the tropological sense (which, in this context, is essentially a repetition of the moral sense), and the anagogical sense, neither of which are in Bernard.

26 Servius’s *In Vergilii carmina commentarius* is discussed (with extensive excerpts from the text, presented in both Latin and English) in Irvine, *Making of Textual Culture*, 126-41 (see esp. pp. 129-31, on the *accessus*).
What the connection to Bernard and Servius tells us is that the discussion of the four levels of exegesis at this point in Conrad’s introduction was most likely not accidental—not the result of careless effort. (The additional references to tropology and anagogy, however, remain unclear.) What it does not tell us is whether or not Conrad intended to draw the parallel between secular or sacred, or, more significantly, how he would have reacted to such comparisons. Obviously, a full analysis of Conrad’s intention in the *Dialogus* is beyond the scope of this study. But even if we are unable to credit Conrad with revolutionary ideas about the interpretation of secular literature, it is important to recognize the significance of Conrad’s exegetical digression for our understanding of secular hermeneutics. What we have here suggests that medieval readers and commentators occasionally blurred the lines between secular and sacred, approaching secular texts from the same multilevel perspective that informed biblical exegesis.

Of course, the terminology of biblical exegesis was not always required for multilevel readings of the *auctores*. In the commentary on the *Aeneid* attributed to Bernardus Silvestris (henceforth “[Pseudo-] Bernardus”), the author begins by telling us, on the authority of Macrobius, that Virgil is both a poet and a philosopher, and that readers must keep this “double teaching” (*gemine doctrine*) in mind as they read the text.\(^\text{27}\) He then lays out three topics for

\(^{27}\) The *accessus* discussed here is edited in *The Commentary on the First Six Books of the “Aeneid” of Vergil Commonly Attributed to Bernardus Silvestris*, ed. Julian Ward Jones and Elizabeth Frances Jones (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1977), 1-3, and translated in *Medieval Literary Theory*, 150-53. The attribution of this commentary to Bernardus Silvestris has largely been discarded, but scholars are hesitant to remove his name from the title because the commentary is still tied to him in the scholarship and because the anonymous author seems to have been writing during the same time period and within the same intellectual schools that we associate with Bernardus Silvestris. I have adopted the name “[Pseudo-] Bernardus” from Jan M. Ziolkowski and Michael C. J. Putnam, eds., *The Virgilian Tradition: The First Fifteen Hundred Years* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 465, 726-39. For a discussion of the authorship issue, see Edouard Jeaneau, “Note sur l’Ecole de Chartes,” *Studi medievali*, 3rd ser. 5 (1964): 821-65 (rpt. in his *Lectio philosophorum: recherches sur l’école de Chartres* [Amsterdam: Adolf M. Hakkert, 1973], 5-49); Brian Stock, *Myth and Science in the Twelfth Century: A Study of Bernard Silvester* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), 36-37 (but see pp. 33-43 for a discussion of the commentary on Martianus Capella also attributed to Bernardus Silvestris); Christopher Baswell, “The Medieval Allegorization of the ‘Aeneid’: MS Cambridge, Peterhouse 158,” *Traditio* 41 (1985): 199-221; and Wetherbee, “From Late Antiquity,” 135. For further discussion on the commentary itself, see Wetherbee, *Platonism and Poetry in the Twelfth Century: The Literary Influence of the School of Chartres* (Princeton: Princeton University Press,
discussion—Virgil’s intention, his manner of writing, and his reason for writing—and proceeds to address these topics twice, following Virgil’s *gemine doctrine*. The main significance of this preface, for our purposes, lies in the doubled aspect of his *accessus*, and the way in which (Pseudo-) Bernardus acknowledges multiple levels of meaning existing in the same text. We should also note, though, the importance of the phrase *gemine doctrine*, which reaffirms the didactic purpose of the classroom *auctores*. Although (Pseudo-) Bernardus acknowledges, in his discussion of Virgil as a poet, that a “certain pleasure” (*quedam delectatio*) may be derived from Virgil’s poetic style, he quickly assigns it a didactic function when he suggests that imitating Virgil will improve your own writing. Even when Virgil’s status as a poet has been singled out and temporarily severed from his role as a philosopher, the very quality that makes Virgil a poet is subordinated to the larger ethical and didactic purpose of medieval reading and interpretation.

In his analysis of “Virgil the poet,” (Pseudo-) Bernardus provides both the literal and the ethical reading of Virgil’s text. The literal reading can be found under the heading *intentio*, and is composed of two main arguments: 1) Virgil’s intention is to narrate the story of Aeneas and Trojans in order to gain favor from Augustus; and 2) Virgil’s intention is to imitate Homer (with the implication that Virgil either attained or confirmed his status as “Latinorum poetarum maximus” by imitating his Greek counterpart). The ethical reading, which can be found under the heading *cur agat* (i.e., *utilitas*), is explained as follows:

*Itaque est lectoris gemina utilitas: una scribendi peritia que habetur ex imitacione, altera vero recte agendi prudentia que capitur exemplorum exhortatione. Verbi gratia: ex laboribus Enee tolerantie exemplum habemus, ex affectu eius in Anchisem at Ascanium pietatis, ex veneratione quam diis exibebat et ex oraculis que poscebat, ex sacrificis que offerebat, ex votis et precibus quas fundebat quodammodo ad religionem invitamur. Per immoderatum Didonis amorem ab appetitu illicitorum revocamur. (Ins. 19-24)*

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(So the reader derives a twofold benefit from this work. The first is skill in writing acquired by imitation. The second is the knowledge of how to act properly, acquired from the exhortation imparted to us by the examples. For instance, the trials of Aeneas give us an example of endurance; the love he showed towards Anchises and Ascanius an example of steadfast loyalty; the reverence he displayed towards the gods, his seeking out of oracles, the sacrifices he offered, and the prayers and vows he poured out attract us in a certain way towards religious observance. The excessive love of Aeneas for Dido restrains us from the desire for what is unlawful.)

As with the readings of Ovid’s *Heroides* and Lucan’s *Bellum Civile* discussed above, ethical reading turns the text—in this case, Virgil’s *Aeneid*—into a collection of exemplary tales, according to which particular sections of the text can be pulled out and assigned relevant Christian virtues. In characteristic fashion, the commentator uses first-person plural verbs in his discussion of the moral content to push the ethical potential of the text towards the reader and exhort him to follow the examples Virgil has provided for the reader’s benefit.

The difference between ethical reading and allegorical interpretation becomes clear when we compare the above example to the discussion of Virgil as a philosopher, provided in the same preface:

Scribit ergo in quantum est philosophus humane vite naturam. Modus agendi talis est: in integumento describit quid agat vel quid paciatur humanus spiritus in humano corpore temporaliter positus. Atque in hoc describendo naturali utitur ordine atque ita utrumque ordinem narrationis observat, artificialem poeta, naturalem philosophus. Integumentum est genus demonstrationis sub fabulosa narratione veritatis involvens intellectum, unde etiam dicitur involucrum. Utilitatem vero capit homo ex hoc opera, scilicet sui cognitionem; homini enim magna est utilitas, ut ait Macrobius, se ipsum cognoscere. (Ins. 29-37)

(In so far as Virgil is a philosopher he describes the nature of human life. His mode of proceeding is as follows. In the integument he describes what the human spirit, placed for a period of time in the human body, does or suffers. In describing this he uses the natural order, and so makes use of both kinds of order in his narration—as a poet he uses the artificial order, and as a philosopher, the natural order. The integument is a kind of teaching which wraps up the true meaning inside a fictitious narrative, and so is called ‘a veil.’ Man derives benefit from this work, the benefit being self-knowledge.)
The allegorical interpretation takes us beyond practical philosophy and virtue in search of the truth hidden under integuments.\(^{28}\) It requires us to follow the natural order of the *Aeneid* (as opposed to the artificial order), and thus demands a higher level of hermeneutic literacy.

(Pseudo-) Bernardus’s conception of narrative order departs from the standard discussion, so it is worth pausing for a moment to clarify the difference.

In their standard form (derived from classical rhetoric), natural and artificial order refer to two entirely separate ways of constructing a narrative.\(^{29}\) Authors who narrate events in the order that they actually occurred are following natural order, and authors who narrate events out of order are following artificial order. Virgil’s *Aeneid*, which begins *in medias res*, is a common example of a text that follows artificial order, and in (Pseudo-) Bernardus’s account, this is the order associated with “Virgil the poet.” Both the literal and the ethical readings that (Pseudo-) Bernardus provides depend on this artificial order, in which we read the text as it is presented to us, beginning with Book 1 and ending with Book 12. If we want to read the text allegorically,

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\(^{28}\) In the *accessus* to the commentary on Martianus Capella also attributed to Bernardus Silvestris, the commentator explains the difference between allegory and integuments: “Allegoria quidem divine pagine, integumentum vero philosophice competit” (“Allegory pertains to Holy Scripture, but integumentum to philosophical scripture.” *The Commentary on Martianus Capella’s “De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii” Attributed to Bernardus Silvestris*, ed. Haijo Jan Westra (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1986), 23-24, 45. The distinction stands out among the other contemporary discussions of integuments, which rarely provide such a clear definition. It is interesting to note, however, particularly in light of the blending of secular and sacred in Conrad (mentioned above), that the commentator does not use this distinction to argue for the superiority of one type of allegory over the other. Instead, as Westra tells us, the commentator makes a point to say that both allegory and integument “contain a true meaning (*verum intellectum*), even a profound hidden truth (*misterium occultum*),” and thus, that “pagan truth is ranked with the truth of the Christian revelation” (26). If both secular and sacred texts can contain the same level of truth, then it would make sense to use the same methods of interpretation to uncover that truth, even if you had to provide separate terminology, as (Pseudo-) Bernardus does in his commentary on Martianus. On the concept of integuments, with particular reference to the commentaries associated with Chartres and with (Pseudo-) Bernardus, see M.T. d’Alverny, “Le cosmos symbolique du XIIe siècle,” *Archives d’histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen âge* 20 (1953): 2-81 (esp. pg. 35); M.D. Chenu, “*Involucrum*: le mythe selon les théologians médiévaux,” *Archives d’histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen âge* 22 (1955): 75-79; Jeanneau, “L’usage de la notion d’integumentum à travers les gloses de Guillaume de Conches,” *Archives d’histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen âge* 24 (1957): 35-100 (rpt. in *Lectio philosophorum*, 127-92); Wetherbee, *Platonism and Poetry*, 36-48, 104-24; Stock, 31-62; and Wetherbee, “From Late Antiquity,” 136.

\(^{29}\) James Simpson provides a useful discussion of narrative order (under the heading “rhetorical order”) in *Sciences and the Self in Medieval Poetry: Alan of Lille’s “Anticlaudianus” and John Gower’s “Confessio Amantis”* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 75-81.
however, as “Virgil the philosopher” intended it, we would have to look past the artificial order and read according to the natural order instead. By suggesting that both natural and artificial order can be present in the same text, (Pseudo-) Bernardus departs from the standard discussion of this topic, but it is easy to see why he pursued this line of thinking. In order to read the poem as an allegory of human life, we have to begin our reading at the earliest point in the narrative, historically speaking, and continue reading in chronological order. Obviously, this method of interpretation requires a more advanced reader, but beyond that, it also implies the necessity of multiple readings. The allegorical interpretation of Virgil’s *Aeneid* presented in this commentary, which demands a complete mental restructuring of the narrative, is not the type of interpretation that could be attempted by a first-time reader of Virgil, no matter how advanced that reader might be in the discipline of *grammatica* more generally.

It is clear, from the conclusion of this preface and from the commentary that follows, that the allegorical reading is the one (Pseudo-) Bernardus favors. That does not, however, invalidate the existence of the literal and ethical readings, which can be seen either as background information for the allegorical reading, or as preparatory readings for those who have not yet learned how to uncover integuments. To understand the latter approach, we need to keep in mind the connection between multilevel reading and stages of literacy. Medieval instructors and commentators understood that texts had multiple meanings, and that a student who entered *grammatica* for the purpose of achieving fluency in Latin might eventually leave the *Disticha Catonis* behind, but he would read an author such as Virgil multiple times throughout his education (both during his grammar school years and after). It was important, therefore, to teach students interpretive strategies that would enable them to find a deeper *utilitas*, maybe not for every occasion on which they might read the *Aeneid*, but at the very least, for each stage of life,
beginning with literal reading and childhood, and passing through ethical reading and adolescence before finally reaching adulthood and the spiritual and philosophical truths that can be unearthed through allegorical interpretation.

This connection between stages of life and hermeneutic literacy takes us to our final example, Alan of Lille’s preface to the Anticlaudianus, in which Alan himself offers a threefold scheme for the interpretation of his text:

In hoc etenim opere litteralis sensus suavitas puerilem demulcebit auditum, moralis instructio perficientem imbuet sensum, acutior allegorie subtilitas proificientem acuet intellectum. Ab huius igitur operis arceantur ingressu qui solam sensualitatis insequentes imaginem, rationis non appetunt ueritatem, ne sanctum canibus prostitutum sordescat, ne porcorum pedibus conculcata margarita depereat, ne derogetur secretis, si eorum magestas diuulgetur dignis.30

(For in this work the sweetness of the literal sense will soothe the ears of boys, the moral instruction will inspire the mind on the road to perfection, the sharper subtlety of the allegory will whet the advanced intellect. Let those be denied access to this work who pursue only sense-images and do not reach out for the truth that comes from reason, lest what is holy, being set before dogs be soiled, lest the pearl, trampled under the feet of swine be lost, lest the esoteric be impaired if its grandeur is revealed to the unworthy.)

Using biblical allusions and sacred language to glorify his own text, Alan recommends that we approach the Anticlaudianus using the very same methods one would use for biblical exegesis. Alan does not provide us with a commentary that would explain this multilevel interpretation of his text, so it is easy to see why Brian Stock, citing Alan’s preface as a potential example of the threefold exegetical system being applied to a secular text, questions whether or not it is even possible to “separate out the ‘moral’ and the ‘allegorical’ senses in the Anticlaudianus.”31

Similarly, Rita Copeland mentions the “threefold hierarchy of sense and interpretive receptivity” in Alan’s preface, and the way in which it echoes the “continuous model of intellectual development” described in Quintilian, only to argue, on the authority of James Simpson, that

31 Stock, 32.
“the very structure of the poem, its inverted narrative shape, dictates against reading according to its represented action.” According to Stock and Copeland, the Anticlaudianus fails to support (either intentionally or unintentionally) the multilevel system of interpretation outlined in the preface.

It could be said, of course, that what is significant about Alan’s preface is that he establishes this threefold system in the first place, even if the poem that follows appears to resist that method of interpretation. But at the same time, we should acknowledge that the “inverted” model Simpson proposes, and that Copeland cites in her argument, actually coincides with the interpretive hierarchy established in Alan’s preface. Simpson writes:

I think we should read the poem in reversed order. I propose that the real order of this poem begins from the birth of the soul in Book VI, proceeds to the soul’s moral education in Books VII-IX, and then to its theoretical education in Books I-VI, culminating in the perception of the soul’s creation.

In Simpson’s model, “the poem becomes an entirely coherent narrative from both an educative and a theological perspective.” According to this reading of the poem, the threefold structure of the narrative echoes Alan’s three levels of interpretation, beginning with the birth of the soul and the literal sense, and ascending through the moral sense (culminating in the battle of the vices and virtues in Book IX) to theory and allegory. Simpson acknowledges, of course, that his “real order” for the poem presents a “preposterous solution,” but it is, nonetheless, a solution, one which takes into account conceptions of theological ascent and narrative order that would have been familiar to Alan. By reading the Anticlaudianus according to Simpson’s “real order,” or, in other words, its “natural” order, we can see the influence of allegorical interpretation on Alan of Lille. (Pseudo-) Bernardus interprets Virgil’s poem as a “covert Bildungsroman,” and

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33 Simpson, 66.
34 Simpson, 66.
Alan, building on this influence, writes his own allegorical narrative that functions as “an explicit story of the soul’s education.” Simpson notes: “Traditions of allegoresis (such as we find in the commentaries on Martianus and Virgil attributed to Bernard Silvestris) interpreted fabulous narratives as stories of the soul’s education. Alan, it could be argued, fashions a narrative surface out of the interpretations of allegorical readings [...] The story is turned inside out, the signified becomes the signifier.”  

Even if we are unwilling to mentally restructure Alan’s poem, and attempt to read it according to the “natural” order that Simpson describes, it is difficult to deny the strong influence that the interpretive methods developed by grammarians and commentators had on Alan of Lille, and the ways in which he adds to our understanding of medieval literary theory. Alan provides, essentially, an accessus to his own literary work, one which blends secular and sacred, and offers multiple levels of reading for multiple audiences. In the passage quoted above, Alan speaks of denying access to anyone who is not in search of a deeper truth, but by providing the other two levels of interpretation, he implies that the lower levels are simply preparation for the higher levels. What is important for the interpretation of Alan’s text is not the ability to read on a deeper level, but the desire to do so. As long as readers are in pursuit of truth, the literary text will teach them how to find it.

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35 Simpson, 59.
Chapter 2:
Reversing Roma: Ovid’s Ars amatoria and the Glorification of Love

Andreas Capellanus, Jean de Meun and John Gower first encountered the classical auctores in the medieval grammar classroom, where the texts of those auctores were used to teach students the Latin language. In that same classroom, they would have been taught interpretive methods that trained them to identify the utilitas of what they were reading, whether that utilitas was conceived of in philological, ethical, philosophical, or even theological terms. Conditioned to read imaginative literature for didactic purposes, these medieval authors found, in Ovid’s Ars amatoria, a text that used love as a platform for didacticism, and a model around which to build their own literary inventions.

To understand this “scholastic” response to Ovid’s Ars, we need to begin at the source, and examine how Ovid balanced the competing claims of love and didacticism. Ovid himself is quite explicit about his own intentions in writing the Ars amatoria. He tells us, in the Amores (2.18.19), in the Remedia amoris (43), in the Tristia (1.1.12), and, of course, throughout the Ars itself, that the Ars amatoria teaches the art of love.1 Obviously, we are not required to take the author at his word, but Ovid’s explicit intention does provide a useful starting point, especially in light of the longstanding disagreement among scholars as to whether or not instruction in love, or even love itself, is actually the main subject of Ovid’s Ars.

1 The reference to the Ars amatoria in Amores 2.18.19 (“quod licet, aut artes teneri profitemur Amoris”) is slightly controversial, since the Amores were published before the Ars. A.S. Hollis, at the end of his commentary on book one of the Ars, suggests that Amores 2.18.19 was added in the second edition of the Amores, and that it was written while Ovid was in the process of composing his didactic poem (Ars Amatoria Book 1: Edited With Introduction and Commentary, 1977 [Oxford: Clarendon: 1992], 150-51). This viewpoint has been echoed, most recently, by Stephen Harrison (“Ovid and Genre: Evolutions of an Elegist,” in The Cambridge Companion to Ovid, ed. Philip Hardie [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002], 80-81). Even if we remove this reference, though, we still have the Remedia, the Tristia, and the Ars amatoria, all of which repeat the same ostensible intention for Ovid’s text.
Critics who argue that love is not the main subject of Ovid’s text tend to focus on the other topics—such as poetics, deception, and game-playing—that appear to figure more prominently in the text than love does. The scholarly interest in these other topics, however, is simply a matter of perspective, as Molly Myerowitz clearly explains:

For the Classicist, Ovid’s poem is of continual interest for many reasons, but rarely for its instructions on love. Yet love is Ovid’s subject—at first glance, not love in the abstract, but the nitty-gritty, very down-to-earth business of catching and keeping a lover. A second look reveals a broad and thoroughgoing treatment of culture and the creative process informing the succession of humdrum and conniving activities which the poem prescribes.

Although love is Ovid’s subject, many critics, having read the text countless times, find themselves confronted with a multitude of other possibilities. And it is not that these other topics—poetics, deception, etc—are not in the text. They are. But Ovid introduces these subjects into his amatory treatise in order to explain their relevance to love and their usefulness to the lover. In short, all of these topics are made to serve the main subject, which is love. The nature of Ovid’s didactic intentions, however, is more difficult to determine. While it is certainly possible that a naive iuvenis of Ovid’s day could pick up the Ars amatoria and learn something about love and courtship, clearly, Ovid’s aspirations go beyond this didactic goal. The fact that he is not teaching us (and here “us” means every one of Ovid’s potential readers, except, perhaps, the aforementioned iuvenis) about love does not negate the fact that love is his subject matter. We can admit that Ovid is not really teaching us about love, and still hold onto the main subject of the poem, if we simply acknowledge that Ovid was inescapably fascinated by love.


3 Myerowitz, 10.
Even the most skeptical of Ovid’s critics would not deny that he wanted to write about love, even if he did not actually intend to teach us the *ars amandi*.

If Ovid’s main subject is indeed love, then what are we to make of what might seem like the “white noise” around this subject: that array of topics, such as art, role-playing, and Augustan Rome, that has preoccupied recent critics of this text? We can begin by recognizing that Ovid is keenly aware of issues of audience and interpretation. By including other topics in his discussion of love, Ovid is consciously reaching out to a broader audience—both among his contemporaries and beyond.\(^4\) That audience is the audience not just of love elegy, but of didactic poetry and of epic as well. And it is Ovid’s adoption of the didactic framework that enables him to broaden his potential audience while still writing love poetry.\(^5\) Using his self-appointed status as *praecceptor amoris*, Ovid expands the scope of love poetry in order to establish the prominence of love in Roman society, that is, to highlight the importance of *amor* in *Roma*. This in turn allows Ovid to make ambitious claims concerning the immortality of his own poetry and to compose a love poem that draws its material from elegy, didactic, and epic in an attempt to rise above them all.

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\(^4\) Holzberg takes Ovid’s dedicatory habits and his discussion of his first public reading as evidence that Ovid wanted to reach a broader audience: “In general, it would seem that [Ovid] was eager to see his new works move beyond the elite circle of those closest to him as quickly as possible, so that they could be heard by a broad public. One indication of this is the fact that, in striking contrast to other Augustans we know of, Ovid dedicated none of the works that he himself was able to publish in Rome to anyone; moreover, he directly addressed friends in individual poems only in his first work, the *Amores*—and in just three poems at that (1.9; 2.10; 2.18). Again, the fact that Ovid’s first public reading is expressly mentioned in the ‘autobiography’ (*Tristia* 4.10.57-58) tends to suggest that he was at pains to reach a wide audience” (28).

Ovid and the Roman Love Elegists

Philip Hardie says it best: “In principio erat amor. Ovid enters as the love-poet, and from this role he never escapes.” But behind Ovid the love poet is Ovid the reader of love poetry, in particular, the elegiac love poetry of Tibullus and Propertius. Inspired by these poets, Ovid describes a type of love in the Ars that we can recognize as elegiac love, as is clear from his most explicit elegiac allusion: “dum licet et loris passim potes ire solutis, / eligi cui dicas ‘tu mihi sola places” (“While it is permitted and you can roam everywhere with loose reins, choose to whom you would say: ‘you alone please me’”; 1.41). Alexander Dalzell even goes so far as to claim that “if erotic elegy had not existed, the poem could not have been written; or, rather, there would have been no point in writing it.” In the Ars amatoria, Ovid borrows some of his most prominent themes from his direct predecessors, such as the idea of a secret language of love (Tibullus 1.2.15-22, 1.8.1-2, and Propertius 3.8.9-20), the use of mythological exempla (Propertius 2.6.15-24, 2.24c.41-46, 2.32.31-62), and, as scholars have often noted, even the fusion of love and didacticism (Tibullus 1.4, and 1.6, Propertius 1.10 and 4.5). He departs

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7 In this chapter, I have focused on Tibullus and Propertius as examples of the Latin elegiac tradition, since Catullus is not solely an elegiac poet, and Gallus’s works, with the exception of a few scattered fragments, have not survived. On the fragmentary elegies of Gallus, see David O. Ross, Jr., Backgrounds to Augustan Poetry: Gallus, Elegy, and Rome (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975); and R.D. Anderson, P.J. Parsons and R.G.M. Nisbet, “Elegiacs by Gallus from Qasr Ibrim,” The Journal of Roman Studies 69 (1979): 125-55.
8 All quotations from Ovid’s amatory works are from the edition of E.J. Kenney, P. Ouidi Nasonis Amores, Medicamina faciei feminineae, Ars amatoria, Remedia amoris (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994). All translations from Ovid in this chapter are my own. The half-line tu mihi sola places, which “represents the conventional expression by a Roman lover of his exclusive passion” (Kennedy, “Bluff Your Way in Didactic,” 166) is found at Propertius 2.7.19 and (Pseudo-) Tibullus 3.19.3. It is also echoed, as Kennedy points out, at other points in the Amores and Ars amatoria (e.g., “non mihi mille placent”; Amores 1.3.15). The allusion is often seen in light of the theme of role-playing in Ovid’s text. For example, Myerowitz cites this passage as evidence that the lover in Ovid’s Ars “is presented as following the rules of a game which both partners are expected to know and respect” (181). I would also suggest that Ovid’s use of elegiac language here is his way of situating his own text in the elegiac tradition.
9 Dalzell, 146.
from his predecessors, however, when he lays aside the structure of the elegiac sequence and adopts the framework of a didactic treatise. There were didactic elements in love elegy before Ovid, but, as A.S. Hollis explains, “neither Tibullus nor Propertius allowed the didactic tradition to influence the way they depicted love; that was a masterstroke of Ovid himself.”

How did Ovid’s use of the didactic mode change the way he depicted love? The most obvious change can be seen in the phrase “mihi cedet Amor” (“Love yields to me”; 1.21), which, as Myerowitz points out, is “an ideal so at odds with the poetic stance of the love poets who were [Ovid’s] contemporaries that at least one commentator believes that it is proposed for its patent absurdity.” Tibullus and Propertius write of being held captive by a destructive, all-consuming love. They may, at times, seem content in their role as lovers, but they insist that it is not a vocation they entered into by choice. In the *Ars amatoria*, however, Ovid is approaching love from a didactic standpoint, and from this standpoint, love must be something that can be controlled. Dalzell gives us a useful perspective on this difference when he writes that elegy and Ovid’s *Ars amatoria* “depend on a different hypothesis”:

*Elegy depends on the view that love is a torment: the *Ars*, on the other hand, presupposes that love is something to be managed. It is not simply, as several commentators have noted, that elegy is subjective and didactic poetry objective. It is rather that the fiction which considers love an art to be taught changes the whole nature of the experience described.*

Ovid’s pretense of control is a necessary part of the creation of an *ars amandi*, and if it appears difficult to maintain, that should be read as a consequence of the impossibility of his task (i.e., to...

11 “*Ars Amatoria* and *Remedia Amoris*,” 93-94.
12 Myerowitz, 33. See also Hollis (*Ars Amatoria Book I*, 34), who points out that Ovid’s “mihi cedet amor” is most likely an “intentional reversal” of a line from Virgil’s *Eclogues*: “omnia uincit Amor, et nos cedamus Amori” (10.69).
13 Dalzell, 140.
render love teachable), and not, as some scholars have argued, as an illustration of the supposed incompetence of the *praecceptor amoris*.\(^14\)

In the process of transforming elegiac love into subject matter appropriate for a didactic treatise, Ovid clearly had to sacrifice some of its defining characteristics. At the same time, Ovid’s use of the didactic mode enabled him to widen the scope (and thus the reception) of love poetry. Gian Biagio Conte writes of the elegist’s “reduction of the world to a partial field of vision,” and his “willingness to turn his own unhappiness into an absolute form of life.”\(^15\) “The elegiac poet,” Conte explains, “establishes his identity as diversity, asserts that he is enclosed within part of the world (let us call it love for now) which seems to him to be self-sufficient and to contain in microcosm all that is necessary for a full life.”\(^16\) And because the poet and his lover-persona are one and the same (at least, according to the fiction of the text), this restricted viewpoint is the only one that we, as readers, are exposed to. Not wishing to exclude himself (or us) from the rest of the world, the elegiac poet “translates” or “recuperates” parts of that world into his own poetic ideology. “Otherwise,” Conte suggests, “he would be irrevocably sacrificing not only things, persons, values, and cultural models, but also (the lover is a poet) literary themes

\(^{14}\) The question of the *praecceptor*’s control is a contentious one, since there are many points in the text where he seems to be contradicting himself or losing control. For the purposes of this chapter, I am concerned solely with the control that the *praecceptor* claims to have over love. Some readers may see this control as, in fact, undermined or threatened at some points in the text, but the *praecceptor*’s assumption that love can be tamed nonetheless stands in contrast to the destructive love of the elegists. The other type of control at issue in this text is stylistic control: the control that Ovid, or his *praecceptor*, has over the methodology with which he espouses his art. On Ovid’s *praecceptor amoris* and the subject of control in the *Ars*, see Robert R. Edwards, "Ovid as Praecceptor Amoris," *The Classical Journal* 53 (1958): 157-67; Robert R. Edwards, *The Flight from Desire: Ovid and Augustine to Chaucer* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 39-58; and Lindsay C. Watson, “The Bogus Teacher and His Relevance for Ovid’s *Ars Amatoria*,” *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie* 150 (2007): 377-74. The issue of control is often brought up specifically in relation to the Daedalus and Icarus episode in book two of Ovid’s *Ars*. On this episode see Myerowitz, 151-67; Charles F. Ahern, Jr., “Daedalus and Icarus in the *Ars Amatoria*,” *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 92 (1989): 273-96; and Sharrock, 87-195.


\(^{16}\) Conte, 37.
and subjects, expressive possibilities, ambitions for a different kind of poetry.” Conte provides the figure of the *militia amoris* as an example of this type of “translation.” By calling attention to the similarities between love and war, the elegiac love poet can make use of the language and the themes of epic poetry while still remaining in the world of elegy. This in turn produces a tension between elegy and Roman society, since no amount of translation or reinterpretation can hide the fact that lovers are not actually soldiers, or, in other words, that elegy can never be reconciled with the world from which it has cut itself out.

Conte’s account of this tension within elegy serves as a useful preface to his discussion of Ovid’s *Ars amatoria* and *Remedia amoris*. According to Conte, Ovid’s ability “to look at elegy instead of looking with the eyes of elegy,” enables him to show his readers how elegy works, and thus, how they can use it to their advantage. If they want to be lovers, they must accept the reduced viewpoint of elegy, and stop trying to “translate” the outside world into terms that elegy can understand. “If one wishes to show that one is in love,” Conte writes, “one must accept the consequence of seeming blind and ridiculous.” Following this line of argument, the cure for love, as represented by Ovid’s *Remedia amoris*, is to open your eyes, and to leave the enclosed world of love elegy for other worlds (and other literary styles).

Conte’s argument works well for the *Remedia amoris*, which does indeed advise you to step outside the world of elegy—to return to the active life, or, if that does not work, to flee to the country. His argument for the *Ars*, however, is less convincing. In Conte’s analysis, “the presupposition of the *Ars amatoria*’s teachings is that elegy must renounce its ambition to reformulate the world.”

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17 Conte, 38.
18 Conte, 46.
19 Conte, 64.
20 Conte, 56.
form of elegy,” thus eliminating the “risk of contradictions” present in elegy and creating an “amatory world” with its own discourse and its own values.²¹ I would argue, however, that the treatment of love in the *Ars amatoria* is more forceful and assertive than Conte’s discussion seems to imply. Rather than advising his readers to succumb to the restricted worldview of elegy, Ovid’s *praecceptor amoris* continues the process of translation and recuperation; in fact, he takes it even further, fully transferring the “outside” world of Roman society into the enclosed world of love poetry, and relieving the tension between love and society by asserting the superiority of love (and thus, of love poets).

Before continuing on to a discussion of Ovid’s *Ars amatoria*, it will be useful to remain just a bit longer with Tibullus and Propertius, and on the tension within elegiac poetry that Ovid exploits to his own poetic ends. Both Tibullus and Propertius represent themselves as outsiders to Roman society, continually reaffirming their status as lovers and as love poets by contrasting their lives and their poetry with that of their contemporaries. Tibullus begins his first book of poetry not by referring to himself or even to his beloved, but by distancing himself from the rest of society: “Divitias alius fulvo sibi congerat auro” (“Wealth let others gather for themselves in yellow gold”; 1.1.1).²² When he does mention himself, he does so by defining his situation in opposition to that of the *alius* at the opening of his poem: “Mi mea paupertas vitam traducat inertem” (“But let my general poverty transfer me to inaction”; 1.1.5). In Roman terms, Tibullus is content with *otium* (“leisure”), even though he knows that he should be striving, along with the

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²¹ Conte, 56.
others, to pursue a life of negotium (“business”). Later in the poem, Tibullus compares his life with that of his friend, Messalla:

Te bellare decet terra, Messalla, marique,
Ut domus hostiles praeferat exuvias:
Me retinent vinctum formosae vincla puellae,
Et sedeo duras ianitor ante fores.
Non ego laudari curo: mea Delia, tecum
Dum modo sim, quaeos segnis inersque vocer. (1.1.53-58)

(It is right that you, Messalla, campaign by land and sea
to adorn your town-house with the spoils of war.
But I am held a pris'ner, fettered by a lovely girl,
and take my post as keeper at her cruel door.
Glory has no charms for me, my Delia. They can call me slack and ineffective, if only I’m with you.)

In this comparison, the primary position is given to the warlike Messala (te bellare), while the secondary position, again, is where we find Tibullus (me retinent). There is biographical evidence that Tibullus was actually a soldier alongside Messalla, but in his poetry, Tibullus continually represents his life as antithetical to that of his friend. Messalla is a soldier, bringing home the spoils of war, and Tibullus is a servant of love, living exclusively for Delia.

The alius (“others”) of 1.1 return in 1.10 as soldiers:

    alius sit fortis in armis,
    Sternat et adversos Marte favente duces,
    ut mihi potanti possit sua dicere facta
    Miles et in mensa pingere castra mero. (1.10.29-32)

(Others can be brave in arms
and by the grace of Mars cut down the opposing leaders,
to tell me, as I drink, of their exploits in the army
and paint camp on the table-top in wine.)

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23 Holzberg explains the irreconcilable tension between the roles of love poet and epic poet in Roman society: “The basic reason for the elegiac lover’s isolation from society is the fact that he firmly rejects what the Roman upper class considered to the ideal life for a young man. Members of the Roman equestrian and senatorial classes typically pursued a political and/or military career and single-mindedly increased their fortunes by engaging in commerce and/or exploiting and aggrandizing their landed estates. The Romans called such activity negotium (business; the literal sense is roughly ‘not doing-nothing’). But the slave of a puella does just the opposite: he lives exclusively for love, which is, for the aristocratic Roman, a species of otium (doing-nothing)” (12).
Drinking with the soldiers, Tibullus is immersed in this world, and yet, at the same time, he feels distant. On this occasion, he does not think of the *servitum amoris*, but of an old shepherd, who deserves praise for his peaceful life:

Ipse suas sectatur oves, at filius agnos;
   Et calidam fesso comparat uxor aquam.
Sic ego sim, liceatque caput candescere canis,
   Temporis et prisci facta referre senem.  (1.10.41-44)

(He shepherds his own sheep, and his son follows the lambs, and his wife prepares hot water for the bath. Such life be mine and with it leave to shine white-haired, recounting in old age old memories.)

Tibullus’s pastoral fantasy dramatizes the extent to which he is cut off from the world, particularly when one considers that the life of a married shepherd is just as unattainable for a servant of love as the life of a conquering soldier. Positioning himself against these young soldiers and old shepherds, Tibullus can “translate” the values of other worlds into his love poems, but in doing so, he does not reconcile those worlds. Instead, he exaggerates the difference between them.

Like Tibullus, Propertius sees himself as an outsider in Roman society. He is less apologetic than Tibullus, though, and more forceful in his comparisons between his life and that of a soldier. Propertius continually remarks that he was fated to live the life of a *militia amoris*:

“non ego sum laudi, non natus idoneus armis: / hanc me militiam fata subire uolunt” (“I wasn’t born to praise or fighting: / the Fates forced me to my own kind of military”; 1.6.29-30).

Propertius describes a state of mind in which his entire life revolves around one person: “tu mihi sola domus, tu, Cynthia, sola parentes, / omnia tu nostrae tempora laetitiae” (“You alone are my home, you, Cynthia, alone, my parents, / you are all the times of my happiness”; 1.11.23-24).

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Recognizing the narrowness of his field of vision (as Conte might describe it), Propertius writes of traveling to Athens in order to cure himself of his lovesickness. Of course, the mere act of traveling is not a cure. Propertius must open his own eyes to other themes:

'illic uel stadiis animum emendare Platonis
incipiam aut hortis, docte Epicure, tuis;
persequar aut studium linguæ, Demosthenis arma,
liborumque tuos, docte Menandre, sales. (3.21.25-28)

(There, I’ll begin to mend my spirit in Plato’s walks
or in your gardens, learned Epicurus;
I will pursue the study of language, Demosthenes’ weapon,
and your witty books, learned Menander.)

The assumption here is that none of this cultural knowledge is available to him in a world where Cynthia is all he sees. More than Tibullus, Propertius writes of contrasting poetic styles (elegy vs. epic), rather than simply of contrasting ways of life (lover vs. soldier). He vacillates between being proud of his amatory calling (e.g. 1.7, 2.13a, 3.1) and wishing he could leave all that behind and turn to epic themes (e.g. 2.1, 2.10, 3.3), which, of course, is exactly what he attempts to do in book four (although he continues to write in elegiac verse, and love is never far from his mind). Even when he is successful in expanding his poetic range, Propertius, as Stephen Hayworth puts it, “writes with the love elegist’s perspective.”

Elegiac love, as represented by Tibullus and Propertius, is defined in opposition to Roman society, and to the themes of epic verse. Being a lover means retreating into personal fantasies about your beloved, or, as in Tibullus, pausing in your account of a military campaign to dream about a paradise in which lovers are rewarded for their suffering:

Sed me, quod facilis tenero sum semper Amori,
Ipsa Venus campos ducet in Elysios.

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25 Stephen Heyworth, “An Elegist’s Career: from Cynthia to Cornelia,” in Classical Literary Careers and their Reception, ed. Philip Hardie and Helen Moore (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 101. On the subject of Propertius’s literary career, Heyworth writes: “Rather than a rising curve we should perceive stasis, and a persistent refusal to have a career” (89).
Hic choreae cantusque vigent, passimque vagantes
   Dulce sonant tenui gutture carmen aves,
Fert casiam non culta seges, totosque per agros
   Floret odoratis terra benigna rosis:
Hic iuvenum series teneris inmixta puellis
   Ludit, et assidue proelia miscet Amor.
Illic est, cuicumque rapax mors venit amanti,
   Et gerit insigni myrtea serta coma.  (1.3.57-66)

   (My spirit, though, as I have always welcomed tender love,
Venus herself will lead to the Elysian fields.
There songs and dances flourish, and flitting everywhere
sweetly sing the birds their slender-throated tune.
Untilled the land bears cassia and over whole acres
heavy-scented roses bloom from the rich loam.
Young men and tender girls make sport, lined up together,
continually engaging in the battles of Love.
There are all those whom Death raped while they were lovers
and they wear the myrtle in token on their hair.)

In this particular poem, Tibullus is on campaign with Messalla, and he envisions himself dying
and being led by Venus to the Elysian Fields, which are reimagined (albeit in martial terms) as a
paradise for the men and women who died while they were lovers. In the stanzas that follow,
Tibullus describes a version of hell that represents the counterpart to his lover’s paradise, and he
tells us who should be sent there: “Illic sit quicumque meos violavit amores, / Optavit lentas et
mihi militias” (“Let any man lie there who desecrates my love / and prays for my long service in
the army”; 1.3.81-82). What we have here goes beyond a lover’s appropriation of military
language. Tibullus is, in fact, engaged in both military and amatory pursuits, and yet he
identifies only with the latter, consigning anyone who might disagree with this choice to hell.
Overall, Tibullus does not spend much time in this lover’s paradise, but the mere existence of
such a place in his poetry is indicative of the conflict he feels between his status as a lover and
his position in Roman society. It is this conflict, the prominent tension in elegiac love, that Ovid
resolves in the *Ars amatoria*, not by reconciling *otium* and *negotium*, but by adopting didactic techniques that enable him to redefine the place of love in Roman society.

**Ovid and the *populus Romanus***

Ovid’s *praeeceptor* begins his instructions on how to find a girl by explaining to would-be lovers that they do not need to travel to foreign lands, because Rome contains all that a young man could possibly want (1.51-59). Exploiting Augustus’s claims to divine ancestry solely for the intriguing implications of the relationship between Venus and Rome, the *praeeceptor* proclaims: “mater in Aeneae constitit urbe sui” (“the mother of Aeneas has settled in the city of her son”; 1.60).²⁶ If Venus’s descendants founded the city of Rome, then the *praeeceptor* is justified in making Rome’s inhabitants and buildings serve Venus. This is dramatized in the *praeeceptor*’s description of the law-courts, as the presence of Venus’s statue in the Forum Julium lends an ironic twist to the image of a lovesick lawyer unable to plead his own case to his beloved.

The significance of this vision of Rome, for our purposes, lies not in its political implications, but in its implications for the conception of love established by Ovid’s elegiac predecessors.²⁷ Even in the first two lines of the *Ars amatoria*, we can see the changes Ovid has made to the elegiac system: “Si quis in hoc artem populo non nouit amandi, / hoc legat et lecto carmine doctus amet” (“If anyone among this people does not know the art of loving, let him

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²⁷ Steven J. Green provides a bibliographic survey of the political approach to Ovid’s amatory works in “Lessons in Love: Fifty Years of Scholarship on the *Ars amatoria* and *Remedia amoris*,” in *The Art of Love: Bimillennial Essays on Ovid’s *Ars Amatoria* and *Remedia Amoris*,” ed. Roy Gibson, Steven Green, and Alison Sharrock (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 8-11. In addition to the references provided in Green’s survey, see Kennedy, “‘Augustan’ and ‘Anti-Augustan’: Reflections on Terms of Reference,” in *Roman Poetry and Propaganda in the Age of Augustus*, ed. Anton Powell (London: Bristol Classical Press, 1992), 26-58.
read this poem, and, having read it, let him love skillfully”; 1.1-2). As Katharina Volk explains, these initial lines tell us that “Ovid’s teaching is meant for ‘this people’”—(cf. in hoc ... populo, 1)—clearly the *populus Romanus*—and, we infer, for no one else.”28 Placing “the pronounced Romanitas of the *Ars amatoria*” in the broader context of didactic poetry, Volk reminds us that, while didactic poems typically have individual addressees, “the usual implication is that the poem imparts universally valid teaching.”29 “For example,” she continues, “it would be absurd to assume that Lucretius regards Epicureanism as useful only for Memmius.”30 Volk’s description of Ovid’s *Romanitas*—or rather, the *Romanitas* of Ovid’s *praecceptor*, since we are talking about the stated intention of Ovid’s didactic *persona* (and not authorial intention or the text’s influence on potential readers)—can help us understand the novelty of Ovid’s conception of love. Addressing the *populus Romanus* as a whole, the *praecceptor* singles out the members of his audience who are ignorant of the art of love.31 The implication, of course, is that there are only two types of Romans: those who are fully versed in the art of love, and those who have yet to be educated in that art. This classification of the Roman people into lovers and would-be lovers reverses the conception of Roman society put forth by Tibullus and Propertius, who characterized themselves as lovers in a world that was hostile, or at least indifferent, to love.

Continuing his survey of Rome, Ovid’s *praecceptor* moves from the law-courts to the theater, where he interprets the story of Romulus and the rape of the Sabines from a lover’s

28 “*Ars Amatoria Romana*: Ovid on Love as a Cultural Construct,” in Gibson, Green, and Sharrock, *Art of Love*, 236.
29 “*Ars Amatoria Romana*,” 236.
30 “*Ars Amatoria Romana*,” 236-37.
31 When considering the *Ars* as a whole, it is clear that Ovid’s *praecceptor* is addressing a certain group of people *within* the *populus Romanus* (as opposed to the entire population). His exclusions, however, are based on who is and is not legally allowed to engage in love affairs, and not on the specific lifestyles or interests of his audience (for more on these exclusions, see Volk, “*Ars Amatoria Romana*,” 237-38). In other words, even though Ovid’s *praecceptor* may not actually be lecturing to the entire *populus Romanus*, what is significant, for our purposes, is that he is certainly addressing everyone in Rome who could potentially engage in love affairs, whether or not they would consider themselves to be lovers, and that this is a reversal of the belief that Romans who value *otium* over *negotium* are deviating from the norm.
perspective and presents this interpretation to the reader as if it were the accepted version of the story.\textsuperscript{32} It is interesting to note that while Aeneas is significant to Ovid’s \textit{praecceptor} only because he is the son of Venus, Romulus’s divine parentage is unnecessary here (even though it could be relevant in the context of love) because Romulus himself can stand on his own as a lover, having been the first one to make the theater a “dangerous place for pretty girls.”\textsuperscript{33} We can see the \textit{praecceptor’s} mind at work in this passage, as he chooses to reveal only those details that will further his immediate goal. Implicit in this story is the assumption that, if Romulus and his men have made the theater unsafe, any girls who still decide to go to the theater must be seeking danger. This notion is strengthened later in book one when the \textit{praecceptor} insists that girls enjoy being won by force (1.673-722).

Ovid’s decision to transfer the Sabine rape from the Circus, where it traditionally took place, to the theater, is the most compelling change from the accepted version of the story. A.E. Wardman explains that the theater was seen as an immoral institution, but, more specifically, a foreign one, since it had been imported from Greece; in addition, the theater was a place where the sexes were segregated (unlike the Circus, where they could sit side by side).\textsuperscript{34} The \textit{praecceptor’s} account of the Sabine rape Romanizes the immorality of the theater and emphasizes the futility of segregation: “If Romulus was able to organize a rape in a segregated theatre, the Romans, who are his descendants, can hardly be blamed for using the theatre as the preliminary

\textsuperscript{32} In his article on hunting imagery in \textit{Ars} 1, C.M.C. Green suggests that Ovid includes the foundation myths of both Aeneas and Romulus to ensure that “his students recognize how inevitable it was that Rome should be a game park for the hunting of women” (“Terms of Venery: \textit{Ars Amatoria} I,” \textit{Transactions of the American Philological Association} 126 [1996]: 233). Whether one reads these versions of the foundation myths as emphasizing love or the hunt for love, the effect is the same: Ovid’s \textit{praecceptor} is telling his addressees that Rome belongs to lovers, and thus, that lovers cannot be outsiders in Roman society.

\textsuperscript{33} Hollis, \textit{Ars Amatoria Book} 1, 51.

\textsuperscript{34} A.E. Wardman, “The Rape of the Sabines,” \textit{The Classical Quarterly} n.s. 15 (1965): 102; see also Mario Labate, “Erotic Aetiology: Romulus, Augustus, and the Rape of the Sabine Women,” in Gibson, Green, and Sharrock, \textit{Art of Love}, 194-215. For a discussion of how Ovid’s use of the Romulus myth here compares to the version found in Livy, see Watson (“\textit{Praecepta Amoris},” 152-54).
for more sophisticated adventures.”35 The lesson to be learned from this excursus is that *amor* is an integral part of Rome’s legendary history, and thus, that Romans are inherently lovers.

Moving from topography and legendary history to the glory of Augustan Rome, the *praecceptor* includes a *propempticon* (send-off poem) for Gaius Caesar in order to explain to would-be lovers that they can find a girl at a military triumph.36 The addressees are not explicitly told the purpose of this military digression until the end, but Ovid’s *praecceptor* gives us small clues, describing Gaius in language that may remind us of descriptions of Cupid: “ultor adest primisque ducem profitetur in annis / bellaque non puero tractat agenda puer” (“The avenger approaches, and, in his first years, claims the title of commander, and, [himself] a boy, conducts wars that should not be led by a boy”; 1.181-82).37 Up until now, the *Romana iuventus* have been the only addressees of the text, and as the *praecceptor* switches to addressing Gaius, the primary addressees might well be expected to feel that he is still speaking to them. The *praecceptor* encourages this confusion, making use of the metaphorical connections between love and warfare to link Gaius’s presumed future triumph over the Parthians to the young mens’ presumed future triumph with a girl: “auspiciis annisque patris, puer, arma mouebis, / et uinces annis auspiciisque patris” (“With the authority and experience of your father, boy, you will launch a war, and you will conquer with the authority and experience of your father”; 1.191-92). The *praecceptor* then anticipates a victory speech for both Gaius and the *Romana iuventus*:

“augor en, uinces, uotiuaque carmina reddam / et magno nobis ore sonandus eris” (“I predict

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35 Wardman, 103.
37 See, for example, the triumph of Cupid in Ovid’s *Amores* 1.2, as well as descriptions of Amor in *Amores* 1.10, 2.9, and Propertius 2.12. Cupid/Amor is always a *puer*, the term that Ovid’s *praecceptor* uses here for Gaius, whereas the *praecceptor*’s addressees, who could easily also be called *puer*, are instead called *iuventus*. The contrast between Gaius and the addressees merely brings out the similarities between Gaius and Cupid (who are already related, through Venus).
that you will conquer, and I shall recite my promised song, and you will be spoken of by us with a loud voice”; 1.205-06). When the praecptor decides to shift back to the Romana iuventus as the sole addressees, he does so smoothly, with only one couplet (1.217-18) separating the activity of the triumph (ibunt ante duces) from that of the iuventus, who are responding to the eager questions of the girls (alia ex illis . . . quaeret):

ibunt ante duces onerati colla catenis,  
ne possint tuti, qua prius, esse fuga.  
spectabunt laeti iuuenes mixtaeque puellae,  
diffundetque animos omnibus ista dies.  
atque aliqua ex illis cum regum nomina quaeret,  
quae loca, qui montes, quaeue ferantur aquae,  
omnia responde, nec tantum si qua rogabit;  
et quae nescieris, ut bene nota refer.  (1.215-22)

(Leaders go in front, necks burdened with chains, so that they might not be able to be safe in flight, as before. Cheerful youths will watch, and mingled girls, and that day will release the spirits. And when some girl from that group will ask the name of the ruler, what places, what mountains, or what rivers are carried, answer everything [not only if she will ask it]; and what you do not know, tell [her] as if you know it well.)

There is nothing, Ovid is demonstrating here, that cannot be put to the service of love, including the legends and triumphs of Rome, and even a citizen’s own knowledge of Roman history and customs.

As book one progresses, Ovid’s praecptor moves from the city of Rome and its foundational history to the source of the greatness of Augustan Rome: the story of Troy. But he does not just make use of the Trojan story as found in Virgil. He also goes back to Homer, continuing his reinterpretation of the major figures of epic. As an exemplum for his argument that girls prefer force, the praecptor uses the story of Achilles and Deidama.\(^38\) He begins by

\(^38\) The immediate source for the story of Achilles and Deidama in Ovid is most likely that of Bion (c. 100 BC). Seeing as we only have a 32-line fragment of Bion, however, I have focused instead on the contrast between the use of Achilles in Propertius and the use of Achilles in Ovid. The most famous rendition of the Achilles-Deidama story, of course, is that of Statius in his Achilleid, written in the 1\(^{st}\) century A.D. On the various characterizations of
describing how Helen came to Troy. This sets the scene for the story of Achilles, who has been disguised by his mother as a girl so that he might be spared from going to war. The *praecaptor* chides Achilles for his indecorous transgression:

> quid facis, Aeacide? non sunt tua munera lanae; 
> tu titulos alia Palladis arte petes. 
> quid tibi cum calathis? clipeo manus apta ferendo est: 
> pensa quid in dextra, qua cadet Hector, habes? 
> reice succinctos operoso stamine fusos: 
> quassanda est ista Pelias hasta manu. (1.691-96)

(What are you doing, Aeacides? Wools are not your duty; you will seek renown by another art of Pallas. What business do you have with baskets? Your hand is suited to bear a shield; why do you have a loom-weight in your right hand, [the hand] by which Hector will die? Lay aside the spindles covered with worked thread: the Pelian spear must be brandished by that hand.)

The *praecaptor*’s indignation at Achilles’s lack of decorum here might remind the reader of a similar outburst in *Amores* 1.1, when Ovid tells Cupid that he has no right to interfere in the realm of poetry. In *Amores*, however, the two realms that have collided—love and poetry—are clearly overlapping, especially for Ovid, whereas in this example, the two realms—private and public, female and male—are polar opposites. Achilles is supposed to be a masculine warrior, and, instead, he has disguised his manhood in women’s attire (“ueste uirum longa dissimulatu erat”; 1.690). But instead of removing him from the private sphere and casting him in his proper role as the Trojan warrior, the *praecaptor* focuses on Achilles’s status as a lover:

> forte erat in thalamo uirgo regalis eodem; 
> haec illum stupro comperit esse uirum. 
> uiribus illa quidem uicta est (ita credere oportet), 
> sed uoluit uinci uiribus illa tamen. (1.697-700)

(By chance the royal maid was in the same room; by rape she discovered he was a man. She was indeed conquered by force (thus it is proper to believe); nevertheless she wished to be conquered by force.)

Achilles, see Katherine Callen King, *Achilles: Paradigms of the War Hero from Homer to the Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).
Achilles is transformed from female to male not by becoming a warrior but by becoming a lover. Despite the praeceptor’s previous militaristic characterization of Achilles, he never leaves the private sphere. His sole purpose in the poem is to serve as an example of the aggressive lover.

Ovid’s Achilles stands in contrast to the Propertian Achilles, who is, principally, a war hero. In Propertius’s elegies, Achilles first appears in 2.1—the poem in which Propertius defends his status as a love poet, only to interrupt his defense with a list of the themes he would treat if he were to write epic verse. When Propertius does mention the love affairs of Achilles, he does so in order to explain that destructive love can afflict even the most heroic warrior. In 2.8, for example, Propertius recounts how Achilles stood idle after Briseis was taken from him, and how her return invigorated Achilles and allowed him to return to battle. Love here is the handmaiden of martial valor. In 2.22a, Propertius depicts love as preceding—even perhaps, by implication, leading to—heroic deeds:

\[
\text{quid? cum e complexu Briseidos iret Achilles,} \\
\text{num fugere minus Thessala tela Phryges?} \\
\text{quid? ferus Andromachae lecto cum surgeret Hector,} \\
\text{bella Myceneae non timuere rates?} \\
\text{ille uel hic classis poterant uel perdere muros:} \\
\text{hic ego Pelides, hic ferus Hector ego. (2.22a.29-34)}
\]

(What? When Achilles was coming from Briseis’ embrace did the Phrygians flee any less his Thessalian spears? What? When savage Hector rose from Andromache’s bed did the Mycenean fleets not fear the conflict? This one or that could wreck ships or walls: here I am Pelides, here I’m savage Hector.)

The Propertian Achilles is a warrior energized, or at least not exhausted, by a night of love. In each of Propertius’s Briseis-Achilles passages, the action moves from the bedroom to the battlefield. Ovid’s praeceptor, however, recharacterizes Achilles by reversing the action. In telling the story of Achilles and Deidaima, the praeceptor first mentions the events at Troy, and
then moves to discuss Achilles and Deidaima alone in her room. He does not return to the events at Troy. When Ovid’s praeceptor mentions the Achilles-Briseis story, at 2.711, the technique is the same. Briseis delights in the blood-stained hands of her Achilles as he returns from battle. Again, the action does not return to the battlefield, but stays in the bedchamber until the praeceptor moves on to another topic. The reasoning behind this is clear—the heroes must be lovers, and the action must stay in the bedroom, if the praeceptor is to be able to connect this exemplum to a discussion of love. The effect of this is that the heroes of Troy (who, through Aeneas, are part of the history of Rome) are significant only for what they can tell us about love.

Ulysses shares the same fate. The praeceptor uses the Greek hero as an example of a man who wooed women with his eloquence: “non formosus erat, sed erat facundus Vlixes, / et tamen aequoreas torsit amore deas” (“Ulysses was not handsome, but he was eloquent, and still he tormented sea goddesses with love”; 2.123-24). What is interesting about Ovid’s use of Ulysses in the Ars, as compared to his treatment of Aeneas and Achilles, is that the story of Ulysses, without much alteration, is already the story of a mythical lover. The stories of Aeneas and Achilles are stories of war and fame, but the story of Ulysses is that of a man trying to return home to the woman he loves. Yet Ovid’s praeceptor rarely makes use of the Ulysses-Penelope story. Ulysses and Penelope are both mentioned three times in the Ars, but only one of those times are they mentioned together. On the other two occasions they are separated, and Ulysses is mentioned either in reference to Circe (2.103) or Calypso (2.123-26). Thus even when it might appear that the praeceptor did not need to distort history, he distorts it anyway, and Ulysses becomes the beloved of Circe or the wooer of Calypso, his exemplary craftiness and his

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war stories useful only because they can help him charm goddesses. For Ovid’s purpose, the conjugal hero is less relevant than the one who can potentially engage in amatory dalliance.

As book two progresses, Ovid’s praeceptor completes his appropriation of Trojan history when Helen and Menelaus become examples for his argument that absence is fatal to a love affair:

\[
\text{dum Menelaus abest, Helene, ne sola iaceret,}
\text{hosiptis est tepido nocte recepta sinu.}
\text{quis stupor hic, Menelae, fuit? tu solus abibas,}
\text{isdem sub tectis hospes et uxor erant.}
\text{accipitri timidas credis, furiose, columbas,}
\text{plenum montano credis ouile lupo?}
\text{nil Helene peccat, nihil hic committit adulter:}
\text{quod tu, quod faceret quilibet, ille facit. (2.359-66)}
\]

(While Menelaus was away, Helen, lest she should lie alone, was received at night by the warm bosom of her guest. What stupidity was this, Menelaus? You went away alone, your wife and guest were under the same roof. Madman, you entrust timid doves to a hawk, you entrust a full sheepfold to a mountain wolf. Helen does not sin, this adulterer commits nothing: he does what you [or] anyone would have done.)

This is more than a demonstration of the harm that absence can cause. This is also a justification for duping inattentive husbands. Releasing Helen from all blame, Ovid has turned Menelaus into a witless husband who can’t keep an eye on his wife.\(^{40}\) Would such a Menelaus have gathered an army and besieged Troy? And even if he had, what good would his army have been, since Ovid’s praeceptor has already transformed Achilles into a lover? The Trojan side does not fare much better, since, according to the praeceptor’s examples, Aeneas exists only to bring together Venus and the people of Rome. Again, Ovid’s praeceptor has completely rewritten history. Joseph B. Solodow, writing on Ovid’s elevation of the figure of the lover, makes a similar point in relation to Rome itself:

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\(^{40}\) A similar argument is made by Blodgett, who calls Menelaus “rusticus” and thus sets him against what he sees as the praeceptor’s ideal Roman hero, who would be “cultus, fallax, artifex, and ludens” (328-29).
He [Ovid] often notably subverts central features of Roman political and cultural life, suggesting that they are really important only so far as they serve the cause of the lover; ultimately, at least in Ovid’s playful account, their final reference is to love, and love is therefore even more important than they are. As important as Ovid’s elevation of the lover are the devices by which he accomplishes it; borrowing the apt phrase of another critic we may call Ovid’s proof of his case a *reductio ad amorem.*

What is implied in this glorification of love, moreover, is that nothing is outside the range of love poetry. If Rome and its history can serve love, then they justifiably belong in this text. And if Ovid can use war heroes and didactic techniques to create a successful poem about love, then what do epic and didactic have that love poetry does not? When all types of poetry have been made equal, then a love poet can hope to gain the high poetic status, and thus the poetic immortality, of a Hesiod or a Virgil.

*Arte Perennat Amor*

Throughout the entire *Ars* and, arguably, throughout his entire career, Ovid is engaged in the process of positioning himself in relation to his literary predecessors. His decision to begin his poetic career as an elegiac poet was a conscious decision that allowed him to test his ambitions against the genres available for a Roman poet of his day. He enters the genre of love elegy (already somewhat reworked by Propertius) with his *Amores,* but it is the *Ars* that allows him greater freedom to explore other genres, even within the apparent confines of elegiac verse. It allows him the freedom to play with themes typically restricted to other types of poetry: most notably, the discourse of Roman culture and history, which is undoubtedly the domain of epic.

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41 Solodow, 112. The phrase *reductio ad amorem* is from Galinsky, who used it in a discussion of mythological exempla in Ovid’s *Amores* 2.12: “The most essential aspect, however, of Ovid’s treatment of [the Trojan war in *Amores* 2.12.17-24] is its *reductio ad amorem*—love is the chief agent everywhere, almost everything can be attributed to love. This attitude is not restricted to the *Amores,* but is found also in the *Metamorphoses*” (Ovid’s “*Metamorphoses*”: An Introduction to Basic Aspects [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975], 30).

42 On the literary implications of Ovid’s decision to write elegy see Harrison, “Ovid and Genre,” 79-94.
And indeed, scholars have frequently noted that Virgil is Ovid’s most prominent target.⁴³ Ovid adopts the themes not just of Virgil’s *Aeneid*, as we saw above, but of his *Georgics* as well; he also seems to have had the Virgilian career model in mind when he moved from short elegiac poetry to didactic elegy (and, ultimately, to epic).⁴⁴

It is in book three that Ovid makes his final claims for the value of poetry. In book two, the *praeeceptor* had informed the young men that poetry would not get a girl’s attention. In book three, the *praeeceptor* and Ovid become indistinguishable (particularly at the end, when the *praeeceptor* names himself: *Naso magister erat*; 3.812) and the *praeeceptor* tells the girls that poetry can help them win over men. Suddenly the *praeeceptor* is a poet himself, flaunting his poetic achievements in a last-minute effort to reassert the significance of (his) poetry before he finishes the work. He lists the poets that the girls should be familiar with, and the list includes not just the elegiac love poets, Propertius and Tibullus, but other poets as well, such as Callimachus, Menander, Varro, and, most notably, Virgil. The *praeeceptor*’s decision to include non-love poets in this particular list effectively draws those other authors into the realm of love poetry, since, as Ovid mentions in his *Tristia* (2.253-62), even non-amatory poets can be read for amatory purposes. And once all the authors—from Callimachus to Virgil—are on even ground, the *praeeceptor* (i.e., Ovid) adds his own *scripta* to the list:

> forsitan et nostrum nomen miscebitur istis

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nec mea Lethaeis scripta dabuntur aquis
atque aliquid dicet “nostri lege culta magistri
carmina, quis partes instruit ille duas,
deue tener libris titulus quos signat AMORVM
elige quod docili molliter ore legas,
uel tibi composita cantetur EPISTVLA uoce;
ignotum hoc aliis ille nouruit opus.”  (3.339-46)

(Perhaps my name will be associated with theirs and my writings will not be given to the
ers of Lethe and someone will say “read the refined poems of our master, who
structs the two sides; or, from the tender books inscribed with the title of Loves, choose
what you may gently read with a soft voice; or let a Letter be read by you with a calm
voice; he renovated this body of work, unknown to others.”)

This passage makes Ovid’s aspirations strikingly clear. As a revolutionary poet (ille novavit
opus), Ovid can claim his place among the great poets, and, potentially, surpass them. Of all
the poets in the above-mentioned list, only Virgil is given more than one line, and even then, he
is not actually named. Aeneas stands in for Virgil as the representative of his greatest
achievement, while the poem that is generically closest to Ovid’s Ars, the Georgics, does not
appear at all in this passage. Meanwhile, Ovid’s own poetry is given eight full lines, not
counting his subsequent pleas to the gods to grant his wishes for poetic immortality.

From anyone else, this excessive self-praise would seem absurd. If it does not seem
absurd coming from Ovid, we should attribute this to the playful spirit he has cultivated

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45 Solodow suggests that, as early as the beginning of book two, Ovid is already revealing his desire to surpass the
great poets: “Indeed, Ovid’s self-proclaimed superiority to Homer and Hesiod: mea carmina .../ praelata Ascræo
Maenoïque seni, (2.3 f.) may also present a victory by elegy over the genres of epic and didactic poetry” (109).

46 And of course, for some, it seems absurd even coming from Ovid. The most famous critics of Ovid’s excess and
his self-praise are Seneca and Quintilian. Seneca, in his Controversiae (2.2 (10).12) says of Ovid: “non ignoravit
vitia sua sed amavit” (“he was not ignorant of his vices, but in love [with them]”; Oratorum et rhetorum sententiae
divisiones colores, ed. L.Hakanson [Stuttgart: Teubner, 1989]; my translation). Quintilian (Inst. 10.1.88) describes
Ovid as “nimium amator ingenii sui” (“an excessive lover of his own genius”; Institutionis oratoriae libri XII, ed. L.
Radermacher and V. Buchheit [Leipzig, Teubner, 1971]; my translation), and, closer to our century, L.P.
Wilkinson notes: “Read by themselves, the Ars and Remedii may be accounted brilliant and entertaining works. Read after the
Amores and Heroïdes they are apt to suffer, and not always undeservedly. Quite apart from the sameness of tone,
there is too much crambe repetita” (Ovid Recalled [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955], 143). Recent
critics such as Holzberg have seen this excess as a (positive) identifying characteristic of Ovid’s art: “even in other,
less ‘outrageous’ instances in which Ovid richly embellishes a set theme, the critics have as a rule been unwilling to
see this ‘excess,’ not as an artistic failing, but for what it manifestly is in Amores 3.7: a poetic technique deliberately
throughout the text. As Solodow explains, Ovid revels in the incongruities between, on the one
hand, the seriousness of elegiac love and the literary efforts of his predecessors, and, on the other
hand, the flippancy of his praeceptor’s tone. Ovid cites other poets in order to make fun of his
own poetic aspirations, but in doing so, he implies that these aspirations have been met. For
Solodow, Ovid is able to make these claims for the seriousness of his poetry precisely by calling
attention to what he is doing. Ovid is simultaneously writing his poem and telling us what to
think about it. I would add, moreover, that the praeceptor’s revisions of Roman society also
contribute to Ovid’s ability to make such claims. The status of love poetry is inextricably
connected to the status of love, and to that of the lover. For Tibullus and Propertius, love and the
lover were outsiders. The love poet was a poet who did not have the spirit for the heroic themes
of epic poetry. In Ovid’s Ars amatoria, however, the epic heroes themselves appear in the role
of lovers, and the entire culture of Rome is integrally connected to love. Ovid’s rewriting of
Roman society serves both to establish the place of love poetry and to raise its status, so that love
poets can compete with the poets of epic and didactic.

The inclusion of the Amores and the Heroides in the list of poems cited above reminds us
of the connection between the praeceptor and our author, Ovid, as well as of Ovid’s status as a
love poet. The Amores and the Heroides are non-didactic texts that suddenly become didactic
with their inclusion in this list of poetry intended to help girls learn the art of love. Syntactically,
these two are situated between the Ars (culta magistri / carmina) and Ovid’s claims for poetic
innovation (ille nouaut opus); enclosed in this way within the realm of Ovid’s erotodidactic
writings, they join those writings in seeking fame for their author.

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47 Solodow, esp. 109.
It is Ovid’s expansion of the scope of love poetry that makes his *Ars* so daring and compelling. In books one and two, Ovid’s *praecceptor* reworked mythical history to make heroes into lovers. In book three, he claims that his book would have had an even greater impact if it had been read by famous women, such as Medea, Phyllis, Ariadne and Dido:

quid uos perdiderit, dicam: nescistis amare;  
defuit ars uobis: arte perennat amor.  
nunc quoque nescirent! sed me Cytherea docere  
iussit et ante oculos constitit ipsa meos. (3.41-44)

(I should say what will have ruined you: you did not know how to love; skill was absent from you: skill makes love endure. Would that they still did not know! But Cytherea ordered me to teach and stood, herself, before my eyes.)

Ovid’s mythical heroines here, again, are not the heroines we know. The names and stories are essentially the same, but something has been altered so that suddenly there is a lesson in these stories that we never knew about. Would Dido have been saved if she had just read Ovid’s *Ars*? If she had properly adorned herself and sat on the bed to show off her best features, would Aeneas have decided to abandon his fate and stay in Carthage? It’s a ridiculous proposition, but one which easily lends itself to the fantasies of the addressees in book three, who can imagine themselves as Dido, and with a little skill change the history of Rome. Hesitant to arm the women with such powerful advice, Ovid pauses, only to be commanded by Venus to continue his instruction. Skill may aid the lover, but even skill itself is under the jurisdiction of Venus.

As with most of Ovid’s text, there is another level to this passage that he wants us to be aware of, and that is in the phrase *arte perennat amor* (3.42). Here, as in the work as a whole, *amor* is the subject, being worked on by the agent, *ars*. But where does *perennat* come from?\(^{48}\) Is that the goal of love? And if so, why has he not used it earlier in the text, especially in book

\(^{48}\) According to the *OLD*, Ovid is the first one to use this word as a verb. It is used as an adjective in Virgil and in Horace, which is most likely what Ovid is alluding to here, and in the *Amores*, where he is much more blatant about his aspirations: “mortale est, quod quaeris, opus; mihi fama perennis / quaeitis, in toto semper ut orbe canar” (1.15.7-8).
two, where he instructs the young men on how to keep their girl? There the term used is *tenere*: you hold on to love, but that does not mean it lasts forever. Yet *ars* does make love everlasting. Ovid’s elegiac predecessors, of course, would readily attest that *ars* makes love everlasting by making the beloved immortal. For Ovid, however, it is neither the beloved nor the lover, but the love poet that *ars* makes immortal. This is his goal in the work, as Ovid fully admits: “quid petitur sacris, nisi tantum fama, poetis?” (“What is sought by the sacred poets, if not fame alone”; 3.403).

Impelled in part, perhaps, by this high ambition, Ovid, in his *Ars amatoria*, merges the traditions of elegiac and didactic poetry, using the didactic framework and his self-appointed role of *praeceptor amoris* to reconfigure the position of love in Roman society. Ovid’s *praeceptor* teaches his students about the Roman cityscape, about its legendary history, and about its mythical heroes, and in doing so, he subordinates those topics to his overall subject matter, which is love. The medieval authors who followed in Ovid’s footsteps—particularly those who were raised in an educational climate which favored didactic approaches to classical literature—created erotodidactic texts in which love was no longer the main subject. And since it was only by asserting the supremacy of love that Ovid had eluded the tensions inherent in love poetry, these medieval authors discovered that they had to find their own way of reconciling love and the outside world.
Chapter 3:

Ovid and the Medieval *Artes Amandi*

Within the corpus of medieval love literature, a number of texts seek to define and codify the practice of love. These are the *artes amandi*, the “arts of love,” and they have as their archetype Ovid’s *Ars amatoria*. As a source text, Ovid’s *Ars amatoria* is significant for three main reasons: 1) Ovid sets out in his text to elevate the status of love poetry, paving the way for later poets who wished to write serious texts on love; 2) Ovid’s classification of love as an *ars* and his use of didactic discourse provide a model for subsequent “textbooks” on love; and 3) the inclusion of Ovid’s *Ars amatoria* in the medieval school canon (a process which began in the twelfth century) introduced students to Ovid’s erotodidactic treatise in a pedagogical context and reinforced Ovid’s status as *magister amoris*. Modern readers of Ovid often find themselves unable to take this *magister* role seriously; however, this was not an issue for medieval readers. Taking Ovid at his word, or even reinterpreting his text to present him as *more* serious, medieval readers, educators, and authors provided us with an Ovid who could easily serve as the first codifier of love—the author, if you will, of the very first edition of a textbook on the *ars amandi*.

The literary world would have to wait almost 1200 years for a new rendition of this textbook. But when it finally came, it was quickly followed by a third, a fourth, and so on. This group of texts—the medieval treatises on the art of love—can be split into two distinct (but related) traditions: the practical, or Ovidian tradition, and the theoretical, or Capellanian tradition. And just outside this core group of *artes amandi*, there is a larger group of texts: peripheral texts, which are not explicitly *artes amandi*, but which have an obvious affinity with that category of literature. And finally, the concept of an *ars amandi* shows up on occasion as a literary topos—this is often just a line or two in an otherwise non-didactic love poem. These
three groups of texts, while not all ostensibly Ovidian in nature, are connected by a certain kind of relationship to Ovid’s text. They are all familiar with Ovid in some form—whether it be from a full reading of Ovid’s text or from a fragmentary knowledge of the *magister amoris* through *florilegia, accessus*, commentaries, and *vitae*. In other words, the medieval *artes amandi* can be said to inhabit a literary world in which the existence of an *ars amandi* (i.e., love as an art that can be learned) has already been established. The foundational textbook has already been written. Each author is conscious of his role as a student of the *magister*, whether or not he slavishly follows the *magister’s* advice.

The category of literature that I am calling the “*artes amandi*” has not been clearly defined by previous scholarship. Certainly, there is no generally accepted name for this body of texts. The term *ars amandi* has been used by Cesare Segre, Anna-Maria Finoli, and Alastair Minnis, but some critics stay closer to the title of Ovid’s poem with terms such as “arts d’aimer” (Reginald L. Hyatte) or “*Arts of Love*” (Thomas Hoenegger).¹ Others provide more elaborate names, from “love handbook,” “erotodidactic genre” and “didactic love literature” (Vered Lev Keenan), to “le genre que constitue l’enseignement d’amour” and “les écrits didactiques traitant de l’amour” (Alfred Karnein).² Beyond the issue of terminology, of course, is the question of which texts belong in this category. A conservative view of the canon would include only the *De*

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amore of Andreas Capellanus and the vernacular adaptations of Ovid’s Ars amatoria. A more liberal view, however, could include every text that even vaguely refers to instruction in love or rules for love.

What distinguishes the core group of artes amandi from the other two groups of texts mentioned above is the use of the didactic as the primary mode of discourse. The didactic mode calls for specialized uses of literary elements such as point of view, structure, diction, and tone, as Alexander Dalzell explains:

Didactic poetry always implies the existence of a student, someone interested in the subject being taught. [...] This is not poetry to be overheard: it demands the reader’s direct involvement. Didactic poetry, like lyric poetry, is first-person poetry in the sense that the poet speaks with his own voice; but the listener is expected to identify not with the speaker, but with the person addressed.  

The narrator may be eager or reluctant, but he always presents himself as experienced and wise, in contrast with the young and inexperienced reader (who is typically addressed in the second person). There is frequent use of terms related to instruction: school, learning, commandments, precepts, etc. Focusing on diction for a moment, we can even draw some distinctions between the practical and theoretical strains of didactic discourse: the former often makes use of imperatives and hortatory subjunctives, whereas the latter is more likely to use passive constructions and declarative statements, and, in addition to the words listed above, we find terms like “demonstrate” and “explain.” Yet both types of narrators speak to their students in a persuasive, direct manner, fully conscious of their duty to educate their pupils and set them on the path of knowledge. These discursive features cross boundaries of genre and materia, and yet, when they are combined with the topic of love, they give us the artes amandi.

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In this core group of artes amandi, the first texts we will consider are the Old French adaptations of Ovid’s Ars amatoria: Maître Elie’s Ci comence de Ovide de arte, the Art d’amours of Jacques d’Amiens, the Art d’amours of Guiart, the anonymous Clef d’amors, and the anonymous prose Art d’amours. All five texts were written in the thirteenth century, and all five are “translations” in the loosest sense of the term—they follow Ovid where it is convenient, but they do not hesitate to stray from him if it will further their own agenda. In addition, all five texts transport Ovid to thirteenth-century France. They vernacularize him in both language and content, turning his Latin into Old French, and replacing his scenes of classical Rome with scenes of medieval France. But the similarities stop there. The five adaptations differ greatly in scope, structure, proposed intention, and in the nature of their additions to Ovid’s text. The following discussion will focus on these differences.

Maître Elie’s Ci comence de Ovide de arte (early 13th c.) is a 1,305-line adaptation of books one and two of Ovid’s Ars (with an emphasis on book one). The name “Maître Elie” comes from the beginning of the text, where the writer, claiming authorship for himself in a way that echoes the introduction of Ovid’s Ars, invites his readers to listen to his instruction on love:

Entendez tuit, grant et petit,
Ce que maistre Elie vos dit,
En l’escouter avroiz delit
Et en l’aprendre grant profit.
S’aucuns est qui ne saiche l’art
D’amors, en cest livre regart,
Lise et apreigne. (Ins. 1-7) 4

(Listen, great and small, to what I, master Elie, am telling you; in listening, you will have great delight, and in learning, great profit. If there is anyone who does not know the art of love, he should look into this book, read, and learn.)

4 Ed. Finoli; my translation. Note Maître Elie’s allusion to Horace’s “aut prodesse … aut delectare” (Ars poetica 333) in lines 3-4.
Continuing this Ovidian introduction, Elie mentions the importance of art, and outlines the threepart structure of his work: how to find a girl, how to win her over, and how to keep her. The reader that Elie addresses is the thirteenth-century French equivalent of Ovid’s reader—he roams the streets of Paris looking for a girl, and when he finds her, his main concern is how to evade her husband so they can spend time together. The advice is purely practical. It is true that, in his adaptation, Elie, as Lawrence B. Blonquist observes, “retained very little of the flavor of the original,” but the difference is mainly due to omission, not alteration. The only significant departure from Ovid is the six-line religious ending Elie appended to the text.

Like Maître Elie before him, Jacques d’Amiens (also called Jakes d’Amiens) begins his *Art d’amours* (c. 1250) in a characteristically Ovidian fashion:

* Cil qui ne set les ars d’amours,
* Et d’amours suèfle les dolours,
* Moi lise, si pora savoir,
* Comment on en puet joie avoir,
* Comment on s’i doit maintenir,
* Comment on s’i doit contenir,
* C’au conquerre convient grant grant sens,
* Art et engien et grant porpens,
* Ainsi que les nés sunt menées
* Par mer, par art, et compassées.  (Ins. 1-10)  

(He who does not know the art of love, and who suffers the pains of love, should read me, so that they can know how one can derive joy from love, how one should behave in love, and how one must keep love. To attain this, great wisdom is required, art and ingenuity and great intention, just as ships are guided by the sea, by art, and by compasses.)

All the prefatory Ovidian elements are present, albeit in abbreviated form: the initial address to everyone who does not know the art of love, the outline of a three-part structure, and the justification for classifying love as an *ars*. But Jacques does not follow Ovid for long. When he comes to his discussion of how to approach a girl, Jacques gives us a series of model dialogues

6 Ed. Finoli; my translation.
on the subject. It is tempting to see these dialogues as an echo of Andreas Capellanus; however, there is no evidence of direct influence.\textsuperscript{7} It is more likely that both authors are drawing from the same tradition, since, as Karnein points out, “André n’est pas l’inventeur de ce procédé.”\textsuperscript{8} What is more interesting for our purposes are the differences between the dialogues of Jacques and Andreas. These differences are summarized by Hoenneger:

Andreas Capellanus’ protagonists rely predominantly or even exclusively on rational arguments, i.e. they appeal to the ratio, and I do not think that there are many men who have found Andreas’ approach useful. [...] Jacques d’Amiens, by contrast, has his interlocutors appeal to the heart and to the emotions. Andreas’ men, to put it crudely, want to argue their ladies into bed, while those of Jacques d’Amiens rather trust in the persuasive power of a description of their love-suffering to arouse pity—which is seen as the first step towards love.\textsuperscript{9}

What Hoenneger is describing (with a clear preference for Jacques over Andreas) is the difference between practical and theoretical discussions of love. Jacques may depart from the structure of Ovid’s text in order to expand on the doctrine, but in doing so, he remains faithful to the type of advice that we have come to expect from the Ovidian tradition.

Guiart’s Art d’amours (c. 1280) is the shortest of the medieval adaptations of Ovid. The text is only 256 lines long, but it includes adaptations of both Ovid’s Ars (books one and two) and Ovid’s Remedia. Guiart begins, as Elie and Jacques begin, in Ovidian fashion. He appeals to his readers to listen if they wish to learn the art of love, and then outlines his own three-part structure: how to win a girl, what to do when you have won her, and how to get rid of her when you are done. It is at this point that he significantly departs from Ovid, proposing that the usefulness of his text lies not in the art but in the remedy. Some people, he says, may disapprove of this poem because it contains a discussion of both good (i.e. the remedy for love) and evil (i.e.}

\textsuperscript{7} For a full discussion of the possible influence of Andreas on Jacques d’Amiens, see Karnein, 511-15.
\textsuperscript{8} Karnein, 513.
\textsuperscript{9} Hoenneger, 79.
the art of love). But they would be wrong, Guiart says, because a discussion of evil can be propaedeutic to a discussion of good:

Aristote en son livre nos aprent a savoir
Qu’un clerç puet par fallace son amie decevoir,
En cel mêisme livre aprent a parcevoir
De cele fausseté a conoistre le voir. (Ins. 21-24)\(^\text{10}\)

(In Aristotle’s book, he shows how “clerics” use
All kinds of cunning craft when they wish to abuse
Their ladies. But he hopes, thereby, to help us choose
An upright life, untouched by such deceit and ruse.)

After this appeal to authority, Guiart explains his intentions:

Or vos voil je premier mostrer la fausseté,
La vanité du monde et la desloiauté;
Puis determinerai apres la verité,
Coment on doit servir le roi de majesté. (Ins. 25-28)

(Likewise I too shall strive, at first, to represent
The falseness of this world, on idle folly bent.
Then, lastly, I shall prove that life, in truth, is meant
To serve God’s majesty, and in His grace be spent.)

Guiart’s advice is for the lover who is quick to move from speech to action. The lover should court the lady, and, as soon as he can be alone with her, he should force himself on her. If she is worthy, Guiart says, marry her, and consider yourself honored in the sight of God. If she is not, let her go, and proceed to the remedy for love. The initial remedies that Guiart provides are from Ovid’s *Remedia*, but if these fail—as Guiart seems to think they will—the lover should contemplate his sinful ways, confess, and make peace with God. The poem ends with a prayer to the Virgin (the anonymous *Des cinq vegiles*, which Guiart appears to have tacked on to the end

\(^{10}\) Ed. Finoli. The translation is from Norman Shapiro, *The Comedy of Eros: Medieval French Guides to the Art of Love* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971). As Shapiro notes, the mention of Aristotle in this passage is probably a reference to an apocryphal text (128).
of his text) effectively securing his role as the most anti-Ovidian of all the adapters of Ovid’s *Ars*.\(^{11}\)

The author of *La Clef d’amors* (c. 1280) is the only one to provide a narrative framework for his amatory treatise. The poem begins with an invocation to the God of Love, after which the narrator, instead of setting out to teach, gives us a description of his beloved. While the other *magistri amoris* merely hint at their own experience with love, this narrator makes it clear that he is a lover first, and a teacher second. As the narrator is enveloped in thoughts of his lady, the God of Love appears, speaks to the narrator about the failings of previous treatises on the art of love, and orders the narrator to learn the art of love and write a treatise of his own. The rest of the treatise follows the basic structure of Ovid’s text quite faithfully and even includes the advice to women found in Book 3 of Ovid’s *Ars* (which is usually omitted in these medieval adaptations). Yet there are numerous details that give us a sense of the distinct character of this adaptation. For example, when this narrator tells his readers to look for women in noble circles, he makes a point to mention that noble ladies are actually *easier* to win over than ladies of a lower class (Ins. 249-56). He suggests such devious ruses as using an onion to conjure up fake tears (Ins. 1097-1100), and seeking women not just at dances and tournaments but at Holy Mass as well (Ins. 425-46). Including himself among Love’s pupils, he describes their subservience with a humility that is anything but Ovidian:

\[
\text{Amour nous a si doctrinez} \\
\text{que touz i sommes enclinez,} \\
\text{et les fames comme les hommes:} \\
\text{deus soit quelz pelerins nous sommes. (Ins.557-60)}^{12}
\]

(Love has taught us so well that we are all humbled, both the women and the men: we are pilgrims, as are they.)

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\(^{12}\) Ed. Finoli; my translation.
In the *Clef d’amors*, the real *magister* is not Ovid, or the narrator, but Love himself.

Of all the French *artes amandi*, the anonymous prose *Art d’amours* is the most didactic adaptation. The text includes all three books of Ovid’s *Ars*; however, critics generally agree that the adaptation of book three was added by a later author (between 1268 and 1300). The adaptations of books one and two are dated to between 1214 and 1233, which places them at the earliest point of this tradition, alongside the text of Maître Elie.\(^\text{13}\) Book one begins not with the introductory formula we know from Ovid, but with a conventional *accessus* to Ovid’s *Ars amatoria*:

> Trois choses furent pour lesquelles Ovide fu esmeüs a faire ce livre. La premiere cause fu pour montrer sa science, la seconde pour faire açavoir la legiereté de son jouvent, la tierce pour enseigner ses amis et ses compengnons en l’art d’amours et a avoir les amours aus dames et aus damoiselles. (Ins. 1-5)\(^\text{14}\)

(There were three reasons that moved Ovid to write this book. The first reason was to demonstrate his knowledge, the second was to reveal the fickleness of his youth, the third was to teach his friends and companions the art of love, or to teach them how to win the love of women and young girls.)

According to the fiction of this *accessus*, Ovid saw that young men were falling into despair and committing suicide due to their ignorance in the art of love, and he saw it as his duty to remedy the situation.\(^\text{15}\) The rest of the *accessus* is a discussion of Ovid’s *materia* and the structure of his work. After this introduction, the narrator switches to first-person narration to tell us that he could have written a more accurate translation, but he did not, because “science ne vault rien

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\(^{13}\) Blonquist (ix-xi) discusses the issue of dating and authorship.


\(^{15}\) Two of the *accessus* to Ovid’s *Ars amatoria* mentioned in Chaper 1 (*In principio* and *Circa hunc auctorem*) also speculate on Ovid’s reasons for composing the *Ars*. The *In principio accessus*, for example, contains this statement: “Causa huius intentionis talis est: cum videret Ovidius amatores propter amoris impericiam quosdam ad laqueos, quosdam ad precipicia, quosdam autem ad diversa pericula compelli, idcirco ne amplius talia paciantur eos in amore peritos reddere intendit” (“The cause of this intention is such: when Ovid saw lovers, forced on account of ignorance of love, some to snares, some to precipices, some to diverse dangers, for that reason, lest they suffer such things any longer, he intends to make them skilled in love”; my translation).
que chacun scet et puet scavoir et regarder‖ (knowledge [...] that is readily accessible to everyone is valued little; Ins. 23-24). This tantalizing statement tells us much about the status of Ovid as an auctor, as well as about the possible intentions of this author, who wishes to maintain the prestige and the recondite character of the Latin text even while translating it into the vernacular.

We learn even more about the way this author read Ovid in the next section, which is an extended discussion on the status of love as an art. After a brief summary of the various ways that love can be learned, the author outlines the three types of art: mechanical, liberal, and non-liberal. Love, for this author, is in the third category; more specifically, it is a subset of this third category: the non-prohibited non-liberal arts. Some non-liberal arts, such as sorcery or gambling, are prohibited to everyone or, at least, to the clergy. But other non-liberal arts, such as love, are not prohibited. The author gives two reasons why the art of love is not prohibited:

tel puet lire et oïr l’art d’amours qui, s’il ne l’eüst leü, ja n’eüst talent ne volanté d’amér; et si n’est mie defendue du tout pour ce que aucuns qui avoient esté navrés d’amours ne savoient querre leur santé ne leur guarison, si en vernoient a droite mort et en villains pechiés contre nature. (Ins. 105-09)

(The first is that some, if they never read about the art of love, would never have the desire or the will to love. Another reason is that some who are heartbroken over love would not know how to seek their health or their cure and thus would go straight to their death from it in their wicked sins against nature.)

After this detailed introduction, the author begins his translation of Ovid’s text. However, as we were told in the introduction, the translation is anything but straightforward. Excerpts of Ovid’s text, translated into prose, are followed (or sometimes preceded) by commentary on those excerpts. The commentary is haphazard and often only tenuously connected to the passage in question. Along with notes on Ovid’s text and explanations of Ovid’s argument, the author includes proverbial sayings and contemporary songs, as well as excursions into such topics as
mythology and contemporary French customs. The overall effect is that the prose *Art d’amours*, in addition to giving us a glimpse into the methods of writing a commentary on a poem such as Ovid’s *Ars*, shows us, more than any other adaptation, what love looks like when treated as a serious school subject in thirteenth-century France.

Although the prose *Art d’amours* belongs to the practical (Ovidian) tradition, it can also function as a bridge between that tradition and the theoretical (Capellanian) tradition. By producing a commentary on Ovid’s text alongside his translation, the author leans in the direction of the theoretical. The fact that the text is in prose, of course, only highlights this point. The epitome of the theoretical *ars amandi*, however, is Andreas Capellanus’s *De amore* (late 12th c.). Andreas’s text is both an extension of the Ovidian tradition and the origin of a new tradition. His proposed intention—to teach young Walter about the art of love—essentially mirrors that of Ovid, and, as critics have shown, Andreas’s three-part structure calls to mind the structure of Ovid’s *Ars* and *Remedia* (minus book three of the *Ars*). Furthermore, Andreas, like Ovid, and like the adaptors of Ovid, uses the didactic as his primary mode of discourse. The dialogues, which constitute the majority of Book One, are in the service of the didactic. Their interlocutors are nameless prototypes, and the situations of these characters (such as age or marital status) can shift at any time. The narrative moments in the dialogues serve the same function, and the brief Arthurian narrative at the end of Book One exists solely as context for the presentation of the rules of love. Yet Andreas sets his treatise apart from the other *artes amandi* by including sections on such issues as the definition of love, the etymology of love, and the effect of love. The focus of Andreas’s treatise, even as he gives us the rules for love and the judgments on love, is not on prescription but on description.

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Richard of Fournival’s *Consaus d’amours* (mid-13th c.) balances the prescriptive and descriptive elements while still remaining primarily theoretical. Richard belongs in the Capellanian tradition not because he is translating or adapting Andreas, but because he was so clearly influenced by Andreas’s text. In a sense, the *Consaus d’amours* is the *De amore* stripped of all its contradictions and digressions. Richard begins his epistolary prose treatise by addressing his sister (who, although she may be no more real than Walter, is certainly more believable). His sister has requested his advice on love, and Richard feels compelled to grant it. He tells her that the treatise will be divided into two parts: first, he will discuss the general nature of love, and second, he will teach her about temporal love. The definition of love that Richard gives us calls to mind the *passio innata* of Andreas: “Amours en general n’est autre cose fors que ardeurs de pensée ki gouverne le volenté du cuer” (“In general, love is nothing more than a fervor of the mind, which directs the desires of the heart”; § 3). Richard does not gloss his terms, as Andreas does; instead, he divides love into evil love and good love, and proceeds to praise the ennobling qualities of the latter. We might expect Richard’s good/evil subdivisions to divide between the spiritual and the temporal, but they do not. In fact, Richard is quite clear in his insistence that there can be virtue in temporal love, even in the type that arises from innate desire (*volenté enracinée*; § 8). We are far from the caustic ranting of Andreas’s *reprobatio* here, as Richard tells his sister to experience love while she’s still young:

> je ne sai nule raison par coi on doie blamer amours, mais que li amours nostre segnour n’en soit laissié et c’on ne face riens contre autrui et que c’on die li jus des joumes gens est biaus. Et je vous lo, si con Ovides dist que vous jués endementiers que vous avés le tans de juer. (§ 14)

(I know of no reason to condemn love, so long as the love of our Lord be not forsworn, nor any ill be done to another. Whatever others may say, I hold that youthful dalliance is a pleasing thing; and I urge you, as does Ovid, to play while you yet have time.)

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The advice he gives is gentle yet thorough; Richard tells his sister precisely which type of love she should follow, and provides in-depth discussions of such topics as how love is conceived, the three stages of love, and the way to recognize sincerity in a lover. Richard concludes with a brief narrative, reminiscent of the description of Love’s palace in Andreas (dialogue E), where he relates how he was allowed to see the torments inflicted on both those who gave into love too easily and those who refused to give into love at all. What is interesting about Richard’s version of this story, however, is the fact that he attributes the vision not to the God of Love but to the Christian God. In Richard’s treatise, the temporal and the spiritual are in harmony with each other. The God of Love holds court on Ascension Day, and Richard closes his letter by appealing to the Christian God on behalf of his sister, who he hopes will find true love (*boine amour*; § 45).

Drouart’s *Livre d’amours* (c. 1290) is a careful rendering of Andreas’s treatise into Old French verse. A great deal of the scholarship on Drouart is focused on one line, a description of Drouart’s own reading of Andreas, in which he tells us that upon reading Andreas, “j’en commençai a rire” (51). Based on their knowledge of modern French, and their eagerness to validate their own ironic readings of Andreas, critics initially read “rire” as “to laugh,” as if Drouart found the text utterly hilarious. However, as Barbara Nelson Sargent points out, the term could also mean “to smile approvingly,” and it is this translation which makes more sense, given the fact that Drouart turns Andreas’s text not into an ironic condemnation of love, but into

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a practical manual on love, written to please an audience of close friends. Drouart abbreviates much of Andreas’s content, suppresses the narrative moments, and omits all mentions of Andreas and Walter. However, Drouart keeps many of the essential elements (even if they appear in abbreviated form): the definition of love, the dialogues, the discussion of gold-diggers, the advice on love as it pertains to clergymen and nuns, the rules of love, the judgments of love, and the condemnation of love. It is this last section—Drouart’s translation of Andreas’s *reprobatio*—that serves as the best evidence for Sargent’s translation of “rire,” mentioned above. Drouart deflates Andreas’s hyperbolic tirade against love and women, advocating the kind of love that Andreas describes as *amor purus*, and restricting the condemnation of women so that it includes only the “mauvaises fames” (and not the “bonnes dames et glorieuses”). Sargent explains how Drouart’s translation of Andreas’s third book affects our reading of the text as a whole:

What Drouart thought of the *De amore*, he tells us at length and repeatedly. He, a clerk, a medieval Christian, found the treatise pleasing (“tant par me plot”), pleasing not because it ironically condemned “courtly love” but because, in Books I and II, it advocated that love. Drouart’s “j’en commençai a rire” expresses his initial reaction not of amusement but of enjoyment on hearing the first lines. What is more, he expects other clerks to enjoy the book too, “car assez i a de delit” (7557)—not information, not edification, not a Christian message cunningly concealed, but entertainment. Where the entertainment fails, where a Christian message is explicitly conveyed, Drouart shows in the clearest way that he does not heed it.

In Drouart’s reaction to Andreas, we have a fascinating example of the way one author of an *ars amandi* read another author in the same tradition. And beyond this core group of *artes amandi*—whether Capellanian, like those of Andreas and Drouart, or Ovidian, like those of Elie and Jacques d’Amiens—lie texts that occupy a peripheral position in relation to the *artes amandi*. These are texts that draw only selectively from that tradition, and are thus one step

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21 Sargent, 540.
removed from it. The peripheral texts discussed below are the anonymous Occitan *Cort d’amor*, Guillaume de Lorris’s and Jean de Meun’s *Roman de la Rose*, John Gower’s *Confessio Amantis*, Aurigenia’s *Facetus*, Boncompagno da Signa’s *Rota Veneris*, and Richard de Fournival’s *Bestiare d’amours*.

The Occitan *Cort d’amor* (late 12th c.) presents us with an interesting fusion of multiple branches of the “court of love” tradition. The court of love, in this text, is simultaneously an allegorical court (inhabited solely by personifications), a feudal court (Amor is presented as a ruler, with his own barons and even his own jongleurs), and a judicial court (where judgments are made and complaints are heard). There are also didactic moments in the work, such as in the prologue, where the author implies that his poem offers a lesson to its readers:

\[\text{Que lo be que lo romanz di fasson las dompnas e·l drut fi e gardon se de la folia que·l romanz deveda e castia. (Ins. 13-16)}^{22}\]

(Let ladies and faithful lovers do the good which the romance prescribes and keep themselves from the folly which the romance forbids and censures.)

And later in the text, both Cortesa d’Amor and the Baillessa d’Amor give speeches in which they instruct members of the court in the art of love.

In contrast with the *Cort d’amor*, the *Roman de la rose* explicitly presents itself as an *ars amandi*: “\text{li Romanz de la Rose, l ou l’art d’Amors est tote enclose}” (“the \text{Romance of the Rose, in which the art of love is contained; Ins. 37-38 [31]}.{^{23}\text{ Yet the didactic elements often take second place to the narrative elements, at least until the narrator meets Amors, who demands}}


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fear and provides instruction. Amors uses didactic language as he prepares to teach the lover his commandments:

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li mestres pert sa poine toute
quant li deciples qui escoute
ne met son cuer el retenir,
si qu’il l’en puise sovenir. (Ins. 2051-54)
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(A master wastes his effort when the disciple does not turn his heart toward retaining what he hears so that he might remember it. [59])

After the departure of Amors, the text vacillates between didactic and narrative discourse. The narrative discourse provides the link between the didactic moments in the text (particularly in Guillaume’s *Rose*); or, to put it another way, the didactic moments are enclosed in a narrative framework (as in Jean’s *Rose*). Indeed, the text can be read either way—with the narrative or the didactic as the focal point—just as the text both is and is not about love. The narrator is given instruction on love, but he is also given instruction on the perils of love, as well as on other topics such as friendship, wealth, and fortune. The very worth of a “school of love” is called into question by the comments of La Vielle, who tells Bel Accueil:

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Bele iere, et jenne et nice et foie,
n’onc ne fui d’Amors a escole,
ou l’en leüst la theorique,
mes je sai tout par la practique. (Ins. 12771-74)
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(I was young and beautiful, foolish and wild, and had never been to a school of love where they read in the theory, but I know everything by practice. [222])

Yet, near the end of her speech, La Vielle acknowledges the studious nature of her pupil, Bel Accueil, and tells him that if he keeps up his study of this subject, she will grant him a “lire congé” (“license to teach”; ln. 13476 [233]). These vacillations and contradictions function to provide opportunities for multiple readings. The *Rose* may be on the periphery of the *ars
amandi, but the extent of its distance from the core group of texts depends on the way in which the text is read.

Gower’s *Confessio Amantis* (14th c.) does not set itself up as an *ars amandi*, but it does state that the main subject of the text is love:

> Whan the prologe is so despended,  
> This bok schal afterward ben ended  
> Of love, which doth many a wonder  
> And many a wys man hath put under. (Ins. 73-76) 

Genius, as the priest of Venus, is expected to instruct Amans not only in the vices but in love as well. The text exemplifies that dual purpose, including a discussion of love in almost every book while avoiding a direct discussion of the sin of lechery. As with the *Roman de la Rose*, *Confessio Amantis* both is and is not about love. A striking example of this is given to us in book seven, where Genius strays from his discussion of the seven deadly sins to instruct Amans on politics and education. At the opening of that seventh book, Genius admits his hesitance to broach this subject—he is, after all, the priest of love. What is he doing talking about Aristotle and Alexander? He continues anyway, only to be told, over 5000 lines later, that Amans can’t stop thinking about love. Thus the instruction in book seven, like that of the *Confessio* as a whole, is bracketed by the subject of love. Genius may not provide specific instruction in love, at least not the kind of instruction we are accustomed to read about in Ovid and Andreas, but the text is clearly dominated by didactic discourse, and the subject of love is never far from the readers’ (or Amans’) mind.

*Aurigenia’s Facetus* (12th c.) is a Latin treatise on courtliness. The narrator sets out to instruct his readers in proper courtly behavior, appearance, and, of course, in the subject of love.

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The section on love dominates the treatise, and it even circulated as a separate text—a condensed version of Ovid’s *Ars* and *Remedia*, attributed to Ovid himself. The text thus serves as evidence of the popularity of the tradition of the Ovidian *ars amandi*, and of the ease with which Ovid’s text was summarized, excerpted, and inserted into other texts. At the other end of the spectrum, we have Boncompagno da Signa’s *Rota Veneris* (13th c.) and Richard of Fournival’s *Bestiare d’amours* (13th c.), two texts that could each be in a category of their own. The *Rota Veneris* is a combination of the *ars amandi* and the *ars dictaminis*—a collection of model love letters, which, according to the fiction of the text, were sanctioned by Venus herself. The *Bestiare d’amours* is a curious combination of a bestiary, an *ars amandi*, and a love complaint. Richard of Fournival draws associations between the characteristics of love and the characteristics of animals, blending traditions in order to describe the conventional aspects of love in unconventional terms.

Beyond the hazy realm of the peripheral *artes amandi*, we have the final category: texts that use *ars amandi* only as a topos. These can be divided into two subcategories: the Ovidian and the non-Ovidian. The first subcategory, quite simply, consists of those texts that mention Ovid in his role as *praecceptor amoris*. In the twelfth-century *Concilium Romarici Montis*, for example, the instruction provided in Ovid’s *Ars amatoria* is referred to as “praecepcta Ovidii, doctoris egregii” (“the precepts of Ovid, illustrious teacher”; ln. 27). And in *Carmina Burana* 105, Cupid mentions Ovid in his lament for the art of love:

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Artes amatorie iam non instruuntur
a Nasone tradite passim pervertuntur;
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nam si quis istis utitur, more modernorum
turpiter hac assuetudine morum. (stanza 7)²⁹

(Instruction is not now given in the arts of love handed down by Ovid, those arts are widely debased. For if anyone employs them as present-day men commonly do, he basely misuses them because of this trend in behavior.)

Also in the *Carmina Burana*, we find an example of the non-Ovidian use of *ars amandi* as a literary topos. The first poem in the collection includes such phrases as “Veneris gymnasia” and “Cytheree scholam”—not explicitly Ovidian, but clearly related to the theme of a school of love.

Likewise, in Chrétien de Troyes’s *Cligès*, Alexander remarks:

S’Amors me chastie et menace
Por moi aprendre et enseignier,
Doi je mon mestre desdeignier?
Foux est qui son mestre desdeigne.
Ce qu’Amors m’aprent et enseigne
Doi je garder et maintenir,
Car tost m’en puet grant biens venir. (Ins. 678-84)³⁰

(If Love chastises and threatens me in order to teach and instruct me, am I to scorn my master? He who scorns his master is a fool. I ought to keep and retain the teachings and instructions love gives me. They might bring me great happiness.)

Alexander’s beloved, Soredamours, also makes use of this motif:

S’en ai esté molt a escole
Et soventes foiz losengiee,
Mes touz jorz m’en sui estrangiee,
Et sel me fait chier comparer
C’or en sai plus que bués d’arer. (Ins. 1024-28).

(Although I have attended Love’s school and often been the subject of his attentions, I stood always aloof. He makes me pay so dearly for my behavior that I now know more of loving than does an ox of plowing.)

The topos even appears, briefly, in Chaucer: “Love hath me taught no more of his art / But serve alwey and stinte for no wo” (“A Complaint to His Lady,” ln. 38).³¹

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These last few examples show us the pervasive nature of the *ars amandi*—it appears not only in didactic treatises but also in romance and lyric, and, as we have seen, even in such genres as the bestiary and the *ars dictaminis*. It is a type of literature, a subject matter, and a literary convention. And, despite the attempts of some translators to claim authorship for themselves, it is inseparable from its originator, Ovid.
Chapter 4:

Andreas Capellanus and the Sapiens Amans

Ovid’s *Ars amatoria* is the work of a love poet with epic aspirations. Eager to reinvigorate the classical love tradition and make a name for himself as a poet, Ovid exploited the framework of didactic literature to offer his readers a glimpse at a lover’s version of Roman society. He invented the figure of the praeceptor amoris, a figure that clearly resonated with medieval authors, who hailed Ovid as the authority on love. At the same time, however, Ovid’s *Ars amatoria* was being used in the medieval classroom to teach students Latin. In order to make the *Ars* (and other pagan literature) suitable for Christian reading, medieval educators focused on the ethical and educative potential of the text. In other words, although Ovid himself had subordinated *utile* to *dulce*, his medieval students were expected to focus on the *utile*. This is precisely what Andreas Capellanus did; in fact, going one step further, he wrote his own *ars amandi* in which *dulce* takes second place to *utile*.

If we find ourselves unclear as to what is *utile* in Andreas’s text, that is because it gradually changes over the course of the treatise. He opens with a *praefatio* that establishes him (albeit somewhat reluctantly) in the role of an educator, a role which, as we have seen, carries a dual responsibility: to teach a subject matter and to use this subject matter to indoctrinate students into the society’s ethical codes. In Book One, Andreas begins his explication of the subject of love as if love itself were a text to be interpreted, and in doing so, sets out to construct an ethical reading of this “text.” Andreas’s “ethical reading” here takes the form of an attempt (ultimately unsuccessful, as it turns out) to unite *amor* with *sapientia*, producing the figure of the *sapiens amans*. When Andreas runs into problems that complicate his ethical reading—problems that are, for the most part, reminiscent of the tensions between love and society that
Ovid resolved by asserting the supremacy of love—he makes no effort to suppress the contradictions or to provide hasty solutions. In fact, he creates the men and women of the dialogues to help him analyze these problems, but in doing so, he ends up demonstrating that an ethical reading of love is ultimately impossible. What we learn from Book One, in short, is that love is unteachable in ethical terms. And Andreas, faced with the choice between what would appear to be his primary function (to teach love) and his secondary function (to teach ethics), ultimately moves toward the latter. After having provided his students with Book Two in order to complete his discussion of the sapiens amans, he appends Book Three, divorcing amans from sapiens in the hope that his students will do the same.

Obviously, this reading of Andreas necessitates a degree of trust in the sincerity of our author. Despite the long tradition of ironic and humorous readings of the De amore, I believe that the evidence for such interpretations is weak and unconvincing, and that we have more to gain by taking Andreas seriously. The readings that argue for his insincerity tend to emerge from an uneasiness about Andreas’s work, a feeling that he cannot possibly be sincere in the first two books if he is sincere in the last (and vice versa). Some critics solve the problem by dismissing the third book as an insincere gesture towards a church audience (John Jay Parry), or by arguing that the first two books are insincere in their celebration of love (D.W. Robertson, Jr.; Alfred Karnein; Paolo Cherchi), or, in some extreme cases, by insisting that all three books are a joke (Michael D. Cherniss, Betsey Bowden).  

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Donald A. Monson explains, is that they attempt to turn an inconsistent treatise into a unified text by glossing over anything that does not fit:

It is the search for unity which has led modern scholars to seize upon certain aspects of the *De amore* and to generalize from them, denying in the process the existence of other important aspects. Irony has become one of the major mechanisms of that denial. There is no doubt that Christian moralization exists in the *De amore*, and not only in the third book; playful and provocative eroticism in the Ovidian tradition is certainly also present, and there may well be a fair amount of wordplay, humor, and irony, intentional as well as observable, scattered throughout the treatise. But no one has yet demonstrated convincingly the presence of any of these running systematically throughout the work.²

Admirable as it may be, the search for unity in Andreas’s text is precisely what has led scholars astray. And the ironic readings pose particular problems for readers, as Monson notes: “If readers have been put into an ironic frame of mind in the course of reading the first two books, it is difficult to see how they could avoid carrying some of the same expectation into the third book as well.”³ Peter L. Allen makes a similar argument about the difficulty of reading the *De amore* (and Jean de Meun’s *Rose*) ironically:

Such readings of the *De amore* and the second *Roman de la Rose* are not surprising, since the texts are themselves fragmented; but they do not fully represent the reader’s experience. They ignore the fact that the rest of the text still exists: as with the rhetorical device of *praeteritio*, simply contradicting a remark one has made does not strike it from memory, and may in fact serve to reaffirm its importance. Furthermore, readings that emphasize one aspect of the text over the other ignore the structural unity of the treatises themselves.⁴

As Monson and Allen make clear, the difficulty with these ironic readings is that they demand too much from the reader, and only offer half of the text in return. Moreover, critics who interpret the entire *De amore* as a joke end up creating similar difficulties for readers, since the passages that these critics interpret as humorous are unsystematically scattered through the

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³ Monson, 136.
treatise and dependent on a very subtle sort of wordplay that has no rhetorical parallel among Andreas’s contemporaries. What all of these ironic and humorous readings share is a desire to explain away the inconsistencies rather than understand them. For example, Cherniss writes: “[Andreas] apparently did not take the work seriously enough to make it wholly coherent and consistent; his casual approach suggests, not a serious philosophical or practical purpose, but rather a desire to amuse his readers.” Faced with a complicated and inconsistent treatise, and unwilling to admit that our author could be capable of writing anything but the most polished and coherent prose, Cherniss resorts to the argument that Andreas must be joking.

But Andreas is not joking. And despite Cherniss’s confidence in Andreas’s authorial capabilities, we have to admit that some of the inconsistencies in the text could very well be charged to our author’s account, either because he had trouble writing the text, or because, just possibly, what we have is actually an unfinished project. We should also recognize, as Monson does, that if Andreas really did set out to write a systematic treatise on love, he gave himself an impossible task:

If we take the treatise as a whole at face value, there is a certain incongruity, indeed, a certain irony, inherent in Andreas’s ostensible project: on the one hand, to systematize the thematic material of the vernacular love poetry and, on the other hand, to reconcile the poetic themes with Christianity and with Ovid. In the first place, the poetic themes are full of inconsistencies and thus ultimately unsystematizable, for the simple reason that they are not philosophy but poetry.

In light of all the problems critics have encountered when trying to interpret De amore, we might be tempted to follow John W. Baldwin, who admits that he has “abandoned the search for

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5 “The existence of an important and neglected medieval clerical tradition of humorous, satirical, parodic, and erotic literature, including a fair amount of punning and wordplay, is undeniable. But as Jean-Charles Payen (pp. 50-52) has pointed out, the jokes and puns that we encounter in the poetry of the Goliards, the most visible strand of this tradition, are usually much more obvious and accessible than most of what Bowden and her followers see in Andreas. With the Goliards you do not have to look for double entendres, for, indeed, you cannot avoid them” (Monson 155-56). See also Jean-Charles Payen, “Un ensenhamen trop précoce: l’art d’aimer d’André le Chapelain” in Mittelalterbilder aus neuer Perspektive, eds. Ernstpeter Ruhe and Rudolf Behrens (Munich: Fink, 1985), 43-58.
6 Cherniss, 226-27.
7 Monson, 163.
overarching consistency,” and who reads the text as an encyclopedia in which “the parts […] are
greater than the whole.” Baldwin’s approach does, in fact, produce useful results. But it is also
true that, despite all the contradictions and the inconsistencies, there is a thematic and stylistic
uniformity in Andreas’s text that makes us want to read the treatise as a coherent whole. Rather
than attempting to “solve” the text by explaining away the contradictions, we should attempt to
understand the way those contradictions function within the treatise. The first step in this
process is to take a close look at Andreas’s preface, which, despite its apparent conventionality,
actually tells us a great deal about Andreas and his De amore.

Andreas and Walter

Andreas’s preface has not received much attention from scholars, especially if you set
aside all the discussions which do nothing more than identify the literary conventions that
Andreas uses. W.T.H. Jackson, for example, identifying Andreas’s preface as “a typical
introduction to a work of this kind,” briefly mentions Andreas’s use of the affected modesty
topos and then proceeds to a discussion of “the actual treatise,” which, according to Jackson,
begins with the accessus in Book One. It is true that, as an overview of the treatise, Andreas’s
preface leaves much to be desired. Andreas gives us no indication that what we are about to read
is an overly complex, contradictory, multi-generic, mostly-theoretical treatise on the nature of
love. And he makes no reference to the misogynistic reprobation of love that we find in Book
Three (although, as Robertson has pointed out, there are hints of condemnation even in the

9 “The De Amore of Andreas Capellanus and the Practice of Love at Court,” Romanic Review 49 (1958): 244. On
the “affected modesty” topos see Ernst Robert Curtius, European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages, trans.
But neither the conventionality of the preface nor its failure to provide us with a concise summary of the entire De amore are reasons to dismiss the preface as uninteresting, unoriginal, or ineffectual. Moreover, the preface is, whether we like it or not, the first textual unit that the reader will encounter in Andreas’s treatise, and as such, it substantially contributes to our reading of the text as a whole. If we pause to consider the preface in more detail, we find that Andreas uses it to accomplish four main goals: 1) establish a relationship with the reader; 2) classify the text as both an ars amandi and a Latin prose treatise; 3) give us a preview of some of the tensions produced by an analysis of love; and 4) introduce the concepts of prudence and caution.

In order to establish a relationship with the reader, Andreas dedicates his treatise to a didactic addressee, Walter, who provides Andreas with an excuse to write in the second person. Ovid, of course, also wrote in the second person, but he did so by addressing his audience directly: “dum licet et loris passim potes ire solutis, / elige cui dicas ‘tu mihi sola places’” (“While it is permitted and you can roam everywhere with loose reins, choose to whom you would say: ‘you alone please me’”; Ars 1.41). Andreas prefers an approach that is both more indirect and, potentially, more intimate. As the preface continues, we discover that Walter is a friend, but he is also young and naïve enough for Andreas to comfortably place him in the role of student. Walter’s recent encounter with love has caused so much visible suffering that Andreas

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10 “The Subject of the De Amore,” 147.
11 Peter Allen writes on the significance of literary convention (specifically for poets, but I would argue that this applies to Andreas as well): “As important to the text as its personal quality—though seemingly in contradiction to it—are its conventions, familiar stylistic techniques and motifs borrowed from pre-existing texts to evoke the emotions they wish to represent. This process of textual imitation performs the essential function of linking the work in question with a canonical group of poetic works. While this linking might, to a post-Romantic reader, seem to emphasize the artificial quality of the text, in fact it reminds the reader that the text is to be read as sincere. Each recognizable convention, from meter to verse-form to traditional imagery, is a signal to read the text in accordance with literary tradition—a tradition whose first requirement is to pretend that the poem means what it says” (“Ars Amandi,” 184-85).
feels compelled to offer instruction, even though Walter did not explicitly ask for advice. Obviously, Andreas could have fabricated this entire scenario. But we should not let this impede our understanding of the text. Whether or not Walter is a fictional construct, Andreas uses him to subtly guide our response to the text. He addresses the reader through Walter, placing the reader in the role of friend and naïve student, or at least making the reader a witness to what might appear to be a private conversation between Walter and his mentor, Andreas.

Although critics have, to a certain extent, been willing to view Walter as a rhetorical strategy, they have not been able to extend the same courtesy to Andreas’s use of the affected modesty topos. It is important to recognize, however, that an author can use literary conventions without necessarily being insincere or mocking those conventions, especially if that author lived in an age that did not share our modern concern with authorial originality. If we take Andreas seriously, and if we look beyond the mere identification of commonplaces to an analysis of how and why Andreas uses these conventions, we find that Andreas’s use of the affected modesty topos contributes to the didactic potential of the text, and to the indirectness established by his use of the didactic addressee. It is also important to note that, despite the Ovidian allusions in Andreas’s description of love, the classical antecedent for Andreas’s opening is not Ovid, but the prose rhetorical treatises of Cicero and Quintilian, who often make use of the convention of the didactic addressee to justify the ambitious task of composing a treatise on the art of rhetoric.13 The most interesting parallel can be found in the pseudo-Ciceronian Rhetorica ad Herennium, where the author begins by telling us that it was the voluntas of Gaius Herennius that led him to

13 Tore Janson traces this convention—the assertion by the author that the addressee had requested that the work be written—to Archimedes (Latin Prose Prefaces: Studies in Literary Conventions [Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1964]), but the more plausible model for Andreas is that of the Roman orators (whom Janson also discusses). The convention appears in the pseudo-Ciceronian Rhetorica ad Herennium and in Quintilian’s Institutio Oratoria, both of which were known in the Middle Ages (the latter was not known in full, but they did have Book One, which contains the preface). It also appears in Cicero’s De oratore and Cicero’s Orator, which were not known in the Middle Ages, but which lend weight to the pervasiveness of this convention among the Latin rhetorical treatises.
compose the text: “tua nos, Gai Herenni, voluntas commovit ut de ratione dicendi
conscriberemus, ne aut tua causa noluisse aut fugisse nos laborem putares” (“your desire, Gaius
Herennius, has spurred me to compose a work on the Theory of Public Speaking, lest you should
suppose that in a matter which concerns you I either lacked the will or shirked the labor”; 1.1).
There is no evidence that Andreas knew the ad Herennium specifically, but he is clearly writing
in the same tradition when he credits the production of this text not to Walter but to his own
affection for Walter: “Cogit me multum assidua tuae dilectionis instanta, Gualteri venerande
amice, ut meo tibi debeam famine propalare” (“My revered friend Walter, my most sedulous and
insistent affection for you compels me to publish for you in my own words”; P.1). The
difference, of course, is that Andreas is more explicit about his hesitancy to approach his subject
matter. What he is telling us in this preface is that if anyone disapproves of his text (and he is
sure that they might), the blame should go not to Andreas or Walter but to Andreas’s dilectio,
which is apparently so forceful that it can motivate the composition of an entire treatise. When
Andreas finally gets around to mentioning amor (which he does, but only after he mentions
Walter and dilectio), we might be left to wonder what exactly amor is capable of, if dilectio
(which is, surely, a less forceful emotion) can do so much.

Throughout the preface, the topic of discussion is amor, and more specifically, an amor
clearly influenced by Ovid’s Ars amatoria. Andreas’s use of phrases such as Veneris iacula,
 novum amoris militem, and Veneris servituti leave us no doubt as to the type of love that afflicts
Walter. At the same time, the structure of the preface, the conventions that Andreas uses, and
the authoritative yet hesitant persona that he creates for himself lead us back to the rhetoricians
and to all the seriousness implied in the task of writing an exhaustive prose treatise on a difficult

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15 All quotations from Andreas are from the bilingual edition of P.G. Walsh (Andreas Capellanus on Love [London:
Duckworth, 1982]). All translations are also from this edition, except where otherwise noted.
and complex subject. From the moment Andreas begins the De amore, there is an established tension between content and form, and this tension is mirrored in the conflict between Andreas’s own diletio (which leads him to write a treatise on love for Walter), and the prudentia that he expects of himself and Walter: “Quamvis igitur non multum videatur expediens huiusmodi rebus insistere, nec deceat quemquam prudentem huiusmodi vacare venatibus, tamen propter affectum quo tibi annector, tuae nullatenus valeo petitioni obstare” (“So though dwelling on such topics seems hardly advisable, and though the man of sense shows impropriety in making time for such hunting as this, the affection that binds us makes me utterly unable to oppose your request”; P.4).

Andreas attempts to balance these tensions by introducing the concept of caution: “quia luce clarius novi quod docto in amoris doctrina cautior tibi erit in amore proecessus, tuae prout potero curabo postulationi parere” (“I shall do my best to obey your demands because I realise more clearly than daylight that your progress in love will be more circumspect if you are learned in its lore”; P.4).

Andreas’s remark about caution is, in a sense, his thesis statement. After reading the entire treatise, readers might disagree that Andreas’s thesis statement is an accurate representation of the arguments made throughout the text, but that does not change the fact that he provides us with this statement in the first place. What is significant, however, is the question of what exactly Andreas means by this term. We can get some clues from the opening to Book Three, which appears to echo Andreas’s statement about prudentia (even though the term is not used): “Taliter igitur praesentem lege libellum, non quasi per ipsum quaerens amantium tibi assumere vitam, sed ut eius doctrina refectus et mulierum edoctus ad amandum animos provocare a tali provocacione abstinendo praemium consequaris aeternum et maiori ex hoc apud Deum merearis munere gloriari (“Read this little book, then, not as one seeking to take up the
life of a lover, but that, invigorated by the theory and trained to excite the minds of women to love, you may, by refraining from so doing, win an eternal recompense and thereby deserve a greater reward from God”; 3.2) If we read Andreas’s preface alongside the beginning of Book Three, we learn that the “cautious” behavior described in the preface is the ability to learn from love in order to avoid it (and thus rise higher in the eyes of God).

Another interpretation of “cautior” is provided by Robertson, who draws our attention to the definition of caution in “a popular florilegium of Andreas’ day” (the *Moralium dogma philosophorum*): “Cautio est discernere a uirtutibus uitia uirtutum speciem preferentia” (“Caution is the ability to distinguish vices displaying the appearance of virtues from actual virtues”; 1.A.3). Although Robertson does not pause to discuss the connection, it does provide us with useful insight into the interpretation of Andreas’s preface. The *Moralium* lists cautio as a subcategory of prudentia, which is defined as “discretionem rerum bonarum et malarum et utrarumque” (“the power of distinguishing good things and bad things from each other”; 1.A).

Both prudentia and cautio, then, are recognized as abilities of discernment, with prudentia applying to the discernment of good from bad and cautio applying to the discernment of vice from virtue. Neither definition reaches beyond the concept of ability to discuss action; in other words, although the *Moralium* may imply that there is an obvious course of action once someone has distinguished vice from virtue, it does not actually state, as Andreas does in Book Three, that the goal is to follow virtue. With this in mind, the cautio in Andreas’s preface can be read as ability, and not as action. It is not until Book Three that we find out what we should do with this

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16 For this passage, I have used the translation of Parry (*The Art of Courtly Love*). At this crucial moment in the text, Walsh forces the Latin to comply with the ironic interpretation of Andreas’s text by translating “refectus” as “recreation.” “Re-create” would seem, of course, to be a sufficiently literal rendering of “re-facio,” but the English noun “recreation” carries with it playful connotations that are not present in the Latin “refectus.”

17 Preface to Chaucer, 394. The *Moralium dogma philosophorum* is edited by John Holmberg (Uppsala: Almquist & Wiksells, 1929). The translations from this text are my own.
newfound ability. Until then, the goal is to learn to be cautio, that is, to learn how to distinguish vice from virtue, particularly when some vices may be disguised as virtues.\textsuperscript{18}

**Book One: Sapiens Amans**

Book One begins with Andreas’s own accessus to the text, which provides us with the titles (albeit out of sequence) of five of the first six chapters of Book One: *quid sit amor* (chapter one), *unde dicatur amor* (chapter three), *quis sit effectus amoris* (chapter four), *inter quos possit esse amor* (chapter two), and *qualiter acquiratur amor* (chapter six). Chapter five (*quaeret personae sint aptae ad amorem*) is not mentioned, possibly because, as Monson suggests, it is a continuation of the first chapter.\textsuperscript{19} Without providing precise titles for the chapters in Book Two, the accessus does look ahead to those topics (e.g. *qualiter […] amor retineatur*). In addition, it is important to note that the accessus presents Andreas’s treatise as both descriptive (*quid sit amor*) and prescriptive (*qualiter acquiratur amor*), and that the shift from one to the other is not the shift from Book One to Book Two. The first *qualiter* section is chapter six of Book One, but chapter six should also not be seen as the point at which the theoretical section ends and the practical section begins. Instead, we must recognize, as Monson does, that Andreas interweaves the two discourses, using each for different intentions.\textsuperscript{20}

It is theoretical discourse, however, that Andreas uses to begin his analysis of love:

\begin{quote}
Amor est passio quaedam innata procedens ex visione et immoderata cogitacione formae alterius sexus, ob quam aliquis super omnia cupit alterius potiri amplexibus et omnia de utriusque voluntate in ipsius amplexu amoris precepta completi. (1.1.1)
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{18}See also Baldwin’s discussion of the phrase *ad cautelam* in “L’ars amatoria au XIIe siècle en France: Ovide, Abélard, André le Chapelain et Pierre le Chantre,” in *Histoire et société: mélanges offerts à Georges Duby*, v. 1 (Aix-en-Provence: Université de Provence, 1992), 19-29; and *The Language of Sex*, 24-25.

\textsuperscript{19}Monson, 19.

\textsuperscript{20}In his chapter on genre (pgs. 11-41), Monson argues for the presence of three discourses in Andreas’s treatise: *ars* (practical), *scientia* (theoretical) and *sapientia* (wisdom). Although I am inclined to agree with Monson, I also think that *sapientia* differs enough from *ars* and *scientia* that one might instead see it as a separate thread that runs through the work, and not as a discourse (at least not in the same way that *ars* and *scientia* are discourses).
(Love is an inborn suffering which results from the sight of, and uncontrolled thinking about, the beauty of the other sex. This feeling makes a man desire before all else the embraces of the other sex, and to achieve the utter fulfilment of the commands of love in the other’s embrace by their common desire.)

This influential definition of love in Andreas’s first chapter has been read as drawing on traditions as diverse as theology, medicine, psychology, physiology, and scholastic philosophy.\(^{21}\) If these accounts seem both justified and not fully satisfactory at the same time, it is because Andreas is influenced by multiple discourses in this chapter, and he combines them, as Monson says, with “the objective detachment of science.”\(^{22}\) By introducing the concept of scientific objectivity, Monson is attempting to lead us away from the argument put forth by Robertson (and others) that Andreas’s definition is actually a definition of *cupiditas*, and not *amor*. No one could deny that Andreas was probably influenced by Biblical glosses, Augustine, Aelred of Rievaulx, and theological discussions on the stages of sin, but to argue, as Karnein does, that *amor est passio* “should read *cupiditas est passio*” is to ignore the most basic features of Andreas’s treatise.\(^{23}\) If Andreas had intended to write a definition of cupidity, he would have done so. His choice of *amor*, in addition to signaling his debt to Ovid, provides Andreas with the opportunity to craft his own definition of the notoriously ambiguous term, thus establishing his own text as authoritative. The definition he produces restricts the concept of love, since the *amor* he describes is unquestionably what we have come to call romantic love (as opposed to


\(^{23}\) “*Amor est passio,*” 217.
friendship or spiritual love), but at the same time, the definition expands on the topic, since it draws from multiple discourses in order to produce a thorough and balanced discussion of love. After having constructed his ingenious definition, Andreas then takes it apart and glosses each term as if his own definition were already an authoritative text. This method allows Andreas to display the complexities of his subject matter, and he makes no attempt to hide the problems that may arise. For example, his description of a lover’s fears includes not only unrequited but also requited love, leaving the reader to wonder (until chapter four, at least) if any good can ever come from love. Furthermore, his gloss on the word *innata* reveals that love proceeds *naturally* from thought to action (and thus, by implication, that love cannot truly be taught). Andreas does not explicitly raise these questions, but more importantly, he does not answer them, because, in this chapter at least, he is not writing a prescriptive definition of love. He is writing a philosophical analysis of the topic, subjecting Ovid to the scrutiny of Aristotle and Augustine, in order to find some understanding of what love entails.

After Andreas’s definition of love, the complications that threaten to undermine his project most often result from his attempts to reconcile love and morality. In chapter two (*inter quos possit esse amor*) he mentions that a lover is constantly preoccupied with thoughts of his beloved, and this leads him to a comparison between loss of money and loss of love: “In amantis ergo conspectu nil valet amoris actui comparari, potiusque verus amans cunctis exspoliari divitiis vel omni eo quod humano posset excogitari ingenio, sine quo quis vivere non potest, penitus privari eligeret quam sperato vel acquisito amore carere” (“So in the eyes of the lover, nothing can be comparable to the act of love. The true lover would choose to be stripped of all his riches, to be utterly deprived of all that the human mind can visualise as necessary for living, rather than forgo the love he anticipates or has won”; 1.2.3). The significant phrase here is “verus amans”—
these are the thoughts of a true lover. A true lover would rather face poverty than the loss of his love. But, as we are about to see, verus amans has only a deprecatory connotation here, since Andreas goes on to contrast this example of a true lover (verus amans) with that of a wise lover (sapiens amator): “Sapiens tamen amator divitias non abiicit tanquam prodigus consuevit dispensator abiicere, sed iuxta patrimonii facultates suis ab initio modum ponit impendiis” (“But the wise lover does not throw away riches as a wasteful steward often does. He puts a limit to his expenditure at the start according to the resources of his inheritance”; 1.2.5). A wise lover would not be wasteful, since, as Andreas tells us, poverty causes love to diminish. The lesson to be learned in this chapter actually has nothing to do with love at all:

Non autem haec tibi enarro, amice, quasi velim avaritiam sectandam esse meis tibi faminibus indicare, quam cunctis constat in eodem cum amore non posse domicilio permanere, sed ut tibi ostendere valeam prodigalitatem esse modis omnibus fugiendam, et ipsam largitatem utroque brachio amplectendam. (1.2.8)

(However, my purpose in telling you this, my friend, is not to suggest by my remarks that avarice should be your aim. All men agree that avarice cannot remain in the same dwelling as love. My aim is to show you that you must avoid wild spending by every means whilst embracing generosity with open arms.)

Andreas’s moral convictions compel him to teach prudence and generosity, even when he is claiming to be teaching love.

Andreas’s sapiens amans is, as Douglas Kelly has recognized, an integral part of the hierarchy of love established by Andreas’s text, which proceeds from the base love of prostitutes and gold diggers up through the passionate love of the simplex amans and the courtly love of the sapiens amans before reaching married love, friendship, and finally, love of God. Although the hierarchy of love described in Kelly’s article seems more organized and systematic than what we actually find in the De amore, his approach remains useful to an understanding of the treatise,

especially because it helps us guard against reading the entire discussion of love in *De amore* as a discussion of *cupiditas*. The ambiguity of *amor* is sometimes difficult for Andreas to negotiate, but it provides him with the opportunity to envision a moral type of love that is superior to the love of the *simplex amans*.

The problems that arose in chapter one (love is a natural process, and therefore does not require instruction) and in chapter two (Andreas’s attempt at an ethical reading of love diverts the course of his lesson) are both echoed in chapter four (*quis sit effectus amor*). Andreas’s discussion of the ennobling properties of love prompts a rare moment of wonderment and optimism: “O, quam mira res est amor, qui tantis facit hominem fulgere virtutibus, tantisque docet quemlibet bonis moribus abundare!” (“What a remarkable thing is love, for it invests a man with such shining virtues, and there is no-one whom it does not instruct to have these great and good habits in plenty”; 1.4.1). It is important to note here that the grammatical subject of *docet* is in fact *amor*. It is love that instructs lovers, and moreover, while instructing them, it makes them virtuous. There is no need for a *praeeceptor amoris*, because *amor* teaches itself (and is therefore, presumably, unteachable). It is in this way that chapter four echoes chapter one. Yet this is not Andreas’s final lesson. Andreas interrupts this positive discussion of love with cautionary words for Walter:

> Hoc ergo tuo pectori volo semper esse affixum, Gualteri amice, quod si tali amor libramine uteretur ut nautas suos post multarum procellarum inundationem in quietis semper portum deduceret, me suae servitutis perpetuo vinculis obligarem. Sed quia inaequale pensum sua solet manu gestare, de ipsius tanquam iudicis suspecti non ad plenum confido iustitia. (1.4.3-4)

(So, dear Walter, I should like you ever to keep this point firmly in mind: if Love’s scales were so balanced as always to guide his sailors into the haven of peace after being drenched by many storms, I would bind myself for ever in the bonds of his slavery. But because the weights he bears in his hand are usually unevenly balanced, I have not full confidence in his justice, for I regard him as an untrustworthy judge.)
This brief digression has little relevance to the section in which we find it, except that it negates the positive effects of love by calling attention to a problem in the nature of love itself. If love is a *iudex suspectus*, then what is to be gained by instructing Walter in love? Presumably Andreas has another *iudex* in mind—one who is more trustworthy, and who always rewards his followers? Writing on this passage, Robertson points out that “in scriptural language, the justice of God which he expects man to imitate is expressed in terms of equal or just weights.”

Although the choice between the god of love and the Christian God will not be made explicit until Book Three, Andreas is already implying that instruction in love might not be his final intention.

In chapter six (*qualiter amor acquiratur et quot modis*), Andreas revisits the idea of the *sapiens amans*, this time in contrast with the *simplex amans*. The *simplex amans* values appearance above all other qualities, and as a consequence, his love often falls prey to gossip and is quickly thwarted by others. The *sapiens amans*, however, values *morum probitas* (“moral character”) above appearance. Andreas takes this opportunity to praise *morum probitas*, a quality which he says should be present in all lovers and which will, by its very presence, enrich their love. However, the problems with this noble sentiment are readily apparent. If, as Andreas explained in chapter four, love has the effect of ennobling the lover, even when the lover in question is *horridum* and *incultum*, then how can *morum probitas* be a prerequisite? Moreover, in chapter four, we were told that love instructs its recipients in virtue, but here, in chapter six, it is *sapientia* that serves this function: “Sapiens igitur, si sapientem suo connectit amori, suum amorem in perpetuum facillime poterit occultare, et sapientem coamantem sapientiorem sua solet exhibere doctrina, et minus sapientem sua consuevit moderatione reddere cautorem” (“So if the

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25 “The Subject of the *De Amore*,” 159.
26 On *morum probitas* in Andreas, see Monson, 290-91. On the relation of *morum probitas* to the *proeza* of the troubadours, see Cherchi, 21-28.
person of sense joins to his love one of like mind, he will very easily be able to conceal his love indefinitely. By his instruction he usually makes a wise partner in love wiser still; and one with less sense he often makes more careful by his guidance”; 1.6.12). Sapientia and morum probitas have usurped the ennobling function of love, even when love is not ostensibly present: “morum atque probitas sola est quae vera facit hominem nobilitate beari et rutilanti forma pollere” (“Honesty of character alone truly enriches a man with nobility, and makes him thrive with glowing beauty”; 1.6.13). The presence of morum probitas, introduced solely to distinguish a superior kind of love that is teachable (in contrast to the love of the verus amans, which occurs naturally) thus creates more problems for Andreas. Is love ennobling, or must the lover be virtuous before he is worthy of receiving love? Likewise, does love educate the lover, or must that education also come first? And how does this affect the process of choosing a beloved? If Andreas’s fidelity were to his subject matter, love, he would take control, as Ovid’s praecceptor does, and proclaim a solution that would benefit amor. But his primary allegiance is to his role as an educator, and it is that role, coupled with his scholastic background, which compels him to write the dialogues, where men and women act as disputants on the very questions that the treatise has raised.

For Andreas, the most significant feature of these dialogues is the tension between love and virtue. This is immediately apparent at the outset of dialogue A. After a few prefatory remarks about the proper way to approach a woman, Andreas lets the man (a commoner) begin the conversation. The man praises the woman (also a commoner), stating that her merits are so overwhelming that they would enrich the man to whom she would grant her love. Thus love is ennobling. However, the man then expresses his hopes that he may be deserving of this love: “Nam si ego tanto meis meritis essem dignus honore, nullus in orbe vivens recte mihi esset

27 Note the echo here of Andreas’s use of cautior in the preface.
coaequandus amator‖ (―And if by my merits I were to deserve this great honour, no lover alive in the world could rightly be ranked with me‖; 1.6.27). Love is ennobling, but the man must be virtuous to deserve it? According to these arguments, love appears to be, in Cherchi’s words, “causa efficiens and causa finalis at the same time.”\(^{28}\) The woman’s response to this contradiction is quite logical—if her virtue makes her noble, then she should seek out a nobleman for her love. The man counters this response by narrowing the subject under discussion to the issue of morum probitas and nobility, making a distinction between those who have been ennobled by virtue and those who are innately noble. The latter are not necessarily superior. The problem has ostensibly been solved, but only after the disputants have removed love from the equation. Returning to the subject of love, the woman proclaims that she is a young woman, and cannot love an old man. As an old man, the man of this dialogue can argue that virtue comes before love—that he deserves her love precisely because he has had time to practice virtue. But shortly thereafter, the suitor is a young man, and as such, he states that love must precede virtue, since all good things have their source in love.

It is important to view these changes in character (e.g. old to young, knowledgeable to ignorant) not as inconsistencies but as rhetorical tactics employed by Andreas in an attempt to exhaust every side of the issue. In order to understand the function of the dialogues within the context of Andreas’s treatise, we should abandon the assumption that these dialogues are intended as practical instruction for lovers.\(^ {29}\) It is true that there are some moments, particularly at the beginning of each individual dialogue, where Andreas offers practical advice on courting a lady. But overall, the dialogues are a continuation of the theoretical instruction that Andreas provided in the first part of Book One. In Irving Singer’s words, the dialogues are

\(^{28}\) Cherchi, 37.
\(^{29}\) See, for example, the discussions of Andreas’s dialogues in Jackson, 246-49; Mackey, 340-43; and Monson, 49.
“philosophical dialogues in the manner of Plato or Hume, not speeches to be memorized by aspiring lovers. They are imaginative devices for considering human problems from diverse points of view, and need not be taken as anything else.” The advantage of the dialogue method, for Andreas, is that it allows him to work through some of the questions raised by the first chapters of the treatise, and to do so in a way that engages the reader by bringing him backstage, as it were, and showing him how these interactions play out. Andreas puts himself at a disadvantage, however, when he unexpectedly changes genres in the middle of his treatise, and when he tries to uphold the fiction that the interlocutors in the dialogues are anything but different facets of his dialectical mind. The effect of all this is that Andreas’s treatise presents itself as simultaneously intriguing and confusing. We can see Andreas working through his own ideas about love, nobility, eloquence, and virtue, but we are being led blindly through these issues, with no hints as to whether or not there will be a resolution to all these questions. More than anything, it is Andreas’s own commitment to a thorough examination of the topic that frustrates his attempts to produce a coherent reading.

As dialogue A continues, the man and woman turn to the subject of education in love. This subject echoes the previous discussion, since, just as it is unclear whether good deeds should precede virtue, and whether virtue should precede love, it is also unclear whether knowledge of love should precede the granting of love. Moreover, education in love is inextricably tied to education more generally, as is clear in the man’s request for instruction:

Praeterea, nonne maiori doctor est dignus honore vel laude, qui omnino discipulum imperitum sua facit doctrina prudentem, quam qui reddit doctum sua sapientia doctorem? Novus ergo miles amoris ac in amore rudis te mihi peto magistram et tua doctrina plenius erudiri. Magno enim tibi adscribetur honori si me rudem et indoctum tua feceris prudentia doctum. Rudes enim et indoctos tali decet amori servire, cuius industria incauta valeat obumbrari iuventus. (1.6.52-53)

Further, does not a teacher merit greater honour or praise if he makes an utterly raw pupil wise by his teaching than if he makes a learned one more learned by his wisdom? So I, Love’s new recruit and a tiro in love, seek you as my mentor and wish to be schooled more fully by your teaching. Great honour will accrue to you if by your wisdom you make me learned from being raw and ignorant. It is fitting that the raw and ignorant should be slaves to a love whose diligence can shield their improvident youth.)

The parallels between this discussion and the rhetorical situation set up by Andreas’s preface only reinforce the importance of this issue. In order to justify his own enterprise—that of instructing Walter in love—Andreas must prove that the act of falling in love can precede education in love. However, Andreas’s moral concerns compel him to argue that education, like virtue, must precede love. Thus the woman replies:

Sed dicis in hoc mea te velle disciplina doceri; hunc autem penitus recuso laborem, quia magis doctus videtur eligendus amator quam qui meo labore est docendus. Parisius igitur exspecta erudiri, non a muliere doceri, quia nimia videtur imperitia laborare qui rudis et indoctus prudentis et instructae feminae sibi quaerit amorem. (1.6.55)

(You say that you wish to be instructed by my teaching. But I utterly refuse this heavy task because it is apparent that a learned lover should be chosen in preference to one who must be instructed by my effort. You must await your education at Paris rather than instruction by a woman; the raw and ignorant man who seeks for himself the love of a wise and well-schooled woman is clearly in the toils of excessive inexperience.)

What sort of education will the man receive at Paris? Are we still talking about education in love?

The answer comes in dialogue C. In order to resolve this dilemma, Andreas must replace education in love with education in courtesy. That way, he can preserve his moral stance (that lovers must possess some sort of virtue that precedes love) while still leaving an opening for his own treatise (which supposedly provides education in love). In dialogue C, the man (a commoner) requests instruction from the woman (a woman of the higher nobility): “Ideoque quum videam vos omnino in amoris arte instructam, vestram in amore deposco doctrinam ut me scilicet docere dignetur gratia vestra quae sint ea quae existuntur in amore praecipua, id est, quae
constituant hominem amore dignissimum” (“So since I observe your comprehensive knowledge of the art of love, I am requesting your instruction on it; in other words, that in your kindness you may condescend to teach me the chief requirements for love, the attributes which make a man worthy of it”; 1.6.146). This request is not a request for instruction in the art of love. It is actually a request for instruction in the qualities that make one worthy of love. These are two entirely separate requests, since the latter is more of a request for instruction in virtue than for instruction in love.

When the man continues, the situation becomes more complicated: “Quum enim omnis ex amoris rivuli plenitudine procedat urbanitas, eoque magistro omni benefacto praestetur initium omnisque exitus bonitatis peragatur, et usque modo expers sim et ignarus amoris inventus, non est mirandum si ab eius inveniar alienus effectu et eiu…doceri” (“Since all civility flows from love’s full stream, and every good deed owes its beginning and every act of kindness its outcome to its teaching, and since I have been exposed as still uninitiated in and ignorant of love, it is no cause for surprise that I am found a stranger to its achievements, and that I seek urgently to be taught its commands”; 1.6.147). If everything good comes from love, then what is the place for instruction? Again, the notion that love is ennobling is in conflict with the idea that virtue and civility can be taught. The woman’s reply acknowledges this contradiction in the man’s proposal. She chastises him for asking for her love even though his ignorance proves him to be unworthy of love. However, she does consent to teach him anyway, and her instruction does indeed follow the man’s request. He specifically asked for education in virtue, and that is what the woman provides, instructing him in virtues such as generosity, humility, and prudence. When the man replies, he thanks the woman for her instruction in love, even though, as we have seen, the instruction was in the requirements for
love, and not in love. Education in love and education in virtue are discussed as if they are one and the same. This occurs throughout the dialogues, most notably in dialogue C, as mentioned above, and in dialogue E, where the man lists twelve precepts of love (1.6.268) that could practically double as precepts for courteous behavior (e.g., be generous, avoid lying, etc.). Virtue and courtesy supposedly come from love, since love is the source of all goodness, but they can also precede love, and it is expected that one will be educated in both before seeking love. The men and women of the dialogues, content to dispute each situation on its own terms, are not threatened by the ambiguity and contradictions posed by these discussions on love. These issues are a problem only for Andreas, whose attempts to explicate love are continually frustrated by the complications that arise.

The question of virtue, combined with the analogy of Love’s weights introduced in chapter four, leads to a discussion on free will as it pertains to love. In dialogue B, the man (a commoner) tries to argue that Love does not recognize class distinctions. The woman (a noblewoman) agrees with this statement, but then suggests that lovers can still discriminate according to class and worth. If this were not the case, she says, there would be no merit to the common statement that Love balances his weights unevenly. She then proceeds to rebut, in advance, any arguments against Love that might be made on the basis of this assertion. She argues that, despite these discriminatory practices, Love should still be seen as upholding justice, since he gave women free will to consent to love in order to counter the fact that men indiscriminately lust after anyone of the opposite sex (1.6.86). Although the woman’s

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31 Monson calls our attention to the significance of the terminology here. The rules in Book One are called praecepta, a term which “is used only of injunctions or admonitions to action,” whereas the rules at the end of Book Two are called regulae, which “may also indicate a standard of judgment or a general statement of fact” (29). Monson connects the praecepta with prescriptive discourse and the regulae with descriptive discourse, which, I would add, is particularly interesting given that the regulae of Book Two are arguably the most notorious part of Andreas’s treatise precisely because they have often been read as prescriptive guidelines for courtly lovers.
explanation does solve the question of why Love balances his weights unequally, it creates countless other problems that Andreas and the men and women of the dialogues have to attempt to work out. If women can choose their lovers based on worth, then how does one decide between numerous worthy lovers, particularly if, as discussed above, there are multiple paths by which the men can be made worthy (nobility by birth, nobility attained through love, nobility attained by good deeds, etc.)? Conversely, if women have free will in matters of love, can they choose to abstain from love entirely? The stage is set for more disputations on the issue of nobility and virtue, as well as for the allegory of dialogue E (and even for the misogynistic outburst of Book Three, which will be discussed later).

After the scattered discussions that make up the first four dialogues, Dialogue E may strike the reader as surprisingly coherent. It is essentially an exploration of one question: Can a woman choose to abstain from love entirely? Andreas, in the guise of the nobleman, wants to test out the possibility of a negative response to this question. To do so, he must make his first thoroughly Ovidian move: he must argue that the only reality worth recognizing is that of the lover. From this love-centric perspective, the only king is the king of love, the only god is the god of love, and so on. The nobleman of this dialogue takes this thought sequence even further. If there is a god of love, then the entire Christian worldview can be superimposed onto that of the lover, so that instead of the Christian afterlife, there is an afterlife for lovers, where all lovers (and, according to the nobleman, all non-lovers) will be rewarded or punished based on their actions as lovers during their lifetime on earth.\(^{32}\) This solution both does and does not answer

\(^{32}\) This is actually a reverse ethical reading. Rather than interpreting secular love from the perspective of Christian morality, the nobleman is interpreting Christianity from the perspective of secular love. The love-centric sections of *De amore* lend weight to Peter Allen’s argument about Andreas’s “moral parentheses”: “The art of love is a finite, fictive domain that, if readers are sophisticated enough, they may isolate from the moral strictures of everyday life. Outside its borders Christian views of marriage and celibacy hold sway, but in the imaginary realm of fiction—for those who recognize it—love is possible even for clerics” (*The Art of Love: Amatory Fiction from Ovid to the “Romance of the Rose”* [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992], 62). Allen’s argument is useful.
the question posed above. If the entire world is ruled by love, as the nobleman says, then it would be unwise for any woman to choose to abstain from love, since the consequences would be undeniably harsh. This is the solution that the noblewoman consents to at the end of the dialogue. However, even though she consents to love, she still does not consent to love the nobleman who has been pursuing her throughout the course of the dialogue, and so the problem of Love’s unequal weights still stands. Moreover, if one is hesitant to adopt the lover’s entire worldview, then this dialogue is simply an exercise in fantasy. The only readers who would consider this a satisfactory solution to the problem of free will as it pertains to love are the implied readers of Ovid’s Ars, who willingly believe that everything is significant only in that it pertains to love. Andreas has neither the will nor the spirit to instill that sort of confidence in his readers.

All of the main issues raised in the dialogues combine to produce the debate on love and marriage in dialogue G, a debate which functions as the climax of the dialogue, as well as of the dialogues as a whole, and of Book One. In dialogue G, as in all the other dialogues, the man (a man of the higher nobility) presents all possible arguments for why he should receive the love of the woman (a noblewoman), only to be refused at the end. But in dialogue G, the woman rebuts all the arguments, and then adds one more complication—she is married to a worthy man. The man is quick to argue that this is irrelevant, citing a definition of love that emphasizes the importance of jealousy and secrecy. The woman attacks the man for daring to praise jealousy, an emotion which is so obviously base. He replies by suggesting that she is wholly ignorant of love, and then proceeds to defend the significance of jealousy. Eventually they consent to write

because it reminds us that Andreas’s knowledge of love is primarily derived from love literature (and thus is particularly suited to remain within the realm of fiction), but it ignores the fact that Andreas is constantly testing his theories on love against his knowledge of contemporary Christian society. Essentially, Allen’s argument works for Ovid, but Andreas is not Ovid, nor is he (as Allen envisions him) a “Naso nouus” (3). See also Trimpi, 84-85.
to the Countess of Champagne, who delicately and judiciously upholds the man’s argument—
love and marriage are incompatible. Her response, while logical, effectively closes the book on
the success of Andreas’s enterprise. If love cannot exist except outside marriage, and, moreover,
if lovers must incessantly think base thoughts in the name of jealousy, then there is no hope for a
moral kind of love. In addition, if marriage is not an option to provide stability and hope for a
lover, then there can be no end to the lover’s fears, and thus no end to Andreas’s pessimism
about the possibility of happiness in love affairs. Furthermore, if love is naturally opposed to
marriage and allied with jealousy, then love cannot possibly be on the right side of virtue and
courtesy. Why would Andreas choose to frustrate his own ambitions in such an authoritative
fashion?33 Andreas is trying to construct an argument and to destroy it at the same time.
He is attempting to instruct his readers in love, but if, because of the complications that arise in
these dialogues, he is forced to choose between love and virtue, he will choose virtue.

After dialogue G, Andreas makes numerous half-hearted attempts to reconcile love and
morality. The most notorious is the discussion of amor purus and amor mixtus, which would be
an ideal solution to Andreas’s quest for a moral type of love, if only it were not in contradiction
with the commandments of love (which state that after the first stage of love has been granted, a
lover cannot refuse to grant the following stages unless the beloved has proven unworthy).34
Dialogue H is full of other examples, such as the debate on whether a woman should choose a
man who preferred her upper half or one who preferred her lower half (1.6.533–50), and the

33 Monson’s response to this question is also interesting: “A key to understanding the Chaplain’s position can be
found in the argumentation presented in support of it by the man of the Seventh Dialogue. In reply to the woman’s
advocacy of love within marriage as a way of avoiding sin, the man invokes the opinion of St. Jerome that the too
ardent lover is an adulterer with his own wife, adding that the abuse of something sacred is more serious than an
ordinary abuse (DA 1.6.383 [150]). This argument, which is repeated by Andreas himself in Book Three (DA 3.33
[296]), casts the question of marriage in a very different light. Far from championing profane, adulterous love at the
expense of Christian morality—out-troubadouring the troubadours, as it were—the Chaplain appears to have
adopted this extreme position on love and marriage with a view to protecting the sacrament of holy matrimony from
the moral contamination of love” (324).
34 This is stated at 2.6.34.
man’s contention that love is essentially preparation for marriage, since a good husband would prefer a wife who is an expert in Love’s teachings ("amoris esset experta doctrinam"; 1.6.469) over an ignorant maiden. We might also note the discussion concerning love and God. In response to the woman’s statement that love is an offense to God, the man offers three main arguments: 1) God allows us to choose between a secular and a religious life, and if one has not chosen the religious life, one might as well devote oneself to love; 2) God cannot object to love, since love is a natural occurrence; and 3) love is the source of all good, and as such, cannot be a sin. The arguments seem sound, but at this point in the treatise, none of these statements can be considered without the numerous complications that arise from each. We have already seen that few people (including, most likely, Andreas) are content to restrict themselves to choosing either the secular or the religious life. We have also already seen that the progression of love is often aided by human intervention (particularly in the form of instruction), and thus is not natural. And finally, the supposition that love is the source of all good has been negated by Andreas’s attempts to insist that only those who are already virtuous (i.e., good) are worthy of love.

The final sections of Book One serve to demonstrate the reasons why Andreas continues to instruct his readers in love. Just as mutual love seems impossible to obtain, so does celibacy. Clerics should not love, nor should anyone love nuns, harlots, or the excessively lascivious, but Andreas knows that such things do occur ("vix tamen unquam aliquis sine carnis crimine vivit" ["there is scarcely a man who ever lived without sinning in the flesh"]; 1.7.4), and so he feels that it is his duty as an instructor to provide some guidance in these matters.
Book Two: Leisure and Toil

Andreas’s duties as an instructor carry over into Book Two, in which Andreas completes his portrait of the sapiens amans. In the very first chapter (qualiter status acquisiti amoris debeat conservari), he takes care to suggest that the only love worth maintaining is the moral kind of love that he tried to describe throughout Book One. He enumerates the qualities that he expects in a lover: “Debet etiam amator in cunctis se coamant ostendere sapientem, moderatum moribusque compositum et in nullo ipsius debeat animum odiosis actibus irritare” (“Further, the lover should show himself to his partner as in all things wise and modest and principled, not grating on her mind in any way with loathsome actions”; 2.1.2). The lover should also be honest (2.1.4), discreet (2.1.5), attractive but modest (2.1.6), generous (2.1.7), courageous (2.1.8), obedient and humble (2.1.9), and courteous (2.1.10). He even notes that these instructions are relevant for both sexes (2.1.12). In short, love can be maintained only if both lovers are worthy of love in the first place, and if they continue to act in a worthy manner. To describe how love is diminished and how love is ended, Andreas needs only to reverse this advice. Love is diminished or ended if a lover is found to have been unworthy in the first place (for example, if he acts foolishly or cowardly) or if a lover suddenly becomes unworthy (for example, if he becomes poor or is unfaithful to his lover or the Church).

Throughout Book Two, Andreas continually restates the notion that the only love worth mentioning is mutual love between two virtuous persons: “Amor enim duos quaecurit fidei unitate coniunctos et voluntatum identitate concordes, alii autem quoliber amoris merito defraudantur et in amoris curia extranei reputantur” (“Love seeks two persons joined together in unity of faith, and harmonious in the identity of their wishes; all others are deprived of any merit of love, and are considered strangers to the court of Love”; 2.4.4). It is only by excluding all who are not
virtuous from the *curia amoris* that Andreas can placate his moral concerns. He recognizes that it is human nature to desire love, and because of this, he attempts to guide his readers to an artificial, moral kind of love. The judgments on love and the rules of love that constitute the remainder of Book Two serve this purpose in that they are written for the reader who desires to restrict his worldview to the worldview of a lover—the same kind of reader whom Ovid speaks to, and the same kind of reader who is addressed in the allegory of dialogue E. Andreas is quite aware that these readers are not going to give up on love, so he feels compelled to provide them with moral advice. Throughout the treatise Andreas presents himself not as a codifier or a master, but as an educator. He knows that his readers (represented by Walter) want to hear about love. So he tells them all about love, exposing the complexities and contradictions inherent in his project, in order to gain their trust and respect in the hope that they may follow him diligently through the close of Book Three.

What is interesting about Book Two is how clearly it betrays Andreas’s lack of interest in writing a practical *ars amandi*. Not only is Book Two significantly shorter than Book One (which is predominantly theoretical), but the sections of Book Two that appear to have ignited Andreas’s creative impulses are the judgments and rules of love, both of which are mainly descriptive or analytical rather than prescriptive (despite the fact that the section heading “de regulis amoris” would seem to imply prescriptive instruction). The most practical (and thus Ovidian) sections of the entire *De amore* are sections 1-5 of Book Two, all of which, it should be noted, conclude with a suggestion that the reader continue researching this topic on his own. For example, near the end of the chapter entitled “qualiter finiatur amor,” Andreas writes: “His tibi breviter et in summa notatis, amice, alios finales modos amoris tibi relinquimus explorandos. Non enim tuo prorsus otio volumus indulgere nec te penitus exonerare labore” (“Now that I have

35 See the discussion on *regulae* and *praecpta* in footnote 31 of this chapter.
made these points briefly and summarily, my friend, I leave to you the investigation of other ways by which love ends. I do not wish to occupy your leisure altogether, nor to relieve you wholly of toil”; 2.4.5). Any reader who has toiled through the dialogues of Book One would be perfectly justified in questioning this excuse for the brevity of Book Two.

**Book Three: Duplicem Sententiam**

At the beginning of Book Three, readers will find themselves with even more reason to question what Andreas is doing. Andreas introduces his reprobation of love quite suddenly: “Taliter igitur praesentem lege libellum, non quasi per ipsum quaerens amantium tibi assumere vitam, sed ut eius doctrina refectus et mulierum edoctus ad amandum animos provocare a tali provocatione abstinendo praemium consequaris aeternum et maiori ex hoc apud Deum merearis munere gloriari” (“Read this little book, then, not as one seeking to take up the life of a lover, but that, invigorated by the theory and trained to excite the minds of women to love, you may, by refraining from so doing, win an eternal recompense and thereby deserve a greater reward from God”; 3.2).36 What are we to make of this unexpected shift in the apparent purpose of Andreas’s treatise? We can start by recognizing, with Robertson, that “the discouragement to the pursuit of love is something that runs through the whole work, not something confined to the last book.”37 Robertson’s observation, which calls attention to the hesitance Andreas expressed in the preface and to the numerous negative statements about love scattered throughout the *De amore*, is certainly an important step towards understanding Andreas’s didactic intentions. The difficulty with his argument, however, is that the potential condemnation of love implied in Books One and Two is primarily observed in hindsight. In other words, an *assiduus lector* of the *De amore*

36 For this passage, I have used the translation of Parry (see footnote 16 in this chapter).
37 Preface to Chaucer, 395.
may notice, after a thorough study of the treatise, Andreas’s hesitance toward love, but it is difficult to imagine that a first-time reader could even come close to anticipating the anti-love sentiments of Book Three (as he would have been able to do if Andreas were more overt about his condemnation of love in the first two books). If anything, a first-time reader might imagine a palinode inspired by Ovid’s *Remedia amoris*, but Book Three is no *remedia*, nor is it a retraction (which is how medieval readers often viewed Ovid’s *Remedia*).\(^{38}\) Acknowledging the negative undertones of Books One and Two or the possible Ovidian origins of Book Three may soften the blow of Andreas’s *reprobatio amoris*, but it does not even come close to explaining it.

Where Robertson’s argument does help us, however, is in understanding the importance of Andreas’s cautious pessimism in Books One and Two. The figure of the *sapiens amans*, born out of Andreas’s need to find a compromise between love and Christian ethics, is a significant link between the pro-love and anti-love sections of *De amore* because Andreas’s praise of *sapientia* continues into Book Three, even in the absence of *amor*. Readers who have patiently followed Andreas’s lessons through the first two books will remember the importance of *sapientia*, and thus may be surprised when they find out, in Book Three, that it is incompatible with love: “Sapiens ergo quilibet amoris cunctos pluribus ex causis actus tenetur abiecere et eius semper obviare mandatis” (“Each and every wise man is bound to renounce all acts of love, and always to oppose Love’s commands for many reasons”; 3.3). Still, since Andreas has made it explicitly clear that love is only good when it is endowed with virtue and courtesy, particularly the virtue of *sapientia*, all he has to do now is explain to his readers that there really is no such thing as a *sapiens amans*. That is, he must divorce *sapiens* from *amans*. To do so, Andreas returns to issues he raised in Books One and Two, but this time he closes the debate, stating, for

example, that God is opposed to love (3.4) and that love pollutes the soul (3.13). Part of the discussion of love in Book Three is actually a reiteration of the discussions earlier in the treatise (for example, his description of the lover’s fears at 3.14), but in the context of Book Three, it is unapologetically negative, and thus functions to dissuade the sapientes from engaging in love. Andreas sets in opposition to love not merely sapientia but all of the virtues (3.26). He counters the notion that love is ennobling with his own suggestion that love in fact does the opposite: “Laïcus etiam nemo posset tanta honestari prudentia vel probitate laudari, si constet eum carnis vitio maculari, qui prioris famae praeconia non amittat et quolibet honoris officio minus reputetur idoneus” (“Moreover, any layman, however great the wisdom with which he is credited or the good character for which he is praised, would be bound to lose the acclaim of his earlier glory, and be considered less suitable for performing any office, if it were established that he was stained with sins of the flesh”; 3.35). And finally, Andreas gives his pessimism full reign, transforming his concerns about Love’s weights and about free will in love to a diatribe against women, stemming from their incapacity to reciprocate love. The final argument of the treatise, as he makes clear at 3.117, is that the diligent reader should choose God over love, since love is undeniably immoral.

Before concluding his text, however, Andreas makes one final attempt to clarify his intentions. He tells us that his work contains a duplicem sententiam (3.117), and reiterates his statement that the first part of the text was written to comply with Walter’s request. The first two books are necessary, Andreas argues, because there are some readers who will continue to pursue love no matter how strong the case is against it. Then he continues: “In ulteriori parte libelli tuae potius volentes utilitati consulere, de amoris reprobatione tibi nulla ratione petenti, ut bona forte praeestemus invito, spontanea voluntate subiuximus et pleno tibi tractatu conscripsimus” (“In the
second part of the book I was more anxious to consult your interests, and though you in no way requested it I have on my own initiative appended a full discussion for your benefit on the condemnation of love, with the intention of benefiting you perhaps against your will”; 3.119). It is difficult, I admit, to read this as a serious proclamation of Andreas’s own authorial methods. But the concept of benefiting the reader without his knowledge (if not explicitly against his will) is a logical extension of the commonplace that texts must be useful as well as pleasurable. Even if Andreas is not providing us with a truthful account of the creation of Book Three, he is at least reaching for the most appropriate literary conventions—as he did in the preface—to justify the composition of his treatise. Moreover, the candor of the statement, and the authoritative yet deferential tone in which Andreas discusses his relationship with Walter, are entirely consistent with the persona Andreas has established for himself throughout the De amore. Andreas’s role as educator stands firm, even as the didactic content of his lessons changes.

If we read the treatise, from start to finish, as if the progression from Book One to Book Three follows the development of Andreas’s attitudes towards love as he is composing the treatise, then it is entirely possible that, as Monson concludes, “Andreas finally rejects love because it conflicts with Christian morality.”39 In this interpretation, the De amore is a record of one man’s struggle with the medieval Christian equivalent of the tensions between love and society that were so familiar to Ovid and his contemporaries. Ovid resolved these tensions by ruling in favor of love; Andreas ultimately rules in favor of Christian ethics, but not until he has exhausted the possibilities of his ethical reading of love. However, we cannot actually know whether or not Book Three was part of the plan all along (despite the lack of an explicit reference to it in Andreas’s preface or in the accessus). If it was, then we should accept Andreas’s arguments about the dual readership of the De amore. Andreas knows that some readers will

39 Monson, 334.
refuse to abandon love, just as so many readers (including Andreas himself, most likely) are hesitant to abandon secular literature, and so, like the grammarians, he has provided an ethical reading of this “text” for their benefit. If the ethical version seems forced and imperfect, that is because Andreas was simultaneously trying to construct this ethical reading of love and to display its flaws so that he could justify the rejection.

In both of these interpretations, what is significant is that Andreas sees himself as a teacher who is primarily responsible for the moral well-being of his students (i.e., readers), and not, as we find in Ovid, as a *magister amoris* eager to pass on his extensive knowledge about love (a knowledge which is, of course, born out of experience, and not learned in a classroom). Andreas’s interest in the *ars amandi* is, like the educator’s interest in the texts of the *auctores*, an interest that must be justified by placing the topic within the domain of ethics, and analyzing it in such a way that it yields insight about human nature, and about our abilities to navigate between virtue and vice.
Chapter 5:

Reson, Amant, and the Reader in Jean de Meun’s Roman de la Rose

The defining feature that the entire Roman de la Rose shares with all of the artes amandi is its juxtaposition of love and didacticism. But in Jean’s part of the Rose specifically, we can, from the very beginning, see a split emerging between these two elements. Love is the “announced topic,” as John Fleming says, of the discourse of Reson.¹ And, as Douglas Kelly points out, there will be some readers who, like Amant, will be interested only in the literal aspects of the narrative.² Nonetheless, though Jean caters to these readers—after all, it was his decision to continue the narrative action of Guillaume de Lorris’s courtly romance in the first place—he does, at the same time, manage to provide other content, other levels of reading. By subjecting love to philosophical analysis and using it as a platform to teach such subjects as fortune, free will, and even cosmology, Jean transforms Guillaume’s practical ars amandi into a theoretical ars amandi. Of course, the relationship between the “announced topic,” love, and Jean’s didactic project is not exactly a reciprocal one. The amatory subject matter aids Jean in creating a widely ranging didactic text, but the didactic text contributes very little to the love story, and in fact, those readers who are paying attention to both levels will find that the love story all but crumbles under the weight of Jean’s didacticism.

The dialogue between Reson and Amant in Jean’s text provides a site where love and theoretical didacticism converge; it is here that Jean transforms Guillaume’s text into his own. Essentially, the dialogue functions as Jean’s beginning—a sort of extended preface—in which he introduces the major themes that will dominate the rest of his philosophical narrative. Scholars

² Internal Difference and Meanings in the “Roman de la Rose” (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), 17-19.
have long abandoned the idea that Reson (or any other character) functions as a spokesperson for Jean’s own ideologies. I have no intention of returning to that line of argument. Nor do I entirely agree with Fleming, who uses Reson’s “dazzling credentials,” her affiliations with Boethius’s Philosophy and divine sapientia, to argue for her unquestionable authority, although Fleming’s characterization of Reson is certainly more convincing than that of his opponents, who focus on her limited theological perspective and her failings as Amant’s teacher. Instead, I suggest that we follow Stephen G. Nichols, who frames the question of Reson’s authority in terms of her contribution to the scope of Jean’s text:

We have seen enough of Jean’s presentation of Raison to understand that she is not a privileged, authoritative narrator in the Guillaume de Lorris tradition. Does this mean that she is entirely compromised? Completely incapable of transmitting objective fact? There is no more evidence to support this conclusion than there is to support complete acceptance of everything she says. In her debate, Raison develops ideas never dreamed of in Guillaume’s philosophy. Enlarging the field of discussion, Raison sets forth whole new areas of love, its contradictions, social forms, place in the natural order and role in the refining of man’s relationship to man.

Guillaume separates love from the world by enclosing it in a dream vision, creating a landscape in which everything falls under the rule of the God of Love. Jean, through Reson, brings love back into the world and redefines it, using it as a framework for teaching other topics such as friendship, justice, and fortune.

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3 Fleming, Reason and the Lover, 64 (see 5-63 for the full discussion); see also Fleming, The “Roman de la Rose”’’: A Study in Allegory and Iconography (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 112-14. For the opposing viewpoint, see Michael D. Cherniss, “Irony and Authority: The Ending of the Roman de la Rose,” Modern Language Quarterly 36 (1976): 230; Winthrop Wetherbee, “The Literal and the Allegorical: Jean de Meun and the de Planctu Naturae,” Mediaeval Studies 33 (1971): 264-91 (esp. pp. 270-75); and Donald W. Rowe, “Reson in Jean’s Roman de la rose: Modes of Characterization and Dimensions of Meaning,” Mediaevalia 10 (1988 [for 1984]): 97-126. Since Fleming, scholars such as Kathryn L. Lynch (The High Medieval Dream Vision: Poetry, Philosophy, and Literary Form [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988]) and Kelly (Internal Difference) have been more open to a middle-road option like the one Stephen Nichols presents. It is interesting to note that the once-controversial issue of Reson’s authority seems to have disappeared from modern scholarship in the last decade or so. However, I would caution anyone from reading this silence as a sign that the issue has been resolved.

In addition to enlarging the worldview of the text, Jean also expands its potential audience by adding another level of significance to the poem as a whole. Kelly describes two groups of implied readers for the Rose: “One group, uninterested in poetic allegories, will read the poem to find out what it literally teaches on how to pluck roses; the letter of the text will please such readers. Another audience will go beyond the letter to get at the moral meanings or lessons set forth through various voices and modes of discourse.” Jean caters to the second group of readers through his extensive use of the Latin auctores and through the lessons he provides; at the same time, as Kelly reminds us, the “essential lesson of the Rose” must be something that can potentially be understood even by the first group of readers.

To understand how Jean accomplishes this task, we can turn to Fleming’s conception of Jean as a classical writer. Fleming distinguishes between, on the one hand, an author who happens to be writing in the vernacular language and, on the other hand, a vernacular author, “one whose artistic vision is substantially controlled by an extant body of vernacular literature.” Jean, who “studiously leaves us with the impression that the only books he has ever read in French are his own translations and the truncated essay of Guillaume de Lorris,” is not a vernacular author.

Fleming continues: “Jean considers himself to a considerable and quite self-conscious degree to be a translator working in the classical tradition rather than a romance poet augmenting a vernacular corpus.” The distinction is significant, because it shows us how carefully Jean positions himself between vernacular and Latin worlds. From the moment Amant enters into dialogue with Jean’s Reson, our author is engaged in a complex process that involves placing

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5 *Internal Difference*, 18.
6 *Internal Difference*, 19.
8 Fleming, “Jean de Meun,” 82.
9 “Jean de Meun,” 84.
Guillaume’s vernacular narrative alongside the texts of the Latin *auctores*, and using Latin educational methods to bring out the didactic potential of both literary traditions.

