



# Primary Source Analysis: The Romance of the Rose

Jingyuan Liang

The Experimental High School Attached to Beijing Normal University, Beijing, 100032, China

ljy050526@163.com

**Abstract.** In a wondrous dream, one gets to hear the consolation from the God of Love. Guillaume de Lorris created this allegoric world in which our beautiful lover was introduced. Everyone has or will have the experience of falling in love, whether it is religious, romantic, or family-bounded. This work analyzes the first part of *The Romance of the Rose*, which is written by Guillaume de Lorris. Discussing the symbols and characters, this work digs into the perspective that the author holds about virtues, religion, and love. The love in the book is of pure emotion, which differentiated itself from love based on a marriage that is mentioned as a sin in other medieval works.

**Keywords:** The Romance of the Rose, Medieval Europe, love, religion, allegory

## 1 Introduction

The work of *The Romance of The Rose* was written by two authors, the first 4058 lines by Guillaume de Lorris, and the rest of it, lines 4059 to 21780, by Jean de Meun. There are few records about Guillaume, and people nowadays get to know him mostly through Jean's description in the *Romance*. Guillaume was born in Lorris, based on his name, which was a village east of Orléans, a city in north-central France and "the center of humanistic studies" at that time [1]. His date of birth remains unknown, but we can estimate his death at around 1235-1240. Ernest Langlois hypothesized the year 1225-1240 [2], while Charles Dahlberg estimated that Guillaume composed his portion between 1230-1235. He is, said by some scholars, one of those great troubadours of that time. However, Guillaume failed to finish his work before his death. It was Jean de Meun who picked up his work about forty years later and finished it between 1269-1278. Jean was born in Meung-sur-Loire, a village south-west of Orléans. He devoted himself to translating works from Latin to French [3] and moved to Paris until he died in 1305.

In the early thirteenth century when Guillaume composed the *Romance*, Orléans, a city adjacent to both of the authors' birthplaces, has a worldwide reputation for its literature and classical philology.[4] Though the rise of Paris gradually replace it and numerous scholars including Jean moved to Paris, it is likely that the studies of classical authors in Orléans' universities had a profound impact on the *Romance*.

## 2 InfoRMATION about the text

The book is broken into two parts, based on different authors, which shared very few things in common except “the title and a certain vague structural resemblance” [5]. This analysis mainly focuses on the first part of the text, which is written by Guillaume de Lorris. Guillaume symbolically depicted a man’s aspiration for Rose, representing love. This pursuit of love corresponds with the “courtly love” first introduced at the end of the eleventh century, which was eminently distinctive for it has few things to do with marriage [6], and it emphasizes an excessive sentiment and courtesy. The poem is pleasant and amiable, in which no violent words are used. Notably, the meaning of the term “love” was not as simple as it is in modern society. In the Middle Ages, there was love not only between ladies and gentlemen but also love for family and for God. [7] Love has always been seen as an indispensable force for social justice and religions. The understanding of “love” differs between Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The portion of Guillaume’s *The Romance of The Rose*, nevertheless, shows no obvious sign of religious interpretation. Based partially on Ovid’s *De Arte Amandi*, on the other hand [8], Guillaume demonstrates the love of young men and women in an ambiguous way by portraying a pursuit of the Rose.

The use of allegory is also evident in the first portion of the work. In the Middle Ages, allegory was mostly used verbally for biblical exegesis.[9] However, allegory’s popularity experienced a decline afterward and was finally revived with C. S. Lewis’s *Allegory of Love* in 1936. The Garden established in the book is stamped with symbolic characters such as Envy, Hatred, and Joy, all came into being in the figure of men or women.

When discussing “Love” in Medieval Europe, it is believed that the marriage between men and women was dominated by social status and hierarchy. Besides, Daniel DeMato mentions that women might be required to grab the chance beforehand to be selected as the wife because of the “power and political imbalance”. [10] However, Guillaume chooses to set a beautiful lover in the garden of Pleasure who was enamored and pursued by the explorer.

## 3 Content

The book tells a story that depicted a dream, where the narrator keeps pursuing the love of the Rose and tries to overcome obstacles that block the way. This essay will mainly discuss the first part, stopping at the plot where the narrator finishes talking with the God of Love beside the fountain.

The dream takes place in the lovely May, a love month when every young man should enjoy the sweetness in the air. The joys of the plants, rivers, and birds are depicted. That is when the Garden is introduced.

Our knowledge of the Garden first comes with its wall, where several unlovely characters are sculptured on. Guillaume de Lorris puts characters with names represented as evil practices on the outside of the Garden of the Love, in a sequence where the extent of their evilness is decreasing, while the ugliness of their looks is adding up.

The author first introduces Hatred, who is in the middle of the paintings and impresses people with her irritable appearance. Figures that follow are Felony, with no description, and Villainy, a “scandalmonger”. Covetousness and Avarice are carved next, two characters with some similarity in names. Covetousness is a taker who takes goods away from their owners with clawlike hands, and Avarice looks sick and poorly clothed since she protects her possessions that are nothing. Envy, Sorrow, and Old Age are portrayed next, all uglier than the former one. Envy hopes no good things happen to everyone in the world, which makes her with eyes that look at everything obliquely. Starting with Sorrow, the names of these characters are not necessarily words that depict evil minds. Sorrow presented in the book is more like a combination of anger and pain, while Old Age followed is an old woman almost killed by Time. The last two of the figures are Pope-Holiness, a hypocrite who is believed to be evil inside though looking fairly well on the outside, and Poverty, who possess nothing.

It is Idleness, a beautiful young lady, who opens the door for the narrator and guides him inside the house. The Garden is owned by Diversion, a male character in the dream, who is handsome and leads the carol in the Garden. