

PART III MEDIEVAL CULTURES

Chapter 10 Divine and Human Love in Medieval Europe

I. The Adoration of the Virgin Mary

1. The adoration of the Virgin was part of a general humanizing trend in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.
2. In art, Jesus was portrayed as more human than in Byzantine and early Christian art.
3. Mary was portrayed as a queen but above all as a mother, able and willing to intercede between individuals and God.
4. Saint Bernard was one of the spiritual leaders most responsible for promoting the adoration of the Virgin theology.
5. The Virgin, human and yet the mother of God, aided humanity along the path from carnal to spiritual love.

II. Representations of the Virgin Mary

1. Mary was a great and popular subject for artists of all kinds.
2. At Chartres, she is alternately portrayed as resplendent and beautiful, the queen of heaven; as a shy girl visited by the angel Gabriel; and as a pregnant matron, greeting her cousin Elizabeth.
3. The association of Mary with Christian and courtly love was the inspiration for Simone Martini's late Gothic Annunciation (1333).

III. The Literature and Music of Courtly Love

1. The graceful reverence in painting as well as music for Mary represents the tradition of courtly love.
2. It represented a literary vision of love rather than a contemporary reality.
3. One of the chief forms of entertainment in the court of a ruler and his inner circle was stories and songs of love.
4. By the twelfth century, the vernacular replaced Latin as the language of literature, and love was the main theme.

A. French Troubadour Poetry

1. While some of the troubadour poets were aristocrats, most were poor knights or minstrels.
2. The lady of the castle was both an object of love and a source of attraction.
3. A common theme was unrequited love for an idealized lady.
4. The sentiment expressed was typically a spiritual love inspired by physical beauty.
5. The *trobairitz* were female counterparts to the troubadour.
6. Devotion to Mary and the love poetry of Muslim Spain are thought to be influences.

B. Minnesingers

1. The Minnesingers were much like the Troubadours of France.
2. Minnesingers would compose music for popular poetry and sing them as songs or write their own lyrics.
3. Unlike the French troubadours, the Minnesingers were usually from the nobility.
4. The songs of the Minnesingers covered a wide variety of topics.
5. Walther von de Vogelweide and other Minnesingers achieved great fame and prominence.

C. The Romance

1. In the second half of the twelfth century, the troubadour's divine quest for love began taking shape in narrative prose form called "The Romance."
2. The main characters were knights and ladies.
3. Plots were concerned with chivalry and love rather than heroic combat, as with the epic.
4. Story material frequently came from Celtic and other oral legends.
5. One of the original romance writers was Marie de France.
6. The status of women and their relationship to men were at variance with the traditional notions of Western culture and religious faith.

I. Dante Alighieri (1265–1321)

1. The courtly lyrics and romances of France had an influence on the greatest love poem ever written, Dante's *Divine Comedy*.
2. The poem encompasses more than love, however, especially politics and theology.

A. Thirteenth-Century Florence and Dante's Early Life

1. Florence was a society in transition from rural and courtly to urban and mercantile.
2. Dante was an urban Florentine at the time when the city was just entering its greatest period.
3. His early work, the *Vita Nuova* (New Life), is an outpouring of his pure and unrequited love for Beatrice, who died in her 20s.

B. The Sonnet and a New Vision of Love

1. Dante was one of a group of writers who wrote love poetry in Tuscan Italian.
2. This genre, called *dolce stil nuovo* (sweet new style), celebrated and idealized women much like the French and Provençal poems of courtly love.
3. The Italian poets equated "nobility" with moral qualities and beauty.
4. These poets perfected the form called the "sonnet," which continues to be used by modern poets.

C. Dante's Later Life

1. Dante became caught up in the political factionalism that characterized this era and was exiled for a time.
2. Dante rejected the Church's secular role in political affairs without rejecting the church's authority on spiritual matters.

D. The *Divine Comedy*

1. Dante referred to this work as his Comedy, "Divine" was added to the title by his admirers.
2. The *Divine Comedy* is not a comedy in the usual sense.
3. Like Dante's other works, the *Divine Comedy* is written in Tuscan Italian, not Latin.
4. The *Divine Comedy* deals with the poet's quest for salvation.
5. The *Divine Comedy* consists of three books, or canticles—the first takes place in hell, the second in purgatory, and the third in heaven.
6. The work is intended to be read on both a literal and allegorical level.

II. Chaucer (c. 1342–1400) and the Comedy of Love

1. Writing in English at the end of the Middle Ages, Chaucer was interested in a variety of people and topics, among them the comic aspects of love and sex.
2. Chaucer's narrative poem, *The Canterbury Tales*, manages to encompass all types of medieval literature.
3. *The Canterbury Tales* develops by presenting apparent truths that are then undercut to seem not entirely true.
4. A different pilgrim, reflecting its narrator's personality, tells each of the tales.

III. Polyphonic Music

1. Polyphonic Music is sung or played in more than one part with two or more different melodic lines performed at the same time.
2. Harmony eventually developed but was not a concern of composers for its own sake.
3. Poetry was set to music and church composers also experimented with singing more than one poem at the same time.
4. These polyphonic motets were sometimes used to set satirical French poetry to music.
5. The polyphonic motet enabled composers to conceal or encrypt subversive or controversial ideas into the works.