Amant’s rejection of Reson would seem to initiate a shift from Latin didacticism back to vernacular courtly narrative. The practical love advice of Ami and La Vieille is, like the commandments of Guillaume’s Amors, still enclosed within a love-centric world. But Reson, using her philosophical didacticism to examine the nature of love, has enlarged the worldview of the text, and that door, once opened, cannot be closed. All of the main characters that speak after Reson, including Amant himself, are, in a sense, standing in the shadow of Reson, and must position themselves in relation to her discourse. Reson’s authority thus comes not from any supposed role as Jean’s spokesperson or from any sort of divine affiliation, but from her primacy in Jean’s part of the text. As the controlling figure in what can be regarded as Jean’s preface, Reson provides the basic education on which the remaining lessons are to be built. She is, as Daniel Poirion says, the teacher of the trivium arts, laying the groundwork for future instruction in the arts of the quadrivium (Nature) and in theology (Genius). ⁶ She teaches Amant and, in doing so, forces the reader to abandon his role as passive observer and become a student as well.

**Entering the Classroom of Reson**

As far as Jean’s poem is concerned, Guillaume could not have picked a better place to end his incomplete story. Amant has begun to question his loyalty to Amors, and he launches into a conventional diatribe about the sorrows of love. Jean continues this monologue, emphasizing Amant’s naïveté and need for guidance, and he has Amant practically summon Reson with this lament:

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Bien le m’avoit Reson noté,  
tenir m’an puis pour rassoté  
quant des lors d’amer ne recrui  
et le conseill Reson ne crui. (4117-20)\textsuperscript{11}

(Reason warned me well of this situation. I may count myself as bereft of reason when from that time I neither renounced love nor trusted Reason’s advice. [92]).

In this transitional moment between Guillaume’s poem and Jean’s continuation, Jean quickly transforms Amant from a courtly lover to a lover-student. In doing so, Jean reconfigures the relationship that has formed between Amant and the other characters in his story, and between Amant and the reader. When Amant becomes a student, so does the reader, since he is also the recipient of the instruction that Reson and the other characters provide.

It is important to note here that Amant remains a student throughout the rest of the poem despite his unwillingness (or inability) to learn. Amant had an early defender in Alan M.F. Gunn, who read the text as “an account of the development and perfecting of personality, the achievement of emotional maturity,” and yet, since Gunn, the consensus has been that Amant is, as Fleming states, “a fool whom Philosophy cannot make wise.”\textsuperscript{12} The list of insufficiencies is quite impressive: Amant is either a superficial literalist (Fleming, Nichols, Marc-René Jung, Kelly), or a “cartoon nominalist” who “rather than overliteralizing, overabstracts” (Kathryn L. Lynch); he is irrational, narrow-minded and closed to new ideas (Fleming, Jung, Lynch, Noah D. Guynn); and his story lacks any sort of psychological development or enlightenment (Winthrop Wetherbee, Sarah Kay).\textsuperscript{13} Amant’s ineptitude becomes even more striking when he is placed

\textsuperscript{11} All quotations from \textit{Roman de la Rose} are from Félix Lecoy’s 3-volume edition (Paris: Champion, 1970). The translations are from Charles Dahlberg, \textit{The Romance of the Rose} (1971; Hanover: University Press of New England, 1986), except where otherwise noted. For each quotation, I give the line numbers from Lecoy’s edition, followed by the page number in Dahlberg’s translation.


next to the narrator-dreamer figures of other philosophical dream visions, such as those of Boethius, Alan of Lille, and Dante. He is a stubborn fool in a sea of wisdom, and unless we wish to trivialize Jean’s text by reading it as one long erotic joke (thus invalidating any search for philosophical or moral meaning), we must come to terms with this aspect of Amant’s character, first by recognizing how Amant’s dual role as lover and student affects the text in ways that are entirely independent from his (in)ability to learn, and second, by considering how this shift in Amant’s character affects the reader.

Reson’s first speech solidifies the teacher-student relationship that she and Amant will maintain for the entirety of their discussion. She opens with a flurry of questions (a sharp contrast with Guillaume’s Reson, whose speech is full of declarative statements). Her immediate task is to set herself up as Amant’s teacher, and she does so by playing on his doubts and suggesting that his suffering could have been prevented (and thus could potentially be relieved) if he were more educated about love. Amant is resistant at first, but he quickly consents to the lesson, and his responses to Reson serve to reaffirm his dual role as lover and as student. He responds to Reson’s suggestion that he can simply flee love by reminding her that he has no idea how to do so. And he counters Reson’s enigmatic descriptions and her litany of oxymorons with a statement that could just as easily apply to the entirety of Jean’s *Rose* as it does to Reson’s discussion of love:

> En ma leçon a tant contraire
> que je n’en puis neant apprendre,
> si la sai je bien par queur rendre,
> c’onc mes queurs riens n’en oublia,
> voire entendre quan qu’il i a
> pour lire en tout communement,


14 For further discussion on Amant and his dream-vision predecessors, see Fleming, *Roman de la Rose*, 111-12; Wetherbee, “The Literal and the Allegorical,” 268-70; and Lynch, 125-32.
ne mes a moi tant seulement. (4334-40)

(There are so many contraries in this lesson that I can learn nothing from it; and yet I can repeat it well by heart, for my heart never forgot any of it; indeed, I can make a public lecture of the whole thing, but to me alone it means nothing. [95])

The language Amant uses to respond to Reson underscores the didactic nature of their conversation. Reson is teaching Amant a lesson (leçon) that he should learn (aprendre), and after he does so, he will be expected to teach the subject himself, to “lire en tout communement” (literally, to “read in its entirety in public”). As Gérard Paré points out, terms such as lire, legere, avoir congîé de lire, and lector are pedagogical terms referring to the practice of “reading” (i.e., explicating) the auctores in a classroom setting.15 Jean’s use of pedagogical language here (and throughout the Rose) serves to define the teacher-student relationships in the text and establish its didactic content.

It is Amant who, baffled by Reson’s first description of love, asks for a definition. The definition that Reson gives is a theoretical one—the first step in her attempts to recharacterize love as a topic for philosophical debate, as we will see below. For the moment, it is significant to note that it is Amant, and not Reson, who first opens up the subject of love to further scrutiny. Amant is a student of love, and Reson is his teacher. As the discussion proceeds, however, Reson moves away from the topic of love, and their relationship becomes more complicated. Reson is still acting as Amant’s teacher, but Amant is a student of love, and Reson is no longer teaching about love. Because of this, Amant’s role as a student becomes separate from his role as a lover. In his role as a lover, Amant stubbornly clings to Amors, countering Reson’s arguments with contentious absurdities and refusing to learn from her examples. But in his role

as a student, Amant dutifully listens to Reson’s lectures on a range of topics that are unrelated to love, and he asks questions. For example, in response to Reson’s lecture on fortune, he replies:

Ha! Dame, par le roi des anges,
aprenez moi donc toutes voies
quels choses peunt estre moies
et se du mien puis riens avoir:
ce voudroie je bien savoir. (5290-94)

(Ah, lady, for the king of angels, teach me by all means what things can be mine, and if I can have anything of my own. I would very much like to know this. [109])

His questions are not intended to reveal anything about his character or to take away from his status as a single-minded, conventional lover. They are merely a rhetorical tactic on Jean’s part, since they serve to drive the discussion forward and to punctuate what would otherwise be one long monologue by Reson.

Because of his dual role, Amant’s character becomes, for the time being, slightly unpredictable. He is an angry opponent and a polite listener, who both participates in and resents Reson’s scholastic discourse. For example, after he confesses to us that Amors is sitting in his head with a shovel, tossing out Reson’s words as they come in, Amant angrily complains that Reson must be teaching him to hate, since she is counseling against love. This indignation, however, is short-lived. Amant’s student role takes over and he begins to question his own response:

Mes espoir que je compare
plus la haine au dasrenier,
tout ne vaille amors un denier.
Bon conseill m’avez or doné,
qui toujours m’avez sermoné
que je daie d’amor retraire!
Or est fols que ne vos velt craire! (4626-32)
(But even though love may well not be worth a penny, I might perhaps pay more for hate in the end. You have given me good advice in continually exhorting me to renounce love, and anyone who is unwilling to believe you is a fool. [71])

This statement is Jean’s subtle transition from the previous lesson, which Amant so sharply rebuked, to the next lesson, which Amant introduces by asking for more information on another type of love that Reson had previously mentioned. Amant is not in the habit of referring to Reson’s advice as “bon conseill,” but, as we see here, he can be made to do so if such a reaction would further the dialogic nature of the text.

Amant’s contradictory responses towards Reson’s lessons are particularly noticeable when it comes to his reactions towards classical exempla. Reson’s lecture is filled with references to pagan authors and examples drawn from their mythology, especially once she moves away from the topic of love and starts discussing friendship, justice, and fortune. Amant joins her in this method of discourse when he questions the attainability of the type of love she wants him to follow:

Qui cercheroit jusqu’an Quartage et d’Orient en Occident, et bien vesquist tant que li dent li feussent cheü de veilliece, et corrust tourjorz sanz perce, fesant sa visitacion par midi, par septentrion tant qu’il eüst tretout veü, n’avroit il pas a conseü ceste amor que ci dit m’avez.

For this passage, I have used the translation of Frances Horgan (The Romance of the Rose [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994]). Amant’s judicious response here is apparently so surprising that Dahlberg removes the negation in the last line of this passage and translates it as: “He who wants to believe you is a fool” (100). In Dahlberg’s reading, Amant rejects Reson’s “bon conseill” as soon as he acknowledges it. However, both Dahlberg and Horgan interpret the passage that follows Amant’s “or est fols” remark as a serious request for Reson to continue her lesson, and both translations have Amant stating (in Dahlberg’s words) “I should consider myself a fool if I did not listen and find out at least if I might learn the nature of love” (“por fol me pourroie tenir / se volentiers ne l’escoutoie, / savoir au mains se ja pourroie / les natures d’amors aprendre”; 4638-41 [100]). Therefore, although it is clear that Amant changes from an angry lover to a calm student at some point after his initial outburst, allowing him to provide a transition to Reson’s next topic of discussion, the translations appear to disagree on where exactly this switch in Amant’s tone takes place.
Bien en fu le mondes lavez
des lors que li dieu s’en foïrent,
quant li geant les assaillirent,
et Droiz et Chasteez et Foiz
s’en foïrent a cele foiz. (5348-62)

(If a man were to search as far as Carthage, from east to west; if he lived until his teeth fell out from old age; if he ran, without stopping to idle, visiting south and north until he had seen everything; still he would not have attained the love you have told me of. Indeed the world was washed clean of it from the time that the gods fled, when the giants attacked them and when Right and Chastity and Faith fled at the same time. [110])

With his references to Carthage and the war between the gods and the giants, Amant is attempting to defeat Reson with her own weapons. This becomes even more apparent as he continues his angry rebuttal:

Neïs Tulles, qui mist grant cure
en cerchier secrez d’escripture,
n’i pot tant son engin debatre
qu’onc plus de .III. pere ou de .III.,
de touz les siecles trespassez
puis que cist mond fu compassez,
de si fines amors trouvast.
[…]
Et sui ge plus sage que Tulles?
Bien seroie fols et entulles,
se tex amors voloie querre,
puis qu’il n’en a mes nule en terre.
Tele amor donques ou querroie
quant ça jus ne la troveroie?
Puis je voler avec les grues,
voire saillir outre les nues,
con fist li cignes Socratés? (5375-95)

(Even Tully, who took great pains to search out the secrets of ancient writings, could not so flog his ingenuity that he ever found more than three or four pairs of such pure loves in all the centuries since this earth was created. […] And am I wiser than Tully? I would be a stupid fool indeed if I wanted to seek such loves, since there are no more of them on earth. Where then would I seek such a love when I wouldn’t find it here below? Can I fly with the cranes, or indeed, like Socrates’ swan, leap beyond the clouds? [111])

This short speech is Amant’s most impressive display of learning. He counters Reson’s numerous references to Cicero with one of his own, in which Cicero has searched the “secrez
d’escripture” and found only three or four pairs of “fines amors” in all of history. The passage Amant is referring to can be found in Cicero’s *De amicitia* (4.15), but Cicero makes no mention of ancient writings or pure loves, nor does he use this example as a way of discouraging friendship. On the contrary, Cicero tells us about the three or four pairs of friends in order to praise the friendship of Laelius and Scipio, which, he hopes, will be known to future generations simply because such a friendship is rare. Amant may have inherited his pessimism from Aelred of Rievaulx, who cites this particular passage from Cicero in his *De spirituali amicitia* as evidence that friendship is an almost unattainable virtue. However, as Fleming points out, Aelred immediately counters this negativity by proclaiming that it is only the pagans who should have reason to despair. God is ready to provide thousands of friends to those who believe in him. Fleming reads Amant’s omission of the second half of Aelred’s argument as evidence that Amant is unable to move beyond pagan wisdom. The problem with Fleming’s explanation, of course, is that Reson herself continually makes use of pagan wisdom in this very same manner. She cites Cicero (and other pagan authors) in order to lend weight to her own arguments, even if she has to distort the text to do so. It is this type of wisdom that is represented in the “integumanz aus poetes,” mentioned later in the poem, in which one can find all the “secrez de philosophie” (an interesting echo of Amant’s “secrez d’escripture,” cited above). Therefore, it is not Amant’s use of Cicero that is the problem here, but his understanding of Reson’s argument. His use of the phrase “fines amors” shows us that he has not quite grasped the ambiguities (and possibilities) inherent in the word *amor*. For Amant, there is only one type of love, and that is *fin’ amor* (or, as we would call it, romantic love). He has no use for a lecture on friendship.

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17 *Reason and the Lover*, 81.
Amant returns to Cicero and Socrates later in Reson’s discourse, after she has chastised him for not remembering his Horace and his Homer and for not having “examined old books.” This time, however, he speaks as a lover, not as a student:

Dame, fis ge, ne peut autre estre.  
Il me convient servir mon mestre,  
qui mout plus riche me fera  
.c. mile tanz, quant li plera,  
car la rose me doit baillier,  
se je m’i sai bien travaillier;  
et se par lui la puis avoir.  
 mestier n’avroie d’autre avoir  
Je ne priseroe .III. chiches  
Socratés, con bien qu’il fust riches,  
ne plus n’en quier oïr parler. (6871-81)

(“Lady,” I said, “I can be nothing other than I am. I must serve my master, who will make me a hundred thousand times more rich when it pleases him, for he should give me the rose if I know well how to exert myself for it. And if, through him, I can possess it, I would have no need of any other possession. I wouldn’t give three chick-peas for Socrates, no matter how rich he were, and I don’t seek to hear any more talk of him.” [132])

We may, at this point, find ourselves wondering about Amant's relationship to classical learning. Here, as elsewhere in this section, his behavior is erratic. At first, he refers knowledgeably to the war between the gods and the giants, to Tully, and to Socrates's swan, and, in fact, uses these references to support his argument. But then he changes course, telling Reson that he scorns Socrates, doesn't want to hear any more about him, and seeks only to return to his master Amors. Leading the discussion away from classical exempla, Amant chides Reson for her use of improper language. Reson responds, and in the process of defending herself gives us a brief lecture on the importance of pagan wisdom and on reading for the sense rather than the letter. Amant, however, rejects Reson's invitation to interpret the fables of the poets and reiterates his status as a lover. He acknowledges that his actions may seem foolish to Reson, but insists that he must remain loyal to Amors. In short, while Amant the student has participated in and even
encouraged Reson's discourse, Amant the lover has the final say, and his rejection of this
discourse eventually drives Reson off permanently.

Of course, it might be unfair to say that Amant learns *nothing*. He is, after all, successful
in his pursuit of the rose. But what Amant learns is entirely contained within the narrative of the
love quest. He refuses to learn from Reson, Nature, and Genius, all of whom provide instruction
in matters that mean little to someone living in a love-centric world. Meanwhile, the reader
(unless he is as stubborn as Amant) cannot help recognizing that there may be a larger lesson to
the text. Nichols suggests that this realization occurs during the debate over Reson’s use of
improper language:

Jean could hardly have chosen a more striking demonstration of the lover’s shallowness.
If all he can see in the vast possibilities posed by Raison’s discourse is an indelicacy of
speech, we can hardly expect him to draw any conclusions about its significance for his
own life. Larger questions obviously escape him. They do not escape the reader. For the
first time, we, the audience, see and understand more than the lover-narrator. How can
this be if he is our guide? How can we see what needs to be done at the end of Raison’s
speech, but not he? Is it possible that, no longer our guide, his conduct will also not be a
model for our own?18

It seems more likely that this realization could occur at any point in Reson’s discourse,
depending on the reader, but Nichols’s main argument remains valid. When Amant becomes a
student, so does the reader. When Amant fails as a student, the reader is forced to seek out
another authoritative voice in the text, and this choice both defines and reveals the reader’s own
character. For Nichols, it is our reaction against the lover that prompts this moment of self-
examination. But in fact, this self-examination can occur even for those readers who are inclined
to remain sympathetic to Amant, since the scope of Reson’s discourse and the explicitness of

18 Nichols, 127. For more on Amant, the reader, and self-knowledge, see Jung, “Jean de Meun et l'allégorie,” 28;
Peter L. Allen, *The Art of Love: Amatory Fiction from Ovid to the “Romance of the Rose”* (Philadelphia: University
Amant’s rejection of that discourse make it difficult to continue to identify with Amant by default, as we might have done throughout the course of Guillaume’s narrative. It is not Amant, therefore, who effects this change in the reader, but Reson. She opens the text up to multiple viewpoints and demands that we choose which authority to follow, and she does this by engaging both Amant and the reader in a philosophical discussion on love.

**Reson and the Philosophy of Love**

Reson begins her discussion of love with a prefatory statement that serves to transform the nature of love in this text:

> Or te demonstreré sanz fable
> chose qui n’est pas demonstrable,
> si savras tantost sanz sciance
> et connoistras sanz connoissance
> ce qui ne peut estre seü
> ne demonstré ne conneü,
> quant a ce que ja plus en sache
> nus hom qui son queur i atache
> ne que ja por ce mains s’en doille,
> s’il n’est tex que föir le voille.
> Lors t’avré le neu desnoé,
> que tourjorz trouveras noé. (4249-60)

(Now I shall show you without fable what is not demonstrable. You shall know straightaway without knowledge and understand without understanding what can never be better known, demonstrated, or understood by any man who fixes his heart on love; but one will not suffer the less on account of this knowledge unless he is the sort that may wish to flee from love. Then I will have untied for you the knot that you will always find tied. [94])

In Guillaume’s *Rose*, love is an experience, enigmatic but familiar. Love is at the same time a discipline that brings with it rules and expectations, and the lover’s task is not how to understand love but how to observe those rules, meet the expectations, and suffer through it as well as he can. The love Jean’s Reson describes, however, is something quite different: a philosophical
concept, veiled in the sort of incomprehensibility normally attributed to God. There are echoes, for example, of Augustine’s “De deo loquimur, quid mirum si non comprehendis? Si enim comprehen
dis, non est Deus” (“We are talking about God; so why be surprised if you cannot grasp it? I mean, if you can grasp it, it isn’t God”; Sermon 117.5). By portraying the God of Love in this manner, Reson is attempting to elevate the status of amors as a topic of discussion. Of course, there is precedent for Reson’s challenging treatment of love. Jean’s immediate source is Alan of Lille’s De planctu naturae, where Nature begins her description of Cupid using similarly complicated language: “sive certa descriptio
ne describens, sive legitima diffinitio
diffiniens, rem immonstrabilem demonstrabo, inextricabilem extricabo” (“either through describing with faithful description, or defining with correct definition, a matter that is non-
demonstrable I shall demonstrate, one that is inextricable I shall untangle”). By using Alan (and theological language) to initiate her discussion on love, Reson is signaling her intent to take us far from the practical love advice of Guillaume’s Amors and engage us in an extended theoretical discussion on the topic.

After these prefatory remarks, Reson begins her discussion of love by acknowledging its complexity, its mystery, and the power it holds over those who succumb to it. In her efforts to describe “ce qui ne peut estre seü / ne demonstré ne conneü,” she gives us a conventional list of oxymorons (also drawn from Alan of Lille) which, in this context, seem a bit out of place. Since they are spoken not by the lover but by Reson (or, in Alan’s case, Nature), they lose their expressive, emotive quality and, instead, become part of the definition of love. Phrases such as

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19 Sermones, PL 38.663. The translation is from The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century, v. 4, trans. Edmund Hill (Brooklyn: New City, 1992), 211. For more on the incomprehensibility of God, see Romans 10.2 (“testimonium enim perhibeo illis quod aemulationem Dei habent sed non secundum scientiam”); Augustine, De ordine, 2.16.44 (PL 32.1015), and Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, 1a.12.
“Amors, ce est pez haïneuse, / Amors, c’est haïne amoureuse” (“Love is hateful peace and loving hate”; 4263-64 [94]) are ubiquitous in love poetry, but when a lover says those words, he is clearly describing his subjective feelings about love (or echoing a commonplace derived from subjective feelings about love). Placed in the context of a definition of love provided by an authority figure such as Reson, the phrase is no longer subjective expression but objective fact. In other words, when a lover says “love is x,” we know that what he really means is “love feels like x.” When Reson says “love is x,” love is x.

When Amant asks for an actual definition of love, Reson shifts gears and gives us a theoretical definition drawn from Andreas Capellanus:

Amors, se bien sui apensee,
c’est maladie de pensee
antre .II. persones annexe,
franches entr’els, de divers sexe,
venanz a genz par ardeur nee
de vision desordenee,
pour acoler et pour besier
pour els charnelment aesier.
Amant autre chose n’entant,
ainz s’art et se delite en tant.
De fruit avoir ne fet il force,
au deliter sanz plus s’esforce. (4347-58)

(Love, if I think right, is a sickness of thought that takes place between two persons of different sex when they are in close proximity and open to each other. It arises among people from the burning desire, born of disordinate glances, to embrace and kiss each other and to have the solace of one another’s body. A lover so burns and is so enraptured that he thinks of nothing else; he takes no account of bearing fruit, but strives only for delight. [95-96])

Reson’s definition is moderately faithful to the source. She expands on Andreas by emphasizing the mutual aspect of love and providing a more literal description of the goals of love that calls attention to the difference between love for the sake of delight and love for the sake of
procreation. What is important about this passage, however, is not so much the way in which she adapts Andreas’s definition to her own needs as the fact that she uses it at all. Reson provides this definition of love in order to complete the transition from the practical *ars amandi* of Guillaume (and of Ovid before him) to the theoretical *ars amandi* of Andreas. Her choice of words echoes the definition found in Guillaume’s part of the narrative, where Amors calls love a “maladie mout cortoisie” (“courtly disease”; 2167 [61]), but she alters it in order to highlight its connection to the mental faculty that she represents (reason). She separates love from the list of prescriptive commandments that surround Guillaume’s definition and, later in her speech, she chastises the kind of deceitful behavior found in Ovid. By redefining love in this manner, Reson is showing Amant that she expects him to think critically about his experience, and, ideally, to reject *amors* in favor of a higher moral purpose. Additionally, by using her definition of love (followed by a reference to Cicero’s *De Senectute*) as a launching pad for a discussion of delight, youth, and old age, Reson is showing Amant that she expects him to broaden his interests. At the same time, she is also laying the groundwork for the lectures on procreation that will be provided by Nature and Genius later in the poem.

If Reson is, as Poirion suggests, the representative of the first stage of education, her task is to teach her students methods of reading and interpretation that will aid them in their future lessons. Additionally, she is responsible for cultivating the moral well-being of her students. She accomplishes these two tasks, in conventional fashion, when she uses the story of Appius and Virginia as evidence for the corrupt nature of judges and the absence of Justice from the world (5559-628). But if we restrict our analysis of Reson’s lessons to the points at which she

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22 Edwards, 115.  
blatantly makes use of classical exempla to prove a point, we are missing much of her discourse. In her second discussion of Fortune (5812-6870, prefaced by her first discussion of Fortune at 4739-5340), Reson draws from a remarkable range of sources, placing Boethius, Socrates, and Seneca alongside a poetic description of Fortune’s house (derived from Alan of Lille’s *De planctu Naturae*), a discussion of the story of Croesus and Phania (which also serves as an exemplum on dreams and on the perils of literal reading), and an analysis of contemporary political struggles. She accompanies her lesson with a sort of meta-discourse about her own methodology, telling Amant that she can prove her point by using arguments based on authority or on reasoning (6270-74), on history (6389), and on old books or recent battles (6601-604). Reson’s main goal in this section is to expose the unreliable nature of Fortune, and her lesson here functions as a counterpart to her earlier discussion on this topic, in which she argued: “que mieuz vaut au genz et profite / Fortune perverse et contraire / que la mole et la debonaire” (“perverse, contrary Fortune is worth more and profits men more than does pleasant and agreeable Fortune”; 4814-16 [102]). Misfortune, Reson claims, can make a wise man out of a fool. Taken together, the two discussions of Fortune provide multiple avenues for attaining the sort of wisdom that Reson expects of her followers. If Amant refuses to learn from books or logic, he will, hopefully, end up learning from experience.

Before Amant rejects Reson entirely, she makes one last effort to convince him of the importance of learning from books. She is ashamed that he has studied Homer but remembers nothing of what he learned:

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Que vaut quan que tu estudies,  
quant li sens au besoig te faut,  
et seulement par ton defaut?  
Certes, tourjorz en remenbrance
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24 On Croesus and Phania, see Jager, “Reading the Roman.”
25 Cf. the ennobling effects of love described by Andreas Capellanus in *De amore* 1.4.
deüsses avoir sa sentance,
si devroient tuit home sage,
et si fichier en leur corage
que ja mes ne leur eschapast,
tant que la mort les atrapast.
Car qui la sentence savroit
et tourjorz en son queur l’avroit
et la seüst bien soupeser,
ja mes ne li porrait peser
de chose qui li avenist
que tourjorz fers ne se tenist
contre toutes aventures,
bones, males, moles et dures. (6756-72)

(What is the value of whatever you study when its sense fails you, through your fault alone, at the very time that you need it? Certainly you should always have its significance in your memory; so should all wise men, and they should so fix it to their hearts that it would never escape them until death captured them. For he who knew the significance, who always had it in his heart and knew how to weigh it well, could never be burdened by anything that happened to him, since he would hold fast against all happenings, good and bad, soft and hard. [131])

The important word here is *sentence* (or *sentance*, as in line 6760). Reson tells us that when we read Homer (or, by extension, any of the *auctores*) we need to find the *sentence*, which is the moral lesson that the text provides. Our main task, as is clear from the cluster of memory-related words and phrases (*remenbrance, fichier en leur corage, and toujourz en son queur l’avroit*), is to remember this lesson. But a wise man (*home sage*) will also know how to evaluate (*soupeser*) the moral significance of the text so that he can apply it to his own life. Earlier in her discourse, Reson told us that wise men are uniquely able to withstand the vicissitudes of Fortune:

Mes riens que Fortune feroit
nus sages hom ne priseroit;
ne nou feroit lié ne dolant
li tourz de sa roe volant. (5317-20)

(But nothing Fortune did would entrap a wise man nor would the revolution of her turning wheel bind him or make him sorrowful. [110]).
It is here, at the end of her lecture, that she provides an explanation of how this works. Wisdom, for Reson, is an understanding of the texts of the *auctores*, and the ability to glean from those texts a type of knowledge that will allow you to live a rational, moral life. Amant’s rejection of Reson is a rejection of the wisdom derived from a literature-based education. His literal-minded complaint about Reson’s use of *coilles* is further evidence of his refusal to find deeper significance in Reson’s literary exempla. It challenges the reader’s ability to identify with Amant at the same time as it provides Reson with one final opportunity to clarify her position and argue for the utility of her educational methods.

Reson’s response to Amant’s complaint is twofold. She starts by giving him a short speech on the nobility of God’s language, but then transitions to a defense of pagan wisdom that concludes with a singular reference to the *integumanz aus poetes*:

> Si dit l’en bien en noz escoles
> maintes choses par paraboles,
> qui mout sunt beles a entendre;
> si ne doit l’en mie tout prendre
> a la lettre quan que l’en ot.
> En ma parole autre sen ot,
> au mains quant des coillons parloie,
> don si briefment parler voloie,
> que celui que tu i veuz metre;
> et qui bien entendroit la lettre,
> le sen verroit en l’escriture,
> qui esclarcist la fable occure.
> La verité dedenz reposte
> seroit clere, s’el iert esposte;
> bien l’entendras, se bien repetes
> les integumanz aus poetes. (7123-38)

(In our schools indeed they say many things in parables that are very beautiful to hear; however, one should not take whatever one hears according to the letter. In my speech there is another sense, at least when I was speaking of testicles, which I wanted to speak of briefly here, than that which you want to give to the word. He who understood the letter would see in the writing the sense which clarifies the obscure fable. The truth hidden within would be clear if it were explained. You will understand it well if you review the integuments on the poets. [136])
According to Alastair Minnis, Reson’s brief mention of *integuments* in her discussion of proper language is evidence that the literal and the allegorical are in competition in Jean’s text.\(^{26}\) It is difficult to disagree with this argument, since it is true that Reson places the two apparently dissimilar types of discourse side-by-side, and that she makes no attempt to resolve the possible tension created by this move. But if we connect Reson’s brief mention of the *integuments* to her earlier discussion of the lessons hidden in Homer, we can see that Reson is drawing a distinction between her speech and that of the poets. There is a difference between the language used by a teacher in her classroom and that of the poets whom she glosses. Teachers are justified in being overly literal when it is appropriate to the lesson, even though the poets (who are the topic of those lessons) often hide the truth in a veil of allegory. We should remember here that Reson’s student, Amant, is prone to thinking in extremes. His first response to Reson’s arguments against love was to assume that she must be teaching him to hate. By bringing up the topic of *integuments*, Reson is merely instructing her student not to make a similar mistake. It is important for Amant to recognize that some degree of literalism is acceptable, but Reson doesn’t want him to assume that *everything* should be taken literally.

Reson concludes her speech by returning to the topic of literal language. Before that final statement, however, she adds one more level to the topic of integumental reading:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{La verras une grant partie} \\
\text{des secrez de philosophie} \\
\text{ou mout te vodras deliter,} \\
\text{et si porras mout profiter:} \\
\text{en delitant profiteras,} \\
\text{en profitant deliteras;} \\
\text{car en leur geus et en leur fables} \\
\text{gisent deliz mout profitables} \\
\text{soz cui leur pensees covrirent,}
\end{align*}
\]

quant le voir des fables vestirent. (7139-48)

(There you will see a large part of the secrets of philosophy. There you will want to take your great delight, and you will thus be able to profit a great deal. You will profit in delight and delight in profit, for in the playful fables of the poets lie very profitable delights beneath which they cover their thoughts when they clothe the truth in fables. [136])

What is compelling about this passage is the way in which Reson merges the concept of *integuments* with the Horatian *prodesse aut delectare* (*Ars poetica*, 333). The two concepts are certainly related, but they arise from two different ways of justifying the value of literature. The Horatian formula stems from a discussion on poetic composition; according to Horace, the poets who are able to combine both *dulce* and *utile* are the ones who will be granted poetic immortality (*Ars Poetica*, 343-46). The concept of *integuments*, however, comes out of an anxiety on the part of medieval educators who wish to justify their reading of pagan myths. For a contemporary definition of *integument*, we can look to the preface of the commentary on the *Aeneid* attributed to Bernardus Silvestris: “Integumentum est genus demostrationis sub fabulosa narratione veritatis involvens intellectum, unde etiam dicitur involucrum. Utilitatem vero capit homo ex hoc opere, scilicet sui cognitionem” (“The integument is a kind of teaching which wraps up the true meaning inside a fictitious narrative, and so it is also called ‘a veil.’ Man derives benefit from this work, the benefit being self-knowledge”).27 Interestingly enough, (Pseudo-) Bernardus also mentions Horace’s dictum, but in (Pseudo-) Bernardus’s commentary, the two concepts are

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separate, the one appearing in a discussion of Virgil’s objectives, and the other appearing in a
discussion of the “philosophical truth” hidden in Virgil’s text.\textsuperscript{28} It is Reson who combines them,
thus providing a double justification for learning how to read the fables of the poets in her last
attempt to convince Amant that he should abandon Amors and follow Reson instead.

Amant’s final rejection of Reson is, as I have pointed out, a rejection of the type of
education Reson proposes. But in this rejection he ends up echoing Reson in two significant
ways. First, he qualifies his refusal to interpret the poets by admitting that he would consider
doing so at a later time, when he is cured of his lovesickness. Amant reiterates this viewpoint
later in the text when he promises to explain the dream once he has finished telling it (15105-23);
in the same excursus, he mentions “profiz et delectucion” (15211) and lends support to the theory
that self-knowledge is the primary benefit of integumental poetry:

\begin{verbatim}
Mes pour ç’an escrit les meïsmes
que nous et vos de vos meïsmes
poïssons connoissance avoir,
car il fet bon de tout savoir. (15181-84)
\end{verbatim}

(But we have set these things down in writing so that we can gain knowledge, and that
you too may do so by yourselves. It is good to know everything. [259]).

