Dissecting la Rose: A look at the thorny view of courtly love presented in Guillaume’s *Romance of the Rose*

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**Abstract**

*The Romance of the Rose* of Guillaume de Lorris recounts the story of a dreamer who, wandering through a garden, encounters a rose and is overcome with desire for it. While it is undisputed that *The Romance of the Rose* is an allegory of love, the kind of love it portrays and the stance it takes on the matter continue to be passionately debated. Is *The Romance* an ideal depiction of “courtly love” where the rose is the woman admired, or is it an erotic tale of the conquest of desire with the rose symbolizing forbidden sexual aims? This paper conceptualizes *The Romance of the Rose* as the lover’s quest to attain his erotic desire within the confines of a romantic system that prefers *fin’amor* to *fol’amor*. Romantic love and erotic desire are irreparably alienated from one another within medieval courtship and, here, Guillaume seems to use his allegory to elucidate the harms inflicted by this courtship system.

Juxtaposing the woman Rose with the textual image of the rosebush, we see the violence incurred by this love object that has been both exalted into oblivion and objectified into bits. This paper traces the dissection of the rose image, reads the rose as a euphemism of sexual aims, and studies the God of Love as the personification of courtly love’s enforcement. In the realm of *The Romance of the Rose*, to love is to suffer and both lover and loved are subjugated to violence.
Men have linked the brilliance of flowers to their amorous emotions because, on either side, it is a question of phenomena that precede fertilization.

*Georges Bataille, The Language of Flowers*

*Rose.* By any other name, would it smell as sweet? A symbol of love; the image of a woman; and for a lover in his twentieth year, the embodiment of desire. *The Romance of the Rose* of Guillaume de Lorris recounts the story of a dreamer who, wandering through a garden, is overcome by the scent of a rose and is “seized by [...] a desire for [it]” (Guillaume, 52). In this famous allegory, the love object, and the titular image of the work, is the rose. But here, a rose is not just a rose. While it is undisputed that *The Romance of the Rose* is an allegory of love, the kind of love it portrays and the stance it takes on the matter remain hotly debated. Is *The Romance* an ideal depiction of “courtly love” where the rose is the woman admired? Is it an erotic tale of the conquest of desire, the rose symbolizing forbidden sexual aims? Or could it be a philosophical contemplation on love and the state of being in love? This paper conceptualizes *The Romance of the Rose* as the lover’s quest to attain his erotic desire within the confines of a system of courtly love that valorizes *fin’amor* over *fol’amor.*¹ As the lover’s attentions toward the rose find themselves in conflict with the cultural emphasis on chaste admiration, the image of the rose is reduced to mere euphemism. Although this simplification enacts violence on the image itself, this reduction, as well as the lover’s failure to satisfy his desires, becomes a larger critique of the ideals of *fin'amor.*

**Rose: An Image Divided**

“The eroticism of the text hardly needs to be belabored,” Meradith McMunn states as she opens her essay “Representation of the Erotic in Some Illustrated Manuscripts of The Romance of the Rose” (125). As the title of her article suggests, McMunn focuses her analysis on iconography of the erotic through manuscript illuminations and takes

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for granted the eroticization of the textual representation of the rose. She works under the assumption that “the subject of [The Romance] is seduction” (125). From this vantage point, the rose is sexualized; as the object intended to be seduced, the rose does not remain merely a representation of “she who is so precious and so worthy to be loved that she should be called Rose” (Guillaume, 31). Sexualized, the image of the rose becomes something other than a beloved woman “called Rose” and the equivalency of flower to woman is complicated. To truly understand how the erotic is being represented, “the eroticism of the text” must be “belabored.” The textual representation of the rose is more complicated than it initially appears.

The incipit of The Romance introduces the rose as a woman who “should be called Rose.” This floral reference begins as a nominal gesture that designates a woman (“she”) who is “precious” and “worthy to be loved.” At the poem’s beginning, we see not the image of a flower; rather, we are introduced to a virtuous, exalted woman. She is described in terms of emotional love and moral characterization. Thus depicted, it is understood that Rose is an honorable (i.e. chaste) woman who has guarded her sexuality and has remained “precious,” therefore, “worthy to be loved.” It is important to note that this introduction occurs before the commencement of the dream; Rose is introduced in the poem’s contextual framework. The dream will be told in the form of a poem “in which the whole art of love is contained” and is dedicated to “she [who is] called Rose” (35).

But as the dream begins, Rose disappears. It is not until 1570 lines after her initial introduction that the rose reappears and, in the span of those lines, undergoes much change. Now in the allegory proper: in the thick of the dream, the rose is no longer a woman named Rose, but has become a “[rosebush] loaded with roses” (52). The image of the rose (and its nominal referent, the woman named Rose) has been divided. Instead of the rose existing entirely unto itself, the rose is a bud on a larger rosebush. Its image has become a part separated from the whole. The rose is re-characterized:

Among these buds I singled out one that was so very beautiful that, after I had examined it carefully, I thought that none of the others was worth anything beside it; it glowed with a color red and as pure as the best that Nature can produce, and she had placed around it four pairs of leaves, with great skill, one
after the other. The stem was straight as a sapling, and the bud sat on the top, neither bent nor inclined. (53)

Contrary to the depiction of the “precious” Rose who is morally deserving of love, the allegorical rose is physically described. It is “so very beautiful” and is comprised of the most perfect color of red, the most harmonious balance of leaves, and the most elegant posture, “neither bent nor inclined.” The rose itself is segmented into parts and analyzed from its color to its leaves and stem. This dissection violently disfigures the rose as it is no longer seen or described as a singular, whole entity, but rather as a collection of corporeal parts. Each leaf is examined in turn, “one after the other.” The bud no longer seems to grow out of the stem, but rather “[sits] on the top” as if the stem and bud were unconnected. The rose is objectified: reduced to a bodily assemblage of leaves and limbs. Now praised for physical attributes, the rose is appreciated through comparison: it is “singled out” in order to be “[carefully] examined.” No longer simply “worthy to be loved,” it is venerated because “none of the others [are] worth anything beside it.” The characterization of the rose has shifted from positive to negative: the rose is beautiful because the others are not equally so. The merit attributed to the rose, calculated by degrees of beauty, is measured against the physicality of other buds as if to imply that, unlike the “preciousness” and “worth” of Rose, these traits have no value intrinsic to themselves.

The rose is sexualized as it is compared to others and no longer presented as a whole. This sexualization of the image alienates the rosebud from Rose, the beloved woman. A. C. Spearing points to the complicated treatment of figures like the rose within medieval allegory, “One great attraction, and also source of confusion, in the *Roman de la Rose* and other love-allegories is that the characters have allegorical or mythological meanings but also have bodies that may be suffused with literal eroticism” (201). In the case of the rose, the character Rose seems to be disembodied from the “literal eroticism” of the rosebud that represents her. Both maintain a similar connection to the lover—he yearns for both the rosebud and Rose, but the attention he gives to them is divided. A complicated image generates a complicated response. Rose, the woman, is worthy of romantic devotion while the rosebud elicits erotic desire. The lover appears to be unable to see and respond to the rose as a whole. Seeing the
rosebush, the lover is “seized by great desire” and, approaching it, he recounts, “when I was near, the delicious odor of the roses penetrated right into my entrails” (52). The lover’s reaction to the rosebud is steeped in the physical. Physical proximity punctuates the lover’s interaction with the rosebud that is so marked by sensory response that it immediately evokes the imagery of intercourse. The odor of the rose “[penetrates] right into [his] entrails.” This odor affects his body in all of its baseness: his entrails respond as the odor is viscerally digested. Here, desire is connected with the depths of the human organism and framed by its corporeality.

This digestive nearness with the rosebud contrasts dramatically to the lover’s interactions with “she [called] Rose.” Most basically, it is unclear if Rose has a physical form at all; her existence outside of the lover’s fantasy of devotion is questionable. She is “called Rose” but her presence is elusive. The lover devotes poems and dreams to her, and it is within these realms of thought that she seems to be contained. Rose, as the romantic object, has been exalted into oblivion. While Rose is nominally connected to the rosebud, the potential unity of this image is shattered by the division of the romantic from the erotic. This separation seems to echo the distinctions made between fin’amor and fol’amor and the fragmented image of the rose can be seen as embodying this schism. But to embody this tension is to be violently ripped apart. Rose is denied tangibility while the rosebud is fettered to carnal physicality; Rose is unspeakably abstracted while the rosebud is deprecatingly reduced. The rosebud is dissected from the Rose, never to be reconciled.

