

VOL 2 • 2016    The Theory  
and Phenomenology  
of Love



Mark Rothko, *Untitled (Violet, Black, Orange, Yellow on White and Red)*, 1949:  
oil on canvas, 207 x 167.6 cm – Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York: Gift,  
Elaine and Werner Dannheisser and The Dannheisser Foundation, 1978: 78.2461



**Published by**

Università degli studi di Milano,  
Dipartimento di Studi letterari,  
filologici e linguistici:  
[riviste.unimi.it/interfaces/](http://riviste.unimi.it/interfaces/)

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**Initiated by**

Centre for Medieval Literature  
(SDU & York) with  
a grant from the The Danish  
National Research Foundation

# The Theory and Phenomenology of Love

VOL 2 · 2016

UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO, DIPARTIMENTO  
DI STUDI LETTERARI, FILOLOGICI E LINGUISTICI

CENTRE FOR MEDIEVAL LITERATURE



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# Introduction to *Interfaces* 2

This second issue of *Interfaces* addresses the subject of “The Theory and Phenomenology of Love.” It brings together readings of medieval representations and explanations of love as an affection, passion, sentiment, attraction, or tension, with work on the connections between literary discourses of love and the history both of emotions and gender roles. Approaching the subject of the nature of love, and the ways it manifests itself, the authors create links between scientific and poetic discourse and highlight the relationship between the experiences of love, described and treated in literary texts, and the specific historical, cultural, and social environments in which those texts were produced.

Not only do the articles reach original results within their fields; taken as a whole, the dossier, ranging as it does from the Late Antiquity to the fifteenth century, and across a Europe situated within a wider Eurasian space, offers deep insights into social history, the history of emotions, and the study of gender and sexuality.

In the first article of the issue Lorenzo Livorsi shows the key role played by Ovid, in his exile poetry, in the trans-codification of the language of love and courtship, typical of the classical Augustan elegy, into the language of court praise. This metamorphosis is evident in Claudian’s poetical panegyrics (fourth–fifth century CE), which also show the intermingling of the language of love and praise with the vocabulary of friendship and patronage (Latin *amicitia*), and, later, in some occasional poems by Venantius Fortunatus (sixth century CE), whose elegies for Radegund provide a remarkable example of the re-use of this courtly language to express a new form of spiritual and ennobling love for a concrete patron. It is striking to modern sensibilities to find this sincere transfer of the language of love to the relationship between subject and lord or ruler – a phenomenon that will continue into the high medieval period with the both public and private meanings of *amor* and *servitium*.

Fabrizia Baldissera discusses love motifs in preclassical, classical, and medieval Sanskrit literature. Her rich and clear survey encom-

passes a large variety of texts, genres, and themes, from the oldest myths and stories recounted in the Vedas to the medieval period, and pays special attention to the change in the status of women in Indian culture. This powerful piece offers a highly productive comparative perspective on European traditions.

With Cameron Cross' study on the many 'colours' of love – and their symbolism – in Nizāmī Ganjavī's *Haft paykar* (*The Seven Figures*) we move from India to Persia. The article focuses on the Stories of the Black and White Domes. The author analyses the fundamental polarisation between black and white, as it occurs also in several medical, philosophical, and poetic texts in Arabic, and suggests the possibility that *Haft paykar*, a Persian narrative poem written in 1197, can be read not only as a story of progress from one pole to the other, from shadow to light, but also as a journey in which the pilgrim of love, once he has come to the end of his road, should become aware that all colours are mere refractions of one pre-prismatic totality, "beyond the spectrum." Cross also offers an overview on Islamic theories of love and desire, which acts as a useful interlocutor for the other articles in this issue. On the one hand he confronts the Greco-Latin notions of *agapē* and *erōs* with the words for "love" in the Qur'ān *ḥubb* and *hawā*, while on the other he dwells on the intensive elaboration that the non-Qur'ānic word *ishq* – which in its simplest definition connotes an excess in love that can be associated with the concept of *erōs* – received in philosophical and speculative circles.

Elisabetta Bartoli's article is about twelfth-century models of love letters, from the earliest Italian examples of Latin *artes dictandi* to later works produced in Europe in the last decades of the century, including Bernard de Meung's *Flores dictaminum*, the *Epistolae duorum amantium*, the Tegernsee Letters, Andreas Capellanus' *De amore*, and Boncompagno da Signa's *Rota Veneris*. Bartoli studies the evolution of the phenomenology of love in love letters both on a linguistic and a thematic level. She highlights the initial overlap of *amor* and *amicitia*, love and friendship, and shows the progressive diversification of the different spheres of affections: filial, fraternal, agnatic, or conjugal affection; friendship; and love passion. In this latter sphere Bartoli observes the parallel elaboration of a specific literature of love letters, rich in models, types, and characters (both masculine and feminine), and a peculiar lexicon of love passion, capable of expressing even the most intense nuances of either sentimental feelings or physical desire.



Giovanna Perrotta's article is a study of the language of emotions and phenomenology of passion in twelfth-century French romances. Perrotta compares and analyses two passages from Thomas d'Angleterre's *Tristan* and Chrétien de Troyes' *Cligés*, where the falling in love of the characters is described as a veritable disease whose symptoms can be mistaken for those associated with seasickness. The relevant bits are linked by the exploiting of the same pun – the paronomasia of lemmata *mer, amer, amor* (“sea, bitter, love”) – but also show remarkable differences both in the description of the affective states and related physical or somatic characterisations of the individual and in the possibility for characters of being healed of love disease. Partly departing from the conventional model of *fin'amor*, Thomas and Chrétien assign to their characters singular and peculiar responses to the emergence of love sentiment. However, they seem to agree on the necessity of preserving a certain degree of rationality confronted with the overwhelming power of the passion: beyond the ephemeral enjoyment of the pleasures of love (*joie*), a tragic epilogue necessarily awaits the lovers who – like Tristan and Iseult – indulge in folly and shame.

In his contribution on troubadour literature, Thomas Hinton deals with the *topos* of the connection between the quality of a song and the authenticity of the love sentiment it expresses. With an eye on the entire tradition of Occitan lyric poetry, Hinton compares the biographies (*vidas*) of Daude de Pradas and Uc de Saint Circ, two of the main thirteenth-century troubadours (they were both born in the second decade of the century). In their *vidas*, both Daude and Uc are said to have shown inauthentic love in their compositions; nonetheless, the opinion expressed on their attitude and poetry is opposite. On the one hand Daude, who was a canon, attracts the biographer's blame for his supposed insincerity, which is connected to the hollow imitation of a cunning hypocrite (*lauzengier*). On the other hand Uc, who rejected the institutional learning curriculum in favour of a vocation centred on vernacular poetry (*trobar*) and courtly values, is praised for his capacity to write excellent love songs through his learning and skill in composition, although he is said to have never been motivated by genuine feelings. This contrasting treatment of the motif of authentic love inspiration, and the way it manifests itself in poetical forms, can be explained on the basis of social, ideological, and political concerns; in particular, it can be viewed in light of the traditional contrast – that became harsher during and after the twenty-year long Albigensian Crusade (1209–29) – between

clerical milieus and lay, courtly circles. But it also tells us much about the value of love, and love literature, as distinctive characters of the vernacular culture, and of the growing importance of the issues of ownership and interpretative control over the poetical artefacts, at a time when the system was moving to a new conception of texts as written objects on the model of Latin.

Focusing both on chivalric romances (the *riddarasögur*, translated and original) and the legendary sagas (the *fornaldarsögur*), Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir explores male emotions and attitudes towards women in Old Norse literature, with an emphasis on texts where women are abused because of their gender or social status. The indigenous *riddarasögur* neither deal with courtly love, nor exploit a language of emotions as rich as the one that is found in the translated sagas of chivalry and their French models. In the original Icelandic *riddarasögur* women of high social standing are sexually violated by men of similar status: in some cases, like the one of the maiden-kings, rape is accepted since it re-establishes the social order; in other cases it is condemned, and men who violate women are considered villains who break the socially accepted rules. In the *fornaldarsögur* – mostly written, as the *riddarasögur*, in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries – the women involved in sexual promiscuity or subject to violence are usually of low birth (or even troll-women), while the male protagonists are of a higher social standing. The social environment depicted in those sagas shows clear traits of patriarchy: the behaviour of the male protagonists is generally approved by society (so the act is not considered to be rape) and likely to be accepted by the audience of those texts – especially when a comic register and intention can be noticed. As the author explains, attitudes towards women in Old Norse literature essentially depend on their social rank and on literary genres.

The last article of the issue is a comparative study by Efthymia Priki. The author brings together three milestones of the European literatures of the high and late Middle Ages that belong to three different literary and socio-cultural contexts: the thirteenth-century Byzantine *Tale of Livistros and Rodamne*, written at the Laskarid court of Nicaea by an anonymous poet; the contemporary Old French *Roman de la Rose*, comprising a first part written by Guillaume de Lorris between 1225 and 1240 and a later, longer continuation by Jean de Meung, dating between 1269 and 1278; and the Italian *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, a splendid, enigmatic, anonymous printed book published in Venice by Aldus Manutius in 1499, for which acrostics sup-

port the attribution to Francesco Colonna (a figure whose actual historical identity remains an issue for debate). Priki compares the rhetoric of love the three works employ in instructive speeches that wise and competent instructors address to neophyte lovers in order to initiate them in the mysteries and the art of love. The analysis is conducted both on a narrative level and in light of ritual theory – particularly the ‘rite of passage’ theory.

Finally, a few updates and acknowledgments. After the publication of [Issue No. 1](#) “Histories of Medieval European Literature: New Patterns of Representation and Explanation” we applied to the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ). *Interfaces* was investigated and, thanks to its open access policies which comply with the highest international standards, was indexed in the [Directory](#). Furthermore, we have developed a document on Publication Ethics that is informed by the “Code of Conduct and Best Practice Guidelines for Journal Editors” published by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE). The full version of our document can be read on the [journal’s website](#).

Our warm thanks go to Kristin Bourassa and Réka Forrai for editorial assistance with *Interfaces*, and to the many anonymous reviewers of the submitted contributions, whose fair collaboration, distinguished expertise, and selfless commitment have been essential to assess the quality of the research published in the journal.

The cover illustration for this issue is an oil-on-canvas painting by Mark Rothko: *Untitled (Violet, Black, Orange, Yellow on White and Red)*, painted in 1949. Here we are reading the vertical and horizontal contrasts of Rothko’s painting, executed in colours that are both warm and strong, as signifying the many ‘colours,’ facets, and dynamics which characterise the various conceptions and definitions of love in the medieval literatures. We would like to thank the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, for giving *Interfaces* permission to use Rothko’s work.

*The Editors*