Second, Amant admits to his foolishness in a way which recalls Reson’s discussion of fortune:

“So je sui fols, c’est mes domages” (“If I am a fool, it is my misfortune”; 7177 [137]). As Reson
explained earlier, misfortune has the effect of providing its own sort of education. On the
surface, the only lesson that Amant appears to have learned is the one about literal language. He
does, after all, excuse Reson for her use of offensive words. But the rest of Reson’s discourse

\textsuperscript{28} Commentary, 2; Medieval Literary Theory, 152. It is interesting to note that the \textit{Aeneid} commentary mentions the
Jupiter-Saturn-Venus myth that Reson cites, and that all three of these aspects (Horace, \textit{integuments}, and the myth)
also appear in William of Conches’s commentary on Macrobius (which is discussed in Peter Dronke, \textit{Fabula:
Explorations into the Uses of Myth in Medieval Platonism} [Leiden: Brill, 1974], 15-78). Could Jean de Meun have
read these commentaries? If so, that might explain his use of Horace and \textit{integuments} in this passage. Of course,
many of these features can also be found in Macrobius (discussed in Dronke), but Macrobius alludes to the concept
of profit and delight only briefly (and without citing Horace by name or discussing the passage), and he presents a
different version of the Jupiter-Saturn-Venus myth in which Saturn is the one doing the castrating.
has clearly made an impact as well, and it continues to permeate the text long after Reson is gone.

**After Reson**

Although there is a sense in which Reson is never fully absent from the text, as I will argue, her initial departure results in a striking shift in the narrative. Immediately after his rejection of Reson, Amant runs to Ami, who notices the lover’s unhappy state and asks what caused it. Amant, not wanting to burden his audience with a recounting of the whole story, simply says: “Et je le conte / si con avez oï ou conte, / ja plus ne vos iert recordé” (“And I told him just as you have heard; I will never record it again”; 7213-15 [138]). Ami’s response here is telling:

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Voiz, dist il, por le douz cors Dé!
Dangier aviez apesié,
s’aviez le bouton besié:
de noiant estes entrepris
se Bel Acueill a esté pris! (7216-20)
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(“You see—” he said, “for God’s sweet body!—you have calmed Resistance and kissed the bud. You are in no way hindered if Fair Welcoming has been captured.” [138])

At this point we may be left wondering whether Amant has even told Ami about the encounter with Reson. Obviously the question is impossible to answer. And certainly the advice that Ami gives is another kind of advice entirely, even though he does appear to employ some of Reson's teaching methods. One could say that, taken on its own, Ami’s advice is not very good; he advises, for example, that the lover should flatter his enemies and then take the rose by force. Some readers may find this abrupt change of atmosphere a relief, precisely because Ami is not Reson. Interestingly, though, despite the sharp contrast between Ami and Reson, his discourse parallels hers in a number of ways. He speaks “con bien apris” (“like one well taught”;

158
7251 [139]), mentions Fortune, glossing, and the Golden Age, and he makes use of classical exempla. In a sense, Ami is standing in the shadow of Reson. Whether the reader approaches Ami’s discourse with reservations or with a sigh of relief, the effect is the same: the character of Ami is partially defined by his status as “not Reson.” Thus, even when we get back to the love story, there are subtle reminders that there is more to the story than love.

If the reader, at this point in the text, is still identifying with Amant, he might be encouraged when Amors returns to reassure the lover and reconfirm his loyalty. This return to Guillaume’s worldview, however, is short-lived, as Wetherbee explains:

“This episode marks a turning point in the poem. Though he will again be driven by Dangier to reflect momentarily on his situation, the Lover’s state of mind will henceforth be almost wholly obscured by the course of events and the interplay of forces which are, as it were, beyond him. From Amors’ initial mustering of his barons to the point at which Venus and Nature enter the picture, the action is determined by the complex interplay of the assailants and the guardians of the Rose, and seems to me to defy analysis in terms of the Lover’s psychological development.”

29 Without recourse to Amant’s state of mind, the reader, now a (potentially unwilling) student, will be forced to sit through the lectures of Faux Semblant, La Vieille, Nature, and Genius, all without the benefit of Amant’s sympathetic perspective. The first two are clearly aligned with Jean’s attempts to continue Guillaume’s narrative, Faux Semblant because he joins the company of Amors, and La Vieille because she is living in the same closed, love-centric world that Amant inhabits. And yet, these two characters are hardly the ideal representatives of the courtoisie that Amors represents (and that Amant strives to attain). Faux Semblant admits to being a hypocrite and La Vieille openly dismisses two of Love’s commandments: “Trop malement les amanz

charge / qui veust qu’amanz ait le queur large / et qu’en un seul leu le doit mettre” (“He who wants a lover to have a generous heart and to put love in only one place has given too evil a burden to lovers”; 12999-13001 [225]). Moreover, their advice is not always in agreement with that of Ami, except when it comes to the subject of deceit, the one thread that ties together all of love’s advisers in Jean’s Rose. In contrast, Nature and Genius, whose authority, like Reson’s, is backed by literary tradition, build on Reson’s lessons to provide an advanced education in the quadrivium and in theology.

Given that Reson, Nature, and Genius all cover different aspects of the educational program, we need to look past the subject matter of each lecture to find their statements about education—their teaching philosophy, if you will. Reson’s argument is that the ability to understand and remember the significance of a text can help a reader withstand even the worst fortune. Reson, however, does not tell us how reading functions in this manner. Nature provides the explanation in a passage that is simultaneously a defense of learning and a reinterpretation of courtliness:

Si ront clerç plus granz avantages
d’estre gentis, courtais et sages
(et la reson vos an lirai)
que n’ont li prince ne li rai,
qui ne sevrent de lestreure;
car li clerç voit en l’escriture,
avec les sciances prouvees,
resonables et demontrees,
touz mauz don l’an se doit retrere
et touz les biens que l’an peut fere.
Les choses voit du monde escrites
si comme el sunt fetes et dites;
il voit es anciennes vies
de touz vilainz les vilanies
et touz les fez des courtais homes
et des courtaisies les somes;
briefmant il voit escrit en livre
quan que l’an doit foir et sivre,
par quoi tuit clerc, deciple et mestre,  
sunt gentill, ou le doivent estre. (18605-24)

(Learned men have a greater opportunity than have princes or kings, who know nothing of what is written, to be noble, courteous, and wise, and I will explain why. In the things that are written, clerks see, with proved, reasonable, and demonstrated information, all the evils from which one should withdraw and all the good things that one can do. He sees all the things of the world written down, just as they are done and said. In the lives of the ancients he sees the villainies of all the villains, all the deeds of courteous men, the summae of all courtesies. In short, he sees written in books whatever one should flee or follow. Thus all learned men, disciples or masters, are noble or should be. [308])

The argument that one can learn the virtues and the vices from reading books is not an original one; in fact, it is the most common expression of what I have described in Chapter 1 as “ethical reading.” By enclosing ethical reading within her discussion of nobility, however, Nature adds another layer of significance to the issue and gives it a new sense of urgency. Reading moves from the private to the public sphere. According to Nature, those who have the opportunity to learn ethics from the books they read have a duty to lead by example. Nature takes this one step further when she argues that clerks who “s’abandonent a vices” (18635) are more worthy of punishment than lay people (who do not have the same opportunities for learning about virtue and vice). The lesson is clear: since books condemn vice and praise virtue, anyone who can read books should be virtuous.

As if to provide an example for the argument she has just made, Nature follows her defense of learning with a discussion of vice and virtue. The link between Nature’s teaching and the reader’s own education is confirmed later in the text by Genius, who reminds the reader that Nature lectured against vice. Genius then praises the utility of Roman de la Rose:

Ces vices conter vos voudroie,  
mes d’outrage m’entremetroie.  
Assez briefmant les vos expose  
li jolis Romanz de la Rose:  
s’il vos plest, la les regardez  
por ce que mieuz d’aus vos gardez. (19849-54)
(I would tell these vices to you, but to do so would be an excessive undertaking. The lovely Romance of the Rose explains them to you quite briefly; please look at them there so that you may guard against them better. [327])

If readers are expected to learn about the vices and virtues from books, and the *Rose* includes a discussion of vice and virtue, then, presumably, readers are expected to learn from the *Rose*. Of course, there are two facts that complicate this argument. The first is that the *Roman de la Rose* Genius is referring to is the text we are currently reading. Typically, ethical reading is a methodology that readers impose on the text, not a methodology that the text imposes on readers. The second is that *Roman de la Rose* is a vernacular text, whereas the texts Jean’s readers would be accustomed to learning from are Latin texts (hence Nature’s comment about the laity being excused due to ignorance). Taken together, these two complications actually resolve themselves. It is precisely *because* Jean is writing in the vernacular that he is so self-conscious about the text’s utility. He uses Guillaume’s fragmentary narrative to launch a program of instruction that will teach both Latin and vernacular audiences to learn from a vernacular love story.

**Conclusion**

Throughout the lectures of Nature and Genius, Amant is silent. His absence from the narrative deprives the reader of an additional perspective and makes it difficult for them to question the teachings of Nature and Genius (as they might have done for Reson when Amant was there to challenge her every word). In fact, Genius’s sermon is well received by Love’s army, even though Genius is preaching doctrines that would seem to be inconsistent with the ideals that Amors represents. For a short moment, the amatory and the didactic strains of Jean’s text appear to have been reconciled.
Amant returns to finish what he started, addressing the reader directly as if he knows how the reader can benefit from this example:

Si savrez con je m’i contins,
tant qu’a mon gré le bouton tins.
Le fet orraiz et la maniere,
por ce que, se mestier vos iere,
quant la douce seson vandra,
seigneur vallet, qu’il convendra
que vos ailliez cueillir les roses,
on les ouvertes ou les closes,
que si sagemant i ailliez
que vos an cueillir ne failliez.
Fetes si con vos m’orroiz fere,
se mieuz n’an savez a chief trere;
car se vos plus larg
ou mieuz ou plus soutivemant,
poez le passage passer
san vos destraindre ne lasser,
si le passez en vostre guise,
quant vos avroiz la moie aprise.
Tant avez au mains d’avantage
que je vos apraign mon usage
san riens prandre de vostre avoir,
si m’an devez bon gré savoir. (21643-64)

(You shall know how I carried on until I took the bud at my pleasure. You, my young lords, shall know both the deed and the manner, so that if, when the sweet season returns, the need arises for you to go gathering roses, either opened or closed, you may go so discreetly that you will not fail in your collecting. Do as you hear that I did, if you know no better how to come to your goal; for, if you can negotiate the passage better, more easily or deftly, without straining or tiring yourself, then do so in your way when you have learned mine. At least you will have the advantage that I am teaching you my method without taking any of your money, and for that you should feel grateful. [352-53])

For Amant, this is still a story about roses, and if he has learned anything, it is that, by posing as a teacher and offering practical instruction, he can demand the respect of his audience. After all, it was Genius, Amant’s last teacher, who stated:

Bon fet retenir la parole
quant ele vient de bone escole,
et meilleur la fet raconter.
Mout an peut l’an en pris monter. (19889-92)

(It is a good thing to remember the lecture when it comes from a good school, and a better thing to tell it again; as a result, one may rise in the esteem of others. [327-28]).

We may question whether Amant’s lectures are taken from a “bone escole,” but in fact, the source of the lectures is not as relevant as the ability of readers to evaluate the lessons they are given. As Reson, Nature, and Genius have argued, it is up to the reader (or listener) to evaluate the sentence of the lesson, and to act accordingly. Those who fail to learn from texts will (hopefully) have the opportunity to learn from experience. Presumably, the most effective didactic text would be one that combines an education in the vices and virtues with an illustration of the instructive potential of experience.

Minnis argues that, after Genius’s spiritual interpretation of Guillaume’s garden of Deduit, “Amant’s sexual climax may well appear as something of an anticlimax.” And the reader who has been expecting some grand philosophical conclusion—the reader who believes, despite Jean’s occasional lapse back into Guillaume’s narrative, that the author intends to end with a palinode—might agree. But Jean does not end with a palinode, as we know, nor, would I argue, does he end at all. The love story comes to a close, and Amant wakes up, but the didactic aspect of the text is never resolved, and thus, not concluded. In Kay’s words, “Although the poem’s ending relieves the fear that the text will turn out to be, after all, interminable, it cannot be said to be a resolution. […] the Rose combines two quests, the erotic and the philosophical. The erotic quest ends when the lover gets the rose, but the quest for enlightenment remains unfulfilled.” This is a frustrating ending, as Kay acknowledges, but, I would add, it is also a natural one, because those readers who are intent on learning from the text will find that the text actually persists well beyond the last page. Not only does the text demand this level of

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30 Minnis, Magister Amoris, 113.
31 Kay, 114.
engagement from its readers, it also cultivates it; in other words, one of the effects of Jean’s *Rose* is that you learn the skills necessary for reading Jean’s *Rose*. 
Chapter 6:

Educatio Amantis: Genius and the Practice of Ethical Reading

Gower’s Confessio Amantis is indebted to the books of “hem that writen ous tofore,” as Gower tells us in the Prologue (Prol. 1).

Yet, there is a sense in which it is just as indebted to the author’s own texts, the Vox Clamantis and the Mirour de l’Omme, which he had written prior to the Confessio. Readers of Gower’s oeuvre will inevitably notice thematic and structural echoes, and Gower’s attempts to unite his poems in the colophon to the Confessio lends further support to the theory that Gower wrote the three poems as if they were part of one continuous project. At the same time, the Confessio stands apart from Gower’s other texts, as Winthrop Wetherbee explains:

All [of Gower’s texts] are in some sense experiments, didactic works that display an evolving engagement with poetic tradition which will be synthesized in the Confessio. But the Confessio is more than a synthesis. Its framing dialogue draws his moral and political concerns into uneasy coexistence with a meditation on love grounded in a complex rereading of such familiar models as Jean de Meun and Alan of Lille.

By including love in his didactic “experiment,” Gower reinvigorated his discussion of ethics and politics, and, at the same time, carved out a place for himself in the tradition of the medieval artes amandi. The significance of this tradition for Gower’s text has received some attention in scholarship on the Confessio, particularly among those critics for whom Gower’s debt to Ovid extends well beyond the tales he borrowed from the Metamorphoses (Alastair

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3 “John Gower,” 591.
Minnis, Götz Schmitz, James Simpson).  For others, *ars amandi* (or *ars amatoria*) is, like *speculum regis*, only one of several terms that could be used to categorize Gower’s work (Kurt Olsson, J. Allan Mitchell).  Yet, even among those who do not specifically use the term *ars amandi* (or anything like it), there is often a sense that what is most intriguing about the *Confessio* is the tension (a more useful term than Wetherbee’s “uneasy coexistence”) between the amatory and the didactic, whether the latter is discussed in relation to penitence (John J. McNally, Gerald Kinneavy), or morality (R.F. Yeager, Minnis, Nicolette Zeeman).  Yeager, for example, writes: “Gower’s poem proceeds contrapunctally, sometimes in apparent opposition—an amorous, and a less obvious but omnipresent Christian moral dimension. Far from being confused by this duality, Gower capitalizes on it, incorporating its tension into the heart of his poem.”  This tension between “lust” and “lore” is not unique to Gower, but is, in fact, built into the Ovidian tradition, as Minnis reminds us:

For Gower, as for those other great Ovidian writers, Andreas Capellanus, Jean de Meun, and Juan Ruiz, Ovidian self-fashioning meant coming to terms with both the amatory and the academic aspects of their author as understood in the later Middle Ages. […] The creative challenges which Gower faced were not new: what was new was the way in which he coped with them.

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7 *John Gower’s Poetic*, 160.  
8 “*De vulgari auctoritate*,” 65 (see also 56).
By adding the element of love to his discussion of politics and morality, Gower reimagined his own didactic “experiment.” And in doing so, Gower placed himself in the tradition of the *artes amandi*. Why did he do this, and to what effect? Or, to put it another way, how does the subject of love assist Gower in his didactic project? It is not just a matter of adding an element of pleasure to the text, as Derek Pearsall explains:

[Gower] is, in fact, making a new approach to his old theme, using love as the focus of his attention not only because of its audience appeal but also because it is the most powerful and most enigmatic focus of human experience, and therefore reveals man’s moral nature under its greatest stress, just as the flaws in a machine can be detected by subjecting it to abnormal strain. Gower, despite the fiction of the lover’s confession, is not providing instruction in the art of love, but using love as the bait for instruction in the art of living.\(^9\)

What Pearsall is noticing here is that there is something in love as a literary subject that makes it amenable to these didactic uses. As an expression of “man’s moral nature under its greatest stress,” love offers a formalized convention for examining the human condition and contemporary value systems. Authors can teach morality by teaching love. In Gower’s *Confessio*, the didactic potential of love is best exemplified by the figure of the lover, Amans, who is the ideal recipient of the lessons that Gower wishes to provide. Genius teaches Amans the process of ethical reading, a method of reading “olde bokes”—not appropriating them or desecularizing them (as we might expect, given Gower’s knowledge of the medieval tradition of allegorized Ovids)—that preserves the status of secular literature while it reframes those texts to make them morally useful for new generations of readers. At the same time, Amans is also an

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\(^9\) “Gower’s Narrative Art,” *PMLA* 81 (1966): 476. There is a great deal of support for the theory that Gower used love for its audience appeal, but none of the critics go beyond that to look at the other reasons Gower may have incorporated love into his poem. See, for example, Kinneavy: “here, I think, we find the key to Gower’s use of the love tradition: to capture and sustain the interest of an audience still captivated by that tradition. Seen in this way, the lover’s plight is but a device—a rhetorical tool to get at the meat of the work: ‘the ethical basis of God’s universe’” (158).
exemplary figure and a stand-in for the reader, receiving lessons that are meant for a wider audience, and participating in a dialogue that brings out the ethical potential of Genius’s stories.

**Amans and the Reader**

Who is it that is being taught in the *Confessio Amantis*? “Amans” might seem, at first glance, to be the obvious answer to this question, but the instruction that Genius offers this lover, though it may up to a point be appropriate to his needs, does seem to go well beyond what his situation requires.

In order to explain the function of Amans in the *Confessio*, Peter Nicholson draws a parallel between the confession of Amans and the Boethian model of philosophical instruction:

> In all such poems, the narrator who is the beneficiary of the instruction gets to speak, sometimes at great length, about his own experiences, and the fictional narrative pretends that the instruction is shaped as a response to his situation and his needs. From a broader perspective, of course, the opposite is true: the narrator is a mere device, and his wants, his expectations, and his misunderstandings—in Amans’ case, his misunderstanding of the nature of love and of the moral requirements that it imposes—are all determined by the specific sorts of instruction that the work is intended to present.  

In other words, the amount of information we receive about Amans’s character and his situation is determined entirely by what we need to know in order to learn from Genius’s lessons. If there are inconsistencies, we need not dwell on them, since Amans, in his role as an exemplary figure, “illustrates a range of behavior that is just as important as the tales for Genius’ lessons.”

Amans receives Genius’s instruction on the Seven Deadly Sins, even though he is not guilty of all of them, because ultimately it is not Amans’s sin that we should be paying attention to, but our own, which may or may not differ from that of Amans.

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11 Nicholson, 95.
Continuing his discussion of Amans and the Boethian model, Nicholson provides us with an invaluable characterization of our narrator. Amans is an ideal penitent, guilty enough to need Genius’s instruction yet virtuous enough to be able to profit from it. He is a “garden-variety sinner,” “someone more like ourselves,” whose struggle “offers a guide to ethical choices in love” and demonstrates the limits of human aspiration.12 Drawing on Nicholson’s portrait of Amans, I would like to redirect the discussion by asking a different set of questions. What does it mean to characterize Amans as a device, or a stand-in for the reader, and not, for example, as the protagonist of the poem? How does this influence our reading of the Confessio? And why Amans? How does this particular persona—the conventional lover—serve to further the poem’s didactic agenda?

Aside from providing the “lust” to counterbalance the “lore” of the text, the use of Amans is advantageous to Gower for several reasons. Amans is a lover, penitent, and student, and as such, he functions within the story to give purpose and structure to Genius’s lessons. At the same time, Amans is also the link between author and audience; he is a stand-in for the reader, and his story is an example from which the reader is expected to learn.

Much has been made of the Latin gloss at 1.59 that identifies the narrator as Amans: “Hic quasi in persona aliorum, quos amor alligat, fingens se auctor esse Amantem, varias eorum passiones variis huius libri distinctcionibus per singula scribere proponit” (“Here the author, fashioning himself to be the Lover as if in the role of those others whom love binds, proposes to write about their various passions one by one in the various sections of this book”).13 In this

12 Nicholson, 100-01.
fascinating “behind the scenes” glance at the text, the Latin commentator introduces us to Amans by describing how (and why) the author has taken on that persona. Less has been said about the corresponding passage in the English text, which gives us a first-person account of this change in character. After a brief discussion on the uncontrollable nature of love, the narrator tells us: “And for to proven it is so, / I am miselven on of tho, / Which to this scole am underfonge” (1.61-63). This corresponds directly to the “fingens se auctor esse Amantem” of the Latin, but with a slight change in emphasis. In place of the complex syntax and the metafictional language of the Latin gloss, we get a direct statement (“I am miselven”) coupled with a reference to love’s school. The use of the word “underfonge,” however, complicates this statement. According to the Middle English Dictionary, “underfonge” here carries the meaning “to take (sb. into one’s community, fellowship, company, etc.), make a member of; also, of the church: take or receive (sb.) as a member through baptism.” The narrator is telling us that he is a member of the school of love. From this perspective, the term is being used in a positive sense, with possible religious undertones. The term “underfonge,” however, has a negative side as well. It can also be translated as “to take by force” (here the MED cites line 2.1751 of Gower’s text), “to be willing to endure,” “to accept the blandishments of the devil,” “to have imposed,” and even, amusingly, to “be struck by an arrow.” Thus, depending on how one reads the line, the “scole” of love is either a community you can belong to, as you belong to a church, or it is an undesirable

Olsson, John Gower and the Structures of Conversion: A Reading of the “Confessio Amantis” (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1992), 39-41. But it is important to keep in mind that, as Olsson tells us, the Latin commentary as we have it was not always included in manuscripts.

14 For example, Burrow mentions the English, but only to make a brief point about the way in which Gower’s “I am miselven on of tho” (I.61) supports what is said in the Latin gloss (21).


16 Gower uses the word in its negative sense during the tale of Demetrius and Perseus: “And whan this king was passed thus, / This false-tunged Perseús / The regiment hath underfonge” (2.1749-51).
force that you must endure—or both. The narrator takes on the persona of Amans by identifying himself as a lover and displaying his familiarity with the contradictory language of love.

When the love plot begins, after the second Latin verse of book one, we learn more about Amans’s character. He is a conventional dream-vision lover, and this allows Gower to introduce him quickly by ushering in a parade of literary conventions: the springtime opening, the singing birds, the idyllic clearing in the middle of the forest, the lover’s complaint, and the appearance of the king and queen of love. We hear nothing of Amans falling asleep, but that hardly disqualifies him from this role. He clearly inhabits the dream-vision world. Other conventions are more easily dispensed with, as we can see from the curious appearance of Cupid, whose superfluous arrows strike an already-wounded victim (1.143-47). A dream-vision state can occur during waking hours, but Cupid cannot remove an arrow that is not there. We receive only the information that is necessary for the narrative framework. And, in fact, the economy with which Gower introduces the love plot in Book 1 contrasts sharply with the excess of the Prologue that precedes it. By the time we meet Amans, we have already been told about Gower’s vision for the text (the “middel weie”) as well as his reasons for writing it (whether it be the politics of the first recension or the bookish sentiments of the second). We have heard diatribes on the present condition of the State, the Church, and the Commons, and we have listened to the tale of the dream of Nebuchadnezzar. We have also been privy to the narrator’s thoughts on love, which he gives us in the first part of Book 1. The introduction of the protagonist, when it finally occurs, may seem somewhat overshadowed by all of this. But the Confessio is not about Amans. He is merely a narrative device and a didactic addressee, and his function is to serve as the ideal recipient for Genius’s lessons.
Genius is both a confessor and a teacher, and he needs a disciple who can be both a model penitent and a model student. Against those who would characterize Amans as a “slow and reluctant learner,” Nicholson argues (and I agree) that “it is too easy to confuse Amans’ persistency in love with persistency in error.” The confession frame requires a character with faults; otherwise, there would be no need for penitence. What makes Amans an ideal penitent is, first and foremost, the nature of his sins and virtues. Amans’s sins are minor sins, quite often sins committed in the name of love, which, we are told, is beyond man’s control. At the same time, Amans has enough virtues that he seems capable of being reformed. He genuinely wants to receive penance, and, although we never get the chance to see him put Genius’s lessons into practice, he listens to Genius, and promises to behave according to the instruction he is given.

It should be noted, however, that none of these attributes is unique to our narrator. Amans is a conventional lover, both in character and in name, and he behaves just like other lovers in the same tradition. He is able to play the role of the penitent because, as McNally explains, many of the lover’s attributes are analogous to those of the penitent:

First, the penitent, like the lover, has unsatiated desire for union with the “beloved.” It is this desire, together with the fear of separation from the beloved that brings the penitent to confession. Second, like the lover who stands in hope of receiving his lady’s grace, the penitent hopes that by receiving the sacrament of penance he will receive the grace of his beloved. Third, both lover and penitent accept a position of inferiority in relation to the beloved, and both are made better by the act of loving in which each engages. The analogy is further seen in at least two of the accidental characteristics of courtly love: the metaphor of sin as a malady is paralleled by that of love as a malady, and the metaphor of sin as an object of combat is paralleled by that of love as a kind of battle.

Lovesick and battle-weary, unsuccessful in his pursuit, the conventional lover is often in need of guidance. Meanwhile, his passion and his humility, his virtues which, as C.S. Lewis famously

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18 McNally, 81-82.
remarked, are “indistinguishable from those of a good man,” ensure that he will listen to this guidance and try to amend his ways, even if the resolution he seeks is not the one he receives.\(^{19}\)

It is shortly after we meet Amans that Genius arrives on the scene. Identifying Genius as a priest who is experienced in love, Amans asks for confession:

\[
\text{Min holi fader Genius;}
\]
\[
\text{So as thou hast experience}
\]
\[
\text{Of love, for whos reverence}
\]
\[
\text{Thou schalt me schriven at this time,}
\]
\[
\text{I prai thee let me noght mistime}
\]
\[
\text{Mi schrifte, for I am destourbed}
\]
\[
\text{In al myn herte, and so contoured,}
\]
\[
\text{That I ne may my wittes gete,}
\]
\[
\text{So schal I moche thing forgete.}
\]
\[
\text{Bot if thou wolt my schrifte oppose}
\]
\[
\text{Fro point to point, thanne, I suppose,}
\]
\[
\text{Ther schal nothing be left behinde.}
\]
\[
\text{Bot now my wittes ben so blinde,}
\]
\[
\text{That I ne can miselven teche. (1.216-29)}
\]

Afraid that he may “mistime” his confession, because love has thrown him into a state of mental confusion, Amans requests that Genius question him “fro point to point,” so that nothing escapes scrutiny. The function of Amans here is to assist Genius in laying the foundation for the dialogic nature of the confession. Moreover, the language with which he asks for this confession highlights the dual roles that both Amans and Genius will play. In addition to being a lover and a penitent, Amans is a student, and, blinded by love, he cannot teach himself.

As a student, Amans listens when he needs to listen, and asks questions when he does not understand. Sometimes he asks Genius to define his terms: for example, when Genius brings up hypocrisy (Book 1), ire (Book 3), or hate (Book 3). He often assists Genius in introducing the exempla by asking for examples, sometimes requesting that they directly relate to his situation.

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\(^{19}\) C.S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936), 199; See also Burrow: “Making confession to the priest of Venus, [Amans] confines himself to the matter at hand, and we therefore never see him in those other relationships which, in *Troilus*, display Criseyde and even Troilus as people with other business besides love. Gower’s Amans, as his name suggests, has no such other business” (10-11).
(e.g. “I wolde you beseche / That ye me som ensample teche, / Which mihte in loves cause stonde”; 1.2259-61), and sometimes not (e.g. “And if ther more of Wraththe be, / Now axeth forth per charité, / As ye be youre bokes knowe”; 3.1085-87). On occasion, Amans’s requests for examples cover both the specific (love) and the general (everything else), such as when he asks:

Mi fader, this matiere is bete
So fer, that evere whil I live
I schal the betre hiede give
Unto miself be many weie.
Bot over this nou wolde I preie
To wite what the branches are
Of Avarice, and hou thei fare
Als wel in love as otherwise. (5.1960-67)

In this particular example, Amans confirms his role as student (and Genius’s role as teacher) by dutifully praising Genius’s lesson and promising to keep it in mind. He is also assisting Genius in directing the discussion back to the main topic of Book 5 (“To wite what the branches are / Of Avarice”), from which Genius had temporarily strayed, driven by Amans’s own questions about the pagan gods. This same pattern—Amans asking questions which prompt a departure from the main topic of the book, and then, afterwards, asking questions which direct Genius back to that topic—is in evidence, most notably, in the transitions between Books 6, 7, and 8. It is Amans who requests information on Alexander’s instruction by Aristotle (6.2408-19), and it is Amans who, at the end of Book 7, asks Genius to return to the subject of love, complaining that the lengthy excursus was not the distraction he hoped it would be (7.5408-14).

In his roles as lover, penitent, and student, Amans functions within the narrative to drive the story and give structure and purpose to Genius’s lessons, as well as to give interest to what otherwise might be the kind of book that “dulleth ofte a mannes wit / To him that schal it aldai rede” (Prol.14-15). But Gower also uses Amans to cultivate a particular kind of relationship
between the text and its readers. As a sympathetic character, someone we can identify with, Amans serves as a stand-in for the reader, receiving lessons beyond those which he needs to learn. At the same time, Amans’s story functions as an exemplum for the reader, similar to the ones Genius tells.

We can identify with Amans, certainly more than we can identify with, say, Dido, or Pygmalion. His world is almost realistic, as Nicholson explains:

“Realism” is always a relative term, but it applies in a precise context here, to the relation between Amans’ accounts of himself and the stories that Genius offers for his instruction. The tales are often heroic or fantastic, but apart from his experiences with Venus, Cupid, and Genius […], Amans encounters no gods, he has no prophetic visions, he performs no heroic deeds, and he undergoes no transformations. His is a world of conventional but very familiar activities in recognizable settings, and he thus provides the link, otherwise lacking in the poem, between Genius’ moral truths and ordinary human lives.²⁰

For a demonstration of how this connection between Amans and Gower’s potential readers might work, we can look to Amans himself, who describes the process of identifying with fictional characters:

Min ere with a good pitance
Is fedd of reディング of romance
Of Ydoine and of Amadas,
That whilom weren in mi cas,
And eke of othre many a score,
That loveden longe er I was bore.
For whan I of here loves rede,
Min ere with the tale I fede;
And with the lust of here histoire
Somtime I draw into memoire
Hou sorwe mai noght evere laste;
And so comth hope in ate laste,
What I non other fode knowe. (6.877-89)

Amans feeds his ears with romances about lovers who were once in his situation. He identifies with these fictional characters, commits their stories to memory, and derives hope from their experiences in love. Undoubtedly, many (if not all) of Gower’s readers (or listeners) have

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²⁰ Nicholson, 100.
experienced the same process of identification (especially since Gower’s medieval audience can be narrowed down to those who would consent to read or listen to secular literature in the first place). Who has not, at some point, been young and foolishly in love? Or, at the very least, who could deny that young lovers are sympathetic characters?

When we sympathize or identify with Amans, we place ourselves in his situation, and we listen to Genius’s lessons in a way that we might not if Genius were simply lecturing to us directly (as Gower does in both the Vox and the Mirour). The purpose of this reader identification becomes most evident when Genius provides instruction on sins which Amans is quite obviously innocent of, such as presumption, boasting, idleness, rape, and incest. It is these moments that tell us Genius is speaking to a wider audience, and that Gower is using Amans almost as a sort of didactic addressee. For a parallel situation, we can look to Andreas Capellanus, and more specifically, to the dialogues that dominate Book One of De Amore. If the advice in these dialogues were intended just for Walter, Andreas’s didactic addressee, then the number of those dialogues could be cut down considerably, because, one might reasonably assume, Walter belongs to only one class, and would only need the advice that pertained to that class. But since Walter is also a stand-in for all the potential readers of De Amore, Andreas provides instruction for all classes—or at least, all classes that he can envision his potential readers belonging to. Likewise, Genius provides advice for all his potential readers—not based on class, as in Andreas, but based on situation. Amans may not be boastful or idle, but others may be.

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21 See Nicholson, 95-96.
22 Andreas provides instruction for three classes of men: plebius, nobilis, and nobilior. The first and third get three dialogues, whereas the second only gets two. Walter, who belongs (we can assume) to only one class, would only directly benefit from two or three of the dialogues.
In fact, it is Amans himself who positions his story as an exemplum for readers. Before he encounters Genius and begins the confession, Amans pauses to address the lovers in his audience:

To hem that ben lovers aboute  
Fro point to point I wol declare  
And wryten of my woful care,  
Mi wofull day, my wofull chance,  
That men mowe take remembrance  
Of that thei schall hierafter rede:  
For in good feith this wolde I rede,  
That every man ensample take  
Of wisdom which him is betake,  
And that he wot of good aprise  
To teche it forth, for such emprise  
Is for to preise” (1.72-83)

In this passage, Amans promises to tell his story in detail, and he does so by using the exact same phrase—“fro point to point”—that he will use when he asks Genius to hear his confession. It is important to recognize here that love is the only subject of instruction in the entire Confessio where the education provided by experience is valued just as much, if not more, than the education provided in the classroom and through books. Because of this unique attribute of love, Amans is able to claim authority based on experience alone, and offer to teach us without elaborating on his credentials. Claiming authority from the outset, Amans tells his readers that they should pay attention to what they read “hierafter”—a term that, in the context of this passage, takes on a double meaning. First, it means that readers should pay attention to what follows—in other words, that they should listen to Genius and learn along with Amans. It also means, however, that readers should pay attention after Amans’s story has ended, or even, perhaps, after Amans has died (“whan I am go”; 1.87). With a nod to the opening of the

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23 For more on Amans’s story as an exemplum, see Mitchell: “Finally, Gower teaches practice by way of practice. The erstwhile lover makes an example of himself, anticipating Genius’s claim that ‘every man is othres lore’ (8.256)” (42). See also Peck, Kingship, xxiv, and Olsson, “Rhetoric,” 196-98.
Confessio, Amans tells us here that we should “take ensample” of the wisdom we receive so that we can teach it to others. Although Amans eventually cedes authority to Genius, this address to the readers provides a necessary link between the didactic claims of the preface and the instruction provided by Genius. Amans’s story is the “newe som matiere,” derived from “old wyse,” that will remain, for our instruction, even after the author and his contemporary readers are gone.