The irrevocable laceration of the rose undermines the aspirations the poem claims for itself. As the lover dedicates his poem to the woman Rose, he declares, “the whole art of love is contained” within its verses (31). However, in order for the “art of love” represented by the poem to indeed be “whole,” then it must account for physical as well as emotional manifestations of this love. But the “whole art of love” cannot be addressed to an object that is not itself whole. How can romantic love touch a rosebud that is purely erotic? “The whole art of love” becomes a falsehood in the face of the divided rose. However, to undermine the preeminence of fin’amor over fol’amor, i.e. the valorization of the romantic over the erotic, is perhaps the aim

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of Guillaume’s Romance. In framing his allegory around the quest for the rose and in highlighting the fragmented rose as the object being sought, he is able to expose the system of courtly love as incomplete.

**Rose: A Blatant Euphemism**

The emphasis placed on fin’amor stands in sharp contrast to the sexualized image of the rosebud. To dedicate a poem to a woman who occupies one’s dreams is behavior more congruent with the paradigm of courtly love than is the desire to draw “near” to a beautiful rose and absorb its “delicious odor.” The image of the rose (and the nearness its odor suggests) becomes a subversive figure resistant to the expectation that courtship be performed from a distance. But as it subverts this sanctioning of the romantic over the sensual, the rose is hyper-sexualized. It is placed in opposition to idealistic expressions of love and becomes nothing but a sign of the erotic. The rose is dramatically reduced to euphemism.

No other description in the text seems as flatly sexual as that of the buds: “There were small, tight buds, some a little larger, and some of another size that were approaching their season and were ready to open” (52-53). The buds are depicted as pudenda, all at various stages of maturity, or arousal. Spearing, a noted scholar on medieval subjectivity, observes the “tendency [of] gardens to symbolize the female body” and points to “Guillaume’s Roman [as] the chief secular source for this idea” (200). Even the Romance’s medieval audience would take pause at this suggestive rendering of the buds. But even though the image of the buds is sexually laden, it is also temporally situated. “Approaching their season” and “ready to open,” these buds, just like the lover in his twentieth year, are also “at the time when Love exacts his tribute” (31). The lover states, “These buds pleased me greatly” and it is clear that the lover—this dreamer and poet who is devoted to romance and “the art of love”—is also enmeshed in the erotic. The realization of emotional passion is also tied to the awakening of cupidinous desire and this emergence of both romantic and sensual awareness is implicated in the tribute exacted by love. The pleasure associated with these various buds is that other half of “the whole art of love.”

A complete approach to love should couple erotic desire with romantic admiration. However, these erotic sensations are not allowed to bloom into romantic ones. The lover’s emerging amorous
impressions are truncated by fear, “Had I not feared to be attacked or roughly treated, I would have cut at least one, that I might hold it in my hand to smell the perfume” (52). Before the lover muses over his desire to hold and smell the rose, he expresses his trepidation; despite his inexperience, the lover understands that touch is impermissible. Even more than social constraint, transgressing permitted distances and behaviors warrants tangible violence. The lover does not dread scorn, but instead fears being “attacked or roughly treated.” More than a cultural preference, courtly love becomes an oppressive social obligation that will be physically enforced. But unwilling, and perhaps unable, to separate romantic fascination from sexual inclination, the lover’s interest in the rose is arrested, “[W]hen I smelled its exhalation, I had no power to withdraw, but would have approached to take it if I had dared stretch out my hand to it” (53). The exhalation of the rose, the draw of the lover’s desire, is a powerful force from which he cannot retreat. Still, the lover’s fear bewilders his admiration of the roses and, in this fear, sex is equated with violence. Although his desire is to “hold [the rose] in his hand and smell [its] perfume,” his impulse is to cut it off the bush. The buds are denied admiration as the lover’s amorous impulse is redirected into violence. His desire for the roses only further threatens them with division. The rose is isolated, banished to sexual signification.