What is interesting about Amans’s role as an exemplum is how conscious it is. There are other moments, of course, in which Amans is aware of the role that he plays (e.g. “Mi fader, I am amorous”; 1.2258), but nowhere else is he so explicit. The care with which Gower, through Amans, describes to us this process of learning and transmission serves to underscore its significance for the text as a whole. Gower learned from old books, and so will Amans. Both are expected to pass this learning on to others, a task which involves the preservation of old stories and the constant reassertion of their utility.

Genius and the Practice of Ethical Reading

Amans, despite his various functions in the Confessio, is first and foremost a lover, as his name suggests. The primary role of Genius, however, is more difficult to discern. We are told he is the priest of Venus, and yet, the confession that follows seems to contradict that role, as Peck explains:

From the beginning of the poem it is clear that [Genius’s] interests are greater than those of the promiscuous Venus and that he will speak of more things than love, at least love as cupidinous Amans has come to define the term. In order to help Amans see beyond his infatuation, Genius will, as the poem progresses, ultimately instruct Amans in all the humanities.24

24 Peck, Kingship, 34.
The last clause here is particularly significant. When we look at the confession as a whole, we see that there is a great deal more instruction than there is confession. And Genius’s affiliation with Venus clearly recedes into the background for the greater part of the text, at least, until Venus returns in Book 8. Therefore, although we may question Genius’s qualifications or his abilities as a teacher (and many have, as I will explain shortly), it is obvious that Genius plays that role.

Genius begins the confession with the eyes and ears because they are “the gates, / Thurgh whiche as to the herte algates / Comth alle thing unto the feire, / Which may the mannes soule empeire” (1.299-302). The first few exempla—those of Acteon, Medusa, the asp, and Ulysses—are intended to teach Amans one simple lesson: he must learn how to “kepe and warde” his eyes and ears, even to keep them locked up if necessary, to protect himself from foolish suggestions. If Amans can learn to govern his eyes and ears, he will have no problem governing the other senses. They are that fundamental.

In addition to being the gateways to a man’s soul, the eyes and the ears are also the path by which wisdom enters the mind. John of Salisbury, in book one of his Metalogicon, speaks on the value of the liberal arts, and especially of grammar, which “et tam per aures quam per oculos ut sic procedat oratio sapientiam introducit” (“introduces wisdom both through ears and eyes by

25 See Bruce Harbert: “The medieval confessional was as much a place of instruction as of confession, and in Gower’s poem there is more of the former than of the latter” (“Lessons from the Great Clerk: Ovid and John Gower,” Ovid Renewed: Ovidian Influences on Literature and Art from the Middle Ages to the Twentieth Century, ed. Charles Martindale [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988], 86). See also Yeager, “John Gower and the Exemplum Form: Tale Models in the Confessio Amantis,” Mediaevalia 8 (1982): 310.

its facilitation of verbal intercourse”; 1.13.20). For John, as for Genius, the eyes and ears are the gateways of the mind, even though Genius, preparing for a long discourse on sin, emphasizes the negative ways in which these gateways can be breached, while John, defending the liberal arts against its detractors, focuses on the positive. Continuing his discussion on grammar, John writes: “Tradit ergo prima elementa sermonis ars ista, oculorum et aurium iudicium instruit, ut non facilius queat aliquis praeter eam philosophari, quam inter philosophos eminere, qui semper caecus fuit et surdus” (“This art accordingly imparts the fundamental elements of language, and also trains our faculties of sight and hearing. One who is ignorant of it cannot philosophize any easier than one who lacks sight and hearing from birth can become an eminent philosopher”; 1.13.26). Grammar enters the mind through these gateways, and, in turn, prepares the mind for an even greater influx of wisdom.

Read in the context of John of Salisbury’s discussion on the senses, Genius’s initial lesson takes on new meaning. Genius is a teacher, but more specifically, he is a grammaticus, instructing Amans on the importance of the senses in order to prepare him for the wisdom that is to follow. The suggestion that Genius plays the role of a grammaticus has previously been made by Olsson, in his chapter in Re-visioning Gower. Olsson draws a comparison between Genius and the Latin prose-commentator, who is also a grammaticus, albeit a more conventional one, “who, through a diligence in connecting the poem with its cultural heritage, confers authority on the English text.” Meanwhile, Genius, “because of the idiosyncrasies of his ingenium,” and because of his dual role as Christian confessor and priest of Venus, “sometimes reinforces and

29 “Reading.” 89.
sometimes undermines” the authority that the Latin-prose commentator has given to Gower’s poem.\textsuperscript{30} Olsson concludes his discussion with a comment on the interplay between interpretation and reading in the \textit{Confessio}:

The debate Gower encourages through the multiple interpreters he represents in his work is consistent with the end he envisions as the poem concludes, when the persona of Amans/“John Gower” becomes a “reader” of his own confession. This work fosters an exercise of reading and, even more importantly, re-reading, inspiring the use of a variety of “medieval reading strategies” to sharpen our capacity for ethical judgment.\textsuperscript{31}

In Olsson’s analysis, the meaning of the text is produced through interpretive conflict and instability. By incorporating multiple viewpoints, multiple reading strategies, and multiple interpreters, Gower “forces readers not only to learn from reading what wisdom is, but to intervene, judge wisely, and thereby become wise.”\textsuperscript{32} Without denying the validity of this line of argument, I would like to suggest that Olsson’s “multiple interpreters” can also teach us something individually; in other words, even if we look at Genius alone, and at Genius’s use of one particular reading strategy, we find a similar path from reading to wisdom.

In order to understand the method of reading that Genius practices, we can look to the very first lesson he provides, and to the critical discussion on this lesson. Genius’s first lesson introduces Amans to three of the major sources for the exempla in the \textit{Confessio}: Ovid’s \textit{Metamorphoses}, the Bible, and Trojan history. It also introduces Amans to many of the topics that will be found in the first book and, indeed, throughout the whole of the text, such as pride, suggestion, consent, self-governance, judgment, and wisdom. Within the text, the four exempla in this section would appear to be short and easy to understand, since the moral of each story is plainly stated. In the hands of Gower’s readers, however, these exempla have often been seen as elusive, disadvantageous, misconstrued, or even, in the words of Anthony Farnham, “morally

\textsuperscript{30}“Reading,” 89.
\textsuperscript{31}“Reading,” 92.
\textsuperscript{32}“Reading,” 92.
This is an important distinction, one which significantly affects our understanding of the text, and thus merits further discussion.

The primary issue at stake here is how critics have responded to Gower’s omission of the allegorized versions of these tales. Thomas Hatton, for example, armed with the writings of the church fathers and with Gower’s own Mirour, explains that Gower was familiar with the “spiritual” interpretations of the tale of the asp, even though the interpretations Genius provides are “carnal” (i.e. literal) ones. In Hatton’s reading, Genius, blind to the obvious allegorical possibilities of his own exempla, is actually “mistelling his tales to make them support the narrow literal points which he attempts to impress on Amans.” Meanwhile, Gower, knowing his audience is more perceptive than Genius, “imbeds in the tales clues that Genius overlooks which suggest that his creator intends the reader to remember the spiritual significances that elude the Priest of Venus.” A similar argument is made by Olsson, who outlines the standard interpretations of the story of the asp in order to make this conclusion: “The point is not that the story lacks the potential for a gloss, but that it is open to multiple readings, and Genius rejects that wealth of significance.” Olsson does not argue that Genius is “mistelling” the tale, just that Genius leaves out these allegorical readings, and that such omissions can be seen by the reader as Gower’s way of highlighting the similarities between Genius and the tales he tells:

The story of the asp, as Genius himself tells it, illustrates by analogy that difference in his character as a genius. Readings in bono and in malo of serpent and charmer disappear in the narratio and its simple, incomplete moralitas. Gower “centers” our attention on the telling, and as with the narrative, so with Genius: the poet provides no explicit readings.

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36 John Gower, 67.
of his persona; he “centers” him as a narrator, even as judge, giving us little opportunity to make a definitive judgment in bono or in malo.\footnote{John Gower, 68.}

Olsson’s Genius is a “patron of too much,” a “personified demande,” an ingenious yet untrustworthy figure who destabilizes our reading and, in doing so, “encourages multiple and ultimately wiser responses to the poem.”\footnote{John Gower, 52 ff.} Hatton’s Genius is a well-meaning yet ignorant servant of Venus, whose “doggedly literal handling of richly allegorical materials” demonstrates the limits of carnal understanding and the dangers of concupiscence.\footnote{“The Role of Venus and Genius,” 36. See also Kathryn L. Lynch: “Genius’s superficial interpretations of many stories in the Confessio suggest that we may expect too much of him. He is an embodiment of the Lover’s imagination, not his reason, and since abstraction occurs only in the reference of what the soul apprehends to reason’s analysis, the guidance of Genius, however prolonged, will not serve to raise the Lover from the literal and practical ethics of courtship to a consideration of the sublime and transcendent love offered to man by God” (The High Medieval Dream Vision: Poetry, Philosophy, and Literary Form [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988], 182).}

What both critical readings share, aside from a grounding in allegorized versions of the story of the asp, is a concern with the potential story as understood by Gower’s readers as opposed to the actual story as told by Genius to Amans. Both readings take as their starting point the expectations of Gower’s readers, and from there, they make judgments as to the success of Genius’s interpretations. I have no intention of downplaying the significance of discussing the interpretive potential of Genius’s stories, nor do I entirely disagree with Mitchell and others, who maintain that “in the strongest sense the poem remains to be invented through reader response.”\footnote{Mitchell, 52. See also David W. Hiscoe, “The Ovidian Comic Strategy of Gower’s Confessio Amantis,” Philological Quarterly 64 (1985): 367-85; and Simpson, 14-15, 203.} However, I do believe that Genius’s reputation has been unfairly damaged by arguments that focus more on what Genius is not doing than on what he is doing. Instead of insisting that the omission of allegorical readings is a failure on Gower’s part, or that it is nothing more than a blatant invitation for the reader to supply these readings, we should consider the possibility that Gower avoided allegorical readings for another reason entirely, one which has
implications not just outside the fiction of the text but within that fiction as well. We should consider that there were other methods of interpretation available to Gower, and that these other methods supported his didactic intentions in a way that allegory could not.

The method of interpretation that Genius practices is not allegorical interpretation but ethical reading. Ethical reading asks that the reader focus on the moral aspects of any given text, and, if there are none, that he look to the immoral aspects as examples of behaviors that should be avoided. Allegorical reading (also called “allegoresis,” to distinguish it from the composition of allegorical texts) is the process of “explaining a work, or a figure in myth, or any created entity, as if there were another sense to which it referred, that is, presuming the work or figure to be encoded with meaning intended by the author or a higher spiritual authority.” We can recognize the difference between ethical reading and allegorical interpretation if we compare, on the one hand, Genius’s interpretation of the Acteon story, which he tells as an exemplum about a man who “caste his yhe amis” (1.380), and, on the other hand, the interpretation provided by Wetherbee, for whom “the vulnerability of the young hunter’s senses to the sight of the nude goddess is a synecdoche for the nature of fallen man.” Both are perfectly valid interpretations, but the method of ethical reading that Genius uses has the advantage of preserving the integrity of the literary text while still opening the text up to a discussion of ethical issues. Rather than composing an allegorical reinterpretation of the text that might suit his purposes, Genius merely has to enclose the text in a moral framework and then subtly excerpt or amend the text so that it can plausibly function as an example of the topic under discussion.

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The difference between these two methods of reading is best explained by Robert A. Kaster, in his discussion on St. Basil (who practices what I would call ethical reading, although Kaster does not use that term) and Augustine (who advocates allegorical reading):

Basil assumes that the literary culture would remain a sanitized but unmistakably secular propaedeutic: as the first step toward the final good of the soul, Moses’ preliminary gymnastics among the Egyptians have a value in themselves and are left, so to speak, in situ. But when Augustine speaks of the use of the foreign culture, in the metaphor of despoiling the Egyptians, the emphasis is wholly on passing out of Egypt. The bits and pieces of the literary culture that one can surreptitiously appropriate are valued only to the extent that they do not remain secular; the metaphor of propaedeutic, with its implications of continuity and progress, yields before the metaphor of possessive alienation.\(^4^3\)

Kaster is discussing the interpretation of secular texts, since they were the primary targets of Augustine’s method of reinterpretation, but the distinction between ethical and allegorical reading can be relevant for the study of religious texts as well, especially if they are placed alongside secular texts and used as exempla (as they are in Gower). It is also important to note that ethical reading was initially developed in the schools, where the emphasis on the moral utility of a text served to justify the use of pagan literature in teaching students Latin. Any Latin text could be put to the service of grammatical education, as long as the teacher was able to provide an accessus or an introductory lecture that placed the text in the domain of ethics. In ethical reading, therefore, the text can be just as important as the moral, whereas in allegorical reading, the focus is on the interpretation, and the original text is rendered virtually irrelevant (a fact which might explain why critics have been so hesitant to accept non-allegorical readings of texts that have already been despoiled). To clarify our understanding of ethical reading and demonstrate the advantage Genius gains from practicing it, I will focus on two examples that are

\(^4^3\) Guardians of Language: The Grammarian and Society in Late Antiquity (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 87-88.
often featured in discussions of Genius’s “misreading”: the tale of Phebus and Daphne (Book 3), and the tale of Ceyx and Alcyone (Book 4).

The tale of Phebus and Daphne is told as an example of “folhaste” (i.e., hastiness, rashness) and, as such, serves as a counterweight to the arguments against sloth in the next book. When read together, these stories teach the virtue of moderation. Yet neither Amans nor modern critics are content with Genius’s interpretation of this exemplum. For Amans, the tale cannot possibly apply to him, because, as he says, his lady is “no tre, but halt hire oghne forme” (3.1731). He reads the tale more literally than Genius tells it. The critics, however, have the opposite reaction—they are puzzled by the lack of allegory. Hatton, for example, points out that the story is typically read as a story about concupiscence and chastity. Bruce Harbert provides even more examples:

The *Ovide moralisé* offers several explanations for the story of Apollo and Daphne, some pure rationalisations: the river Peneus has many laurels alongside it and the sun (Apollo) makes them grow, or Daphne was a girl who died fleeing her lover and was buried under a laurel-tree. Alternatively, Daphne is virginity fleeing corruption, changed into a laurel because it is evergreen and never bears fruit; or else Daphne is the Blessed Virgin, who was the laurel with which the Son of God crowned himself by taking up residence in her body.

Although Genius hints at these interpretations by mentioning that the laurel tree is evergreen, and that Daphne will “duelle a maiden stille” (3.1719), his interpretation of the tale is far from being allegorical.

The advantage of this method, for Genius, is that it allows him to maintain his focus on “folhaste,” while still leaving the tale open to further interpretation. He removes from the story any mention of the argument between Cupid and Phebus, which might have drawn our attention away from the main point of the exemplum. The fault here lies entirely with Phebus, who, by

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45 Harbert, 91.
time Cupid arrives on the scene, has already fallen in love with Daphne and has begun to pursue her tirelessly. Cupid has been reduced to an afterthought, whose darts serve only to confirm a preexisting love (as they did for Amans in Book 1). And Daphne’s transformation, stripped of its etiological connotations, serves as both an echo of the original text and a quick way of ending the story so that Genius can proceed to the moral. The story may seem too unrealistic to be useful, but only if we are reading the tale literally, as Amans initially does. Genius responds to Amans’s literal interpretation by opening up the tale beyond the subject of love:

Mi sone, sithen it is so,
I seie no mor; bot in this cas
Bewar how it with Phebus was.
Noght only upon loves chance,
Bot upon every governance
Which falleth unto mannes dede,
Folhaste is evere for to drede,
And that a man good consail take,
Er he his pourpos undertake,
For consail put Folhaste aweie. (3.1736-45)

Genius’s reading of this tale assigns it a moral significance beyond the particularities of the story (“Noght only upon loves chance / But upon every governance”), but it does not close the tale to further interpretation (as often happens in allegorical readings). 46 Moreover, the moral Genius provides is not a normative prescription. He is not giving Amans strict rules to follow, but rather, offering him exemplary scenarios that highlight specific ethical issues. If Amans is going to find relief from his love, he must learn to read his own situation in terms of its broader ethical implications. Mitchell’s conclusion here is worth repeating: “the strength of the exemplum, alongside contrary cases, is that it invites the lover to reflect on the moral issues involved without legislating a course of action independent of personal reflection and the contingencies of

his own cases.”\textsuperscript{47} For Mitchell, however, Genius’s method of reading “is incomplete without the transition from text to mediation and action.”\textsuperscript{48} He continues: “Until it is realized in the conscience or conduct of a practitioner as a form of life, exemplary morality exists only in \textit{potentia}.”\textsuperscript{49} It is true, of course, that the ethical utility of a text can only be realized in action. But Mitchell’s analysis runs the risk of taking us too far from the text. \textit{Within} the text, Genius’s exempla serve only to provoke discussion on moral issues and to prompt Amans to dutifully request more exempla.

For Amans (and the reader), the tale of Phebus and Daphne is a relatively easy lesson. Genius has given us Ovid’s tale, but simplified it to make it more useful as an exemplum on the vice of “folhaste” and related topics. The same cannot be said for the tale of Ceyx and Alcyone. And yet, Genius still has little use for allegorical interpretations. For this tale especially, they were abundant, and must have been difficult to avoid. Gower’s audience would have known two standard allegorical readings of the tale: a negative reading (such as that found in Giovanni del Virgilio’s \textit{Allegorie Librorum Ovidii Metamorphoses}), in which the lovers represent cupidity, uxoriousness, spiritual sloth, and a concern for the pleasures of this world over those of the next; and a positive reading (such as that found in Pierre Bersuire’s \textit{Ovidius Moralizatus}), where Alcyone becomes the Christian soul, suffering the loss of Ceyx, who represents Christ.\textsuperscript{50} Obviously, there is nothing to prevent that same audience from reading those interpretations into Gower’s text, even if Genius does not make them explicit. But the \textit{possibility} of an allegorical reading does not mean that one is present in the text (if that were the case, then Virgil really would be a prophet). How, then, does Genius interpret this tale?

\textsuperscript{47} Mitchell, 55.  
\textsuperscript{48} Mitchell, 17.  
\textsuperscript{49} Mitchell, 17.  
\textsuperscript{50} The allegorical readings of Ceyx and Alcyone are discussed in Hiscoe (375-76) and Harbert (91).
The moral of this tale, for Genius, is twofold. Prompted by Amans’s remark that he has no use for sleep, Genius initially tells the tale as an exemplum on the utility of dreams. After stating this moral, however, Genius adds a cautionary note: “Bot slowthe no lif underfongeth / Which is to love appourtenant” (4.3130-31). This second moral—that sloth and love are incompatible—ties the tale of Ceyx and Alcyone in with the rest of Book 4 and initiates the discussion that will lead to the next tale, The Prayer of Cephalus. The first moral, on the utility of dreams, speaks to the larger issues of the text. Amans’s entire confession, we might recall, began with a dream-vision-like scenario, and the lack of any mention of Amans falling asleep hardly negates the strong parallels between dream-vision literature and Confessio as a whole. Even if the events narrated by Amans are not part of an actual dream, there can be no doubt that they are removed from Amans’s ordinary existence in some manner. By instructing Amans on the utility of dreams, Genius is looking ahead to Book 8, when Amans (and the reader) will be expected to learn from these otherworldly encounters. Genius’s lesson also ties in with Gower’s comments on the utility of old books and the transmission of learning. Books, like dreams, are fictions that need to be interpreted before they can yield any sort of knowledge, and both are often dismissed as trivial, or, even worse, as harmful.

Readers of the Confessio can benefit from Genius’s lesson on sloth and the utility of dreams, or they can bring their own interpretation to the tale, because, as with Phebus and Daphne, Genius’s interpretations are not prescriptive but suggestive. He tells the tale in a way that would support his reading, but he also leaves numerous openings for further ethical inquiry. For example, if we want to read Alcyone in a wholly positive light, then we have to consider the idea that her impatience could be a virtue (or, at least, not a vice). Ceyx told Alcyone he would be gone two months, and “whan the monthes were ago, / The whiche he sette of his comynge”
Alcyone immediately began praying for knowledge of her husband’s whereabouts. How do we reconcile this with Genius’s teachings on patience in Book 3? Or, to take a closer example, can we draw a parallel between Alcyone and Phyllis? And if so, how does that affect our reading of Ceyx? Surely we cannot blame him for dying. But can we blame him for leaving? Genius certainly gives us more explanation for Ceyx’s departure than he does for that of Aeneas (also in Book 4), but that does not mean it is entirely clear either. We do not, for example, learn why his brother was turned into a goshawk, or why Ceyx has to travel to pray to the gods (especially since Alcyone prays quite successfully without leaving home). Genius gives us enough information to attempt our own interpretation of the text, but not enough to control the outcome of that interpretation. He tells the story of Ceyx and Alcyone in a way that highlights the ethical concepts being discussed at this point in the confession, the “horizon of possible outcomes,” in Mitchell’s terms, at the same time as it encourages an exploration of the other moral topics that can be found in the tale.51

Returning now to the frame story, we find that, at the end of Genius’s lessons, Amans is still a “lewed man” (8.2052). He has not yet learned that his persistence in love is keeping his reason at bay, nor, for that matter, has he realized that the resolution he is about to receive lies in the opposite direction from the one he initially sought. If we expect to see Amans slowly coming to these realizations, then we have not been paying attention to Amans’s function in the text. He functions not as the protagonist but as a literary device, and as a device, he can be quickly disposed of as soon as he is no longer needed. However, Amans is also an exemplary figure, and so we need to be provided with a conclusion to his story. Gower resolves this narrative problem by bringing back Cupid, who “cures” Amans through divine intervention. The fantastical

51 “Indeed, the exemplary array constitutes something like a horizon of possible outcomes, a taxonomy of cases, a repertoire useful for orienting the moral subject without predetermining final ethical positions in practice” (59).
conclusion to Amans’s story is not something that we, as readers, can aspire to achieve. And that is exactly the point. We are supposed to learn from his story, not emulate it, and the very fact that we cannot make use of Amans’s conclusion leads us to consider in more detail the other ways in which Gower attempts to conclude the love plot, such as Genius’s rejection of love, Venus’s lecture on love and old age, Amans’s vision, and even Gower’s final prayers for peace.

Conclusion

The purpose of ethical reading, for the grammarian, is that it enables the reader to derive moral content from even the most salacious texts, to “sanitize” the text, as Kaster says, while still keeping it intact. After learning to read in this manner, the student would most certainly be expected to apply these skills in ways that reach beyond the scope of the classroom. The ideal reader is one who can learn from the moral lessons that he finds in the texts, and who, in turn, will become a teacher himself (maybe not in the literal sense of the word, but in some way). As Gower himself says in his prologue, we are taught by old books, and therefore, we should compose our own books to leave for future generations. “Upon those who understand this essential character of books,” Yeager says, “a certain implicit responsibility is conferred, to perpetuate the transmission of learning.”52 The Confessio Amantis is Gower’s contribution to this learning process. Gower called upon the old stories and the reading methods that he would have been familiar with from his own schooling, and set them side by side with conventions drawn from the love literature of his own age, to produce a didactic text in which he (as Genius) teaches himself (as Amans) about the process of ethical reading and ethical judgment.

“The real meaning of the poem,” Simpson writes, “is to be located not so much in its represented action as in the experience it provokes in its reader.”53 If this is the case, then it might appear that the “real meaning” of the poem will forever elude our grasp. As Mitchell reminds us, “Gower is the first ‘reader’ of his own text to open it up to complex and opposing responses. He says he writes in such a manner ‘Which may be wisdom to the wise, / And pley to hem that lust to pleye’ (Prol. 84-5*), even if it should seem palpable to us which response ‘moral’ Gower would prefer.”54 The text encourages multiple (and often contradictory) responses, particularly among readers who know their Ovid, so to speak. Everything in the Confessio has a history—from Genius and Amans to the stories drawn from pagan and Christian literature—and even if Gower does not always make use of those histories, he certainly makes no attempt to conceal them, since a large part of his project depends on the transmission of learning from “hem that writen ous tofore” (Prol. 1) to “the worldes eere / In tyme comende after this” (Prol. 10-11). At the same time, we should recognize that “the experience it provokes in the reader” is “its represented action.” In other words, what the Confessio illustrates is that same process of reading and learning that readers are expected to experience, particularly if you keep in mind Joyce Coleman’s argument that the “readers” of the Confessio may just as well have been “listeners.”55 Amans listens to Genius. He learns to read (i.e., interpret), and his understanding of each story is quite obviously influenced by his knowledge of the topic at hand and the way in which he applies the story to his own experience. In other words, since it is the very process of reading that is enacted in this poem, we might say that the “real meaning” of the poem is as much in the text as it is in the reader.

53 Simpson, 203.
54 Mitchell, 41.
Conclusion

Andreas Capellanus’s *De amore*, Jean de Meun’s *Roman de la Rose*, and John Gower’s *Confessio Amantis* are predominantly didactic texts. Andreas presents himself as a teacher, and he assigns the role of student to his didactic addressee, Walter. The *De amore* is saturated with references to knowledge, doctrines, instruction, disputation, reason, schools and precepts (even in the dialogues, where Andreas’s didactic persona plays only a minor role). Similarly, Jean de Meun and John Gower fill their texts with the language of learning and instruction; they also recast the conventional lover figure from courtly narrative as a lover-student, and place his education in the hands of figures such as Reson and Genius. In Jean’s *Rose*, even the characters that might typically be considered non-didactic (such as Ami and Faux Semblant) present themselves as authority figures and join the others in providing instruction for the lover-student, who, at the end of the text, poses as an instructor himself and offers his own story as an exemplary narrative. And in Gower’s *Confessio*, Amans functions not only as a student but also as an exemplary figure and a didactic addressee, asking questions so that Genius can display his encyclopedic knowledge under the pretext of confession.

In these complex, contradictory, and occasionally ambiguous works, Andreas, Jean, and Gower illustrate the process of learning through reading and dialogue. These authors challenge their readers to develop a deeper engagement with the text, and to continue the learning process even after the text has ended. In Book Three of the *De amore*, for example, Andreas tells Walter that the treatise contains a “duplicem sententiam” (“double lesson”; 3.117), and that he included
the second lesson “ut bona forte praestemus invito” (“with the intention of benefiting you perhaps against your will”; 3.119). Andreas then explains this unexpected benefit:

Quem tractatum nostrum si attenta volueris investigatione disquirere ac mentis intellectu percipere et eiusdem doctrinam operis executione complere, ratione manifesta cognoscere neminem in amoris voluptatibus debere male suas expendere dies. (3.119)

(If you are willing to examine this thesis of mine more carefully, comprehend it intellectually, and carry out its teaching in action, you will come to a clear understanding that no man should waste his days in the pleasures of love.)

Andreas is saying here is that he does not expect Walter (or, by extension, the implied readers of the De amore) to accept his conclusions on the basis of authority alone. Through the verbs disquirere, percipere, and complere, he lays out a three-step program that the reader should follow, starting with a close reading of the De amore and ending in the reader’s own actions outside the text, after which the reader will come to understand, on his own, that the pursuit of love is not worth his time. Andreas does not specify what type of action the third step requires, but he is confident (an attribute which, we may recall, is almost entirely absent from the first two books) that if the reader decides to practice what he learned in Books One and Two, he will come to the same conclusion.

Jean’s Reson, lecturing Amant on the importance of learning through books, suggests another benefit that can come from the type of diligent study that Andreas describes:

Car qui la sentence savroit
et tourjor en son queur l’avroit
et la seüst bien soupeser,
ja mes ne li porrait peser
de chose qui li avenist
que tourjor fers ne se tenist
contre toutes aventures,
bones, males, moles et dures. (6765-72)²

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(For he who knew the significance, who always had it in his heart and knew how to
weigh it well, could never be burdened by anything that happened to him, since he would
hold fast against all happenings, good and bad, soft and hard. [131])

Here, again, we have a three-step process of learning (savroit / avroit / soupeser), starting with
knowledge of the sentence (which comes from reading), proceeding through memory, and
ending in understanding, after which the student (in other words, the reader) will be able to use
the text to navigate toutes aventures.

In the Confessio Amantis, we are encouraged to learn from the text by Gower himself,
after he has taken on the persona of Amans, but before he has submitted to Genius’s instruction:

To hem that ben lovers aboute
Fro point to point I wol declare
And wryten of my woful care,
Mi wofull day, my wofull chance,
That men mowe take remembrance
Of that thei schall hierafter rede:
For in good feith this wolde I rede,
That every man ensample take
Of wisdom which him is betake,
And that he wot of good aprise.
To teche it forth, for such emprise
Is for to preise. (1.72-83)

Here, and in the preface to the entire Confessio (P.1-11), Gower provides us with a model for
endless learning. Everyone should learn from examples (which are conveyed in books), and
then, once they have learned, they should pass that learning on to others. Gower highlights the
link between reading and instruction implied in the verb reden, which can mean “to read” or “to
learn by reading” as well as “to advise” or “to teach;” the subject of that instruction, however,
despite Gower’s initial address to lovers, is simply “wisdom.”

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5 “reden (v.(1))” Middle English Dictionary (University of Michigan, 18 December 2001),
<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med/> , 15 September 2011.
Gower’s reference to wisdom, paired with Reson’s discussion of *sentence*, calls attention to the indeterminate nature of the instruction in both the *Confessio* and the *Rose*. We are often told *that* we should be learning, but we are not always told *what* to learn; or, in the case where we are given explicit instruction on a topic, we often find that another section of the text negates (or at least complicates) that learning. Andreas is more explicit about the nature of his instruction, but he often strays from his ostensible subject matter, and, of course, when we reach Book Three, we find the passage cited above, in which Andreas confesses that what we will learn from Books One and Two, if we are diligent readers, is that we should not waste our time with the process of love described in Books One and Two. But then what is it, beyond this somewhat circular lesson, that Andreas is teaching?

Didacticism is the governing principle in these texts, but didacticism is a mode of discourse, not a subject matter. The ostensible subject matter here is, of course, love. But are we actually being taught the art of love? Although it is possible to find erotodidactic moments in these texts, the presence of love, in the face of all this overflowing didactic energy, seems secondary. Andreas, Jean, and Gower use love for its pleasurable aspect (the *dulce*, in Horace’s terms, or the “lust,” in Gower’s), but they also use love as a subject matter around which to structure their lessons. The subject of love helps these authors teach a method of active reading that enables readers to go beyond the surface of the text and find the exemplary material that will help them navigate through life. In other words, the most significant instruction in these texts is not about *what* we are learning. It is about *how* we are learning.

Andreas, Jean, and Gower learned to read using the texts of the *auctores*, from whom they acquired a storehouse of exemplary material that could be used to inspire discussions on language, ethics, philosophy, and, sometimes, even theology. At some point during their
education (either in school or afterwards), they encountered Ovid’s *Ars amatoria*, which taught them that blending amatory material into their didactic texts would help them engage the reader and extend the reach of their didacticism. And when these authors set out to compose their own *artes amandi*, they treated love itself—or, rather, everything they had read about love—as if it were a “text” that could itself be read and interpreted.

As a “text,” this literary discourse of love has its own didactic potential, which can be understood by comparing it with the mythological exempla that these authors would have known. Modern scholars associate many of these exempla with Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, and sometimes the medieval authors did the same. But more often than not, the source was far less relevant than the *utilitas* that could be derived from the tale, and as the stories were expanded, augmented, and reinterpreted, they become part of the general cultural knowledge available to medieval authors. Likewise, the discourse of love that Andreas, Jean, and Gower are responding to can be traced to a source (or, in this case, multiple sources, from Ovid to the troubadours), but it can also be used, as it is in these texts, as a body of cultural knowledge and exemplary tales (some of which it shares with mythology).

Influenced by the methods of interpretation they learned in grammar school, Andreas, Jean, and Gower wrote didactic texts that read love, as a text, for its didactic potential. None of these authors are grammarians, nor are their texts explicitly grammatical, but the methods of learning the authors espouse and the interpretations of love that they provide are the result of their grammatical training. Above all, it is the ideology behind medieval grammar education that is significant. These authors learned to read within a specific intellectual context, in which imaginative literature was read primarily for its *utilitas*, and advanced authors such as Ovid and Virgil could be read literally, ethically, or allegorically (or even all three at once, depending on
the situation). By locating Andreas, Jean and Gower within this intellectual context, we gain a
greater understanding of their dense, challenging, multilayered, and classically inspired texts,
which use the literary discourse of love to teach their students the art of reading.
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Vita

Annika Farber

Education


Publications


Conference Presentations


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Awards

College of the Liberal Arts Graduate Student Award for Excellence in Research
Penn State University, Spring 2008

Institute for the Arts and Humanities Dissertation Fellowship
Penn State University, Spring 2007

Medieval Academy CARA tuition scholarship
University of Toronto Medieval Latin summer course, Summer 2004