Presenting the rose in such sexualized terms, Guillaume illustrates the polarizing effects of the courtly love system. While the lover is suspended between the separation of the emotional from the physical, the rosebud, still alienated from the venerated Rose, is cast to the extremity of lust. It remains a base image that heralds the taboo impulse to touch. A euphemism, it conjures an image of forbidden zones. Yet this euphemistic presentation of the rose provides Guillaume the means of critique. Eliecer Crespo Fernández connects euphemism to taboo; his study proves helpful in imagining Guillaume’s treatment of the rose image as a critique. Fernández explains:

[The] power of taboo keeps language users from avoiding the forbidden concept and compels them to preserve or violate it. To this end, they resort [...] to euphemism (i.e. the semantic or formal process by which the taboo is stripped of its most
explicit or obscene overtones) [...] This ambivalence towards taboo seems to be especially noteworthy in the case of sex. (96)

Sex is clearly a taboo in the context of The Romance of the Rose, so much so that the mere thought of touching the rose strikes fear into the lover. As has already been discussed, the lover’s reaction to this taboo (and to his desire toward the rose) is so ambivalent that it is almost schizophrenic. All at once fearing to touch the rose and yearning to dismember it, he feels simultaneously “[compelled] to preserve or violate it.” In these terms, the rose is a euphemism that seems to relate to taboo itself: it is a sexualized image that embodies the concept of the forbidden. The lover hesitates as he cannot decide whether to sexually “preserve or violate” the rose just as his reaction to the rose will either “preserve or violate” the ideals of fin’amor—or the taboos perpetuated by courtly love.

Fernández continues, stating, “[It] is hardly surprising that speakers turn to figurative language as a means of coping with the realm of sex” (96). The Romance of the Rose presents “the realm of sex” as a facet of love that does indeed need to be coped with. Excluded from the vision of fin’amor, the young lover is troubled when Love comes to “[exact] his tribute.” His encounter with the roses elicits a desire that he is ill-prepared to confront, quite simply because it is left out of Love’s paradigm. Guillaume’s use of allegory, itself a form of “figurative language,” provides the means of addressing (of coping) with sex as a taboo. The dream begins with the lover “[i]n the twentieth year of [his] life,” the time when the lover and “young people” encounter love and desire. The allegory of this dream is this young lover’s confrontation with sexual desire. To reprise McMunn’s claim, “the subject of [The Romance] is seduction” (125). As the lover pursues the rose, the idea of seduction becomes paramount; however, in order to explore this theme, it is necessarily grounded in the allegorical journey of navigating desire. This framework proffers the rose as a euphemism, but, as has been previously stated, it does more than reflect taboo and represent the sexual.

Fernández defines euphemism as “the semantic or formal process by which the taboo is stripped of its most explicit or obscene overtones,” and here euphemism can be seen as subverting the dominance of taboo. To render taboo no longer overtly “explicit or
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obscene” is to allow the taboo subject entrance back into cultural consciousness. Quite simply, in writing an allegory about an alluring rose, Guillaume is able to talk about sex and desire. It is important that the overt sexuality of the figure is also concealed beneath the pleasing image of the rose. Stripping sexual physicality of “its most explicit or obscene overtones,” less vulgar, more positive connections are attached to erotic desire. Elizabeth Allen explains, “Etymologically, euphemisms are words of good repute—they have good connotations, or good pasts. They are also auspicious words—they predict good effect, or good futures” (193). With this definition in mind, the temporality of the pudendal rosebuds (previously discussed) gains larger significance. These buds are about to blossom and their image connotes their eventual growth. “Approaching their season” and being “ready to open,” the roses “predict good effect [and] good futures.” These blossoming roses seem to suggest that sexual desire can grow into love. As the buds emerge into roses, their vitality exists contrary to the violence that surrounds them. It seems as though the sexuality contained within the rose has more potential to lead to love than does the resistance demanded by fin’amour, which serves to perpetuate violence and destruction.

The postulation that euphemisms better the concepts to which they refer is also argued by linguist Donald Miller. Similar to Allen’s statements, Miller writes, “The mental operation (conscious or unconscious) behind all euphemism is simple: the creation of compatible yet enhancing metaphors for the purpose of amelioration. To euphemize is to compensate, to counter-balance, either to increase pleasure or to reduce pain” (132). To reiterate, the alienation of desire from romance subjugates physical manifestations of love under force of taboo. In response to this overbearing force of taboo, euphemism seeks “to compensate, to counter-balance” pressures which decrease pleasure and increase pain. To euphemize the rose is perhaps an attempt to ameliorate the position of erotic desire, or fol’amor, which the valorization of fin’amor has demonized. But the pressures of taboo are strongly felt and the “whole art of love” is dismantled because of it. The individual lover is rendered unable to navigate his emerging feelings of love and desire. The lover suffers.
Denial of the rose

Directly after the lover sees the rose and is “seized by [...] desire” for it, he is assaulted by the God of Love and shot multiple times by arrows from his bow. The very moment the lover encounters his desire, God of Love, the very personification of fin’amor itself, intervenes. The rosebush falls from sight, its presence felt only in the lover’s yearning for it—in his desire to approach that which he is barred from. God of Love’s intervention is immediate: “The God of Love, who had maintained his constant watch over me and had followed me with his drawn bow, [...] when he saw that I had singled out the bud that pleased me [...] he immediately took an arrow [...] and shot at me” (Guillaume, 54). The figure, God of Love, illustrates perfectly the cultural oppression imposed by fin’amor. Through this personification, courtly love is depicted as a watch-dog ready to pounce at any cultural misstep. God of Love maintains a “constant watch” over the lover and this sustained watchfulness implies the larger cultural context into which the lover is entering. Following the lover with a drawn bow, God of Love is prepared to aggressively enforce the ideals of fin’amor. The entrance into love is not an open and welcoming one: there is a correct and an incorrect way to proceed. When God of Love sees that the lover “[singles] out the bud” that pleases him most, he recognizes that the lover is attracted by desire and “immediately [takes] and arrow” and shoots. With this recognition of desire, God of Love inflicts physical pain, “[H]e sent the point through the eye and into my heart. Then a chill seized me” (54). God of Love shoots the lover in the eye. It is the sight of the rose that elicits desire within the lover; he sees the rose and longs to touch it. It is sight that compels the lover to draw near enough to the rose to be penetrated by its “delicious odor” and it is this mechanism of view that God of Love attacks. He takes out the lover’s eye and tries to redirect his attentions to the heart. But the lover is overcome by a chill; the thrusts of Love’s arrows seize his burning passions with coldness.

Injured and fallen, the lover bemoans his wounds, “I was in great pain and anguish [...] I didn’t know what to do, what to say, or where to find a physician” (54). Contrary to the pleasure he discovers in the rose, the God of Love—the demands of fin’amor—bring the lover “great pain and anguish.” The lover is disoriented by the force the god inflicts. He is derailed from his desire and no longer knows “what to
do [or] what to say.” His organic, sensory impulse for desire is squelched. The lover is at a loss. As the arrows of courtly love strike him, the lover’s desire is associated with physical pain and his heart is made to suffer. In the trauma of his wounds, his erotic impulse is identified with violence. Romantic love is coupled to suffering. Baffled, the lover is alienated, skeptical that he will be able to “find a physician” to alleviate his woes.

Still, the arrow of God of Love misses its mark; it is unable to tranquilize the lover’s desires: “But my heart drew me toward the rosebud, for it longed for no other place [...] Even the sight and scent alone were very soothing for my sorrows” (54). The lover is wholly enamored with the rose and, in the wake of his wound, now relates his desire to his heart. But as his heart suffers, his desire is also depressed. His heart sorrowing, the sight and scent of the rose alone have the potential to soothe it. He longs more ardently for that forbidden “place.” Again, the lover begins “to draw toward the bud with its sweet exhalations” (54). His heart draws him to the alluring sighs of the bud, but God of Love again draws his bow, “When Love saw me approach, he did not threaten me, but shot me with the arrow [...] so that the point entered my heart through my eye” (54-55). The God of Love is relentless. In a repeated display of force, courtly love strikes again; but the arrows meet a perfunctory end. The lover attests:

Now know for a truth that if I had been full of desire for the rosebud before, my wish was greater now. As my woes gave me greater distress, I had an increased desire to go always toward the little rose that smelled [...] I would have done better to go farther away, but I could not refuse what my heart commanded. (55)

The oppressive violence of the arrows only further encourages the lover’s desires. As his woes bring “greater distress,” he feels “an increased desire.” His hunger for the rose acquires permanence as he wants “always” to go “toward the little rose.” In attempting to rid desire from the lover’s eyes, Love’s arrows only drive the longing deeper into his heart. God of Love fails to eliminate the lover’s sexual impulse. Contrary to its aims, the ruthless force of the God of Love further fuses the lover’s desire with his love. Herein lies the torment inflicted by fin’amor. In the context of courtly love, the lover knows
that he “would have done better to go farther away,” to deny his love and desire altogether. But his wish grows only greater. The God of Love demands distance and restraint, but the lover is incapable, he “[cannot] refuse what [his] heart command[s].” The lover is fated to stagnate in the conflict created by the insistence of fin’amor. He is denied the ability to realize his desires and satisfy his yearnings. Any attempt to touch the rose is refused with physical force. He cannot explore his love without repercussion. “[T]he bowman, who strove mightily and with great diligence to wound me, did not let me move without hurt” (55). The circus of arrow-wielding and suffering continues. The lover repeatedly strives to get to the rose. God of Love repeatedly slings his arrows. As the lover continues to resist God of Love, driven by the “powerful force” of “necessity” (or in other words, desire), obstructions multiply. The lover encounters “thorns, thistles, and brambles;” he feels powerless “to pass through the thicket of thorns” to reach the rosebud (55). The lover not only encounters hostility from the God of Love, but meets further antagonism in the environment surrounding the rose. It seems as if every force available is trying to keep him from it. The lover finds consolation in the sight and smell of the buds, but still God of Love makes “a new assault upon [him]” (56). There is no hope for the lover. His is an impossible struggle. The closer he gets to the rose, the more obstacles he encounters. God of Love will never cease to “watch over” him.

God of Love appeals to the lover, “Vassal you are taken. There is no chance for escape or struggle [...] The more willingly you surrender the sooner will you receive mercy [...] submit yourself as prisoner” (56-57). God of Love makes himself explicitly clear: there is “no chance” in resisting—the strength of courtly love will conquer. His is an omnipresent force from which there is no “escape or struggle.” Submitting to the ideals of fin’amor is to surrender one’s will to its demands. It is only through surrender that mercy will be given and to receive mercy is to become Love’s prisoner. The lover must forget his desires, cast aside his individual will and submit himself to incarceration—to limitations and boundaries. God of Love articulates, “Serving me is, without fail, painful and burdensome; but I do you great honor, and you should be very glad—since Love carries the standard and banner of courtesy” (57). The connections between the God of Love and fin’amor are solidified as Love declares that he carries “the standard and banner or courtesy” like a soldier of courtly

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love. He tells the lover that to suffer under the seal of courtesy is an honor: it is honorable to be burdened with pain. His statements turn love into a battlefield where honor and desire are at war. Suffering is the only way to imprison desire. Love is only honored when desire is suppressed.

**Love Hurts**

The suffering demanded—inflicted by fin’amor perpetuates harm on many levels. The lover suffers and is made to repress his amorous desires. He concedes to God of Love, “I shall never defend myself against you [...] I know very well that I cannot change things, for my life is in your hands” (56). The presence of fin’amor dominates the lover’s whole life; he is one individual who cannot stand up to such encompassing normative pressures. He knows that he is unable to “change things.” The lover is alienated from the realization of love and desire. He suffers all too aware of the significance of his misery, “I wailed and sighed, for my anguish was growing so much worse that I had no hope, either of cure or of relief. I would rather have been dead than alive, for in my opinion, Love would make a martyr of me in the end” (56). This conquering Love kills in order to banish desire, martyrs lovers in its own name. There is no life in this kind of love and fin’amor is presented as a deadly, marring disease. Unable to snuff out his desire, the lover is denied access to the rose.

But even more perversely, the vision of courtly love presented in The Romance of the Rose negates the love object altogether. The rose splinters under the weight of honorable suffering and the sexual rosebuds are demonized while the abstracted female Rose is exalted. But Rose is only consequential as long as she is absent. An accessible woman is the sexual woman banished from the tower of courtly love. Love in the context of fin’amor becomes the self-serving route to suffering that narcissistically alienates the love object from its discourse.

Spearing points to this narcissistic trend as a commonality within “medieval courtly writing”: that “a human love which is both mutual and erotically founded [...] is relatively rare in medieval texts” (198). Fin’amor is not a mutual love, but is decidedly fixated on self-suffering. But in the context of The Romance of the Rose, it seems as if both the lover and the love object are subjected to the violence perpetuated by courtly love. In the realm of fin’amor, sex can only
ever exist as a violation. But the love object is not offered protection from this violation, quite simply because it is left out of the courtly framework. In fact, the love object is further violated by the system that divides it. Its parts are banished in opposite directions. The lover is also denied the complete experience of a romantic love that can be physically expressed. It seems the lover too is alienated from love (although, arguably, he is at least offered a new object of infatuation: himself). The ultimate effect of fin’amor, as it is illustrated in The Romance of the Rose, is that both lover and love object are forced into a system in which they cannot relate. Spearing elaborates that in Guillaume’s poem, the “‘love’ for the lady symbolized as a rose is not a relationship involving mutuality or even reciprocity; indeed, it is represented in such a way as to imply that, if this is indeed love, Lacan was right in stating that ‘the relation between the sexes does not take place...’” (198). Guillaume’s portrayal of love unveils grave problems symptomatic of larger social pressures.

The lover is left wanting. The rose is left wanting. The reader is left wanting. The Romance of the Rose is notoriously left open-ended, presumably unfinished. But there is no ending to be had. The lover continues to suffer and the rose remains out of reach, ad infinitum. Elizabeth Allen coheres the effect of Guillaume’s Romance with its assessment of courtly love, “[T]he Roman de la Rose’s depiction of a lengthy allegory of seduction engages readerly desire so that sexual desire mirrors desire for the plot, the end, the goal to be reached” (196). Neither readerly desire nor sexual desire is reached and Guillaume’s Romance performs the very frustrations produced by the love practices he critiques. Spearing refers to this unfulfillment as a “particular itch,” and even supposes that Jean de Meun’s continuation of the Romance is meant to address the plights set forth by Guillaume. And yet, the problems seem only to intensify...

Works Cited

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The term “courtly love” did not come into use until the late nineteenth century. *Fin’amor* (or “refined love”) is the medieval term used to refer to this courtship system; *fol’amor* denotes its opposite: erotic or unrefined love. For more on this terminological shift, see Joan M. Ferrante’s article “Cortes’ Amor in Medieval Texts.” (Citation has been included in Works Cited.)

It seems to be no small coincidence that the image of the rose (a woman now transformed into a rosebush) is seen in the fountain of Narcissus, directly after the reference to the Ovidian tale that also addresses the theme of metamorphosis. Narcissus himself seems to be doubled in the fountain, just as the rose, or Rose, is also doubled within it. This scene of Narcissus’s fountain is a pivotal one that elucidates medieval conceptions of desire. Due to constraints in length, this paper is unable to incorporate this discussion here. For scholarship on this scene, see, most notably, *Self-Fulfilling Prophecies: Readership and Authority in the First Roman de la Rose* by David F. Hult as well as work by Jane Gilbert, Claire Nouvet, and A.C. Spearing. (References to Gilbert, Nouvet, and Spearing have also been included in Works Cited.)

The rules imparted to the lover by God of Love (lines 1681-2577) detail this paradigm. A thorough study of this portion of *The Romance* would serve to more clearly elaborate the concepts of *fol’amor* and courtly love as it is situated within the text. They seem to instruct the lover to turn to suffering rather than the fulfillment of desire; denial of desire is extolled as the proper performance of love.

Even after the lover’s encounter with the God of Love concludes, he continues to be driven back by other figures. Resistance, Foul Mouth, Shame, and Fear also work to keep the lover from the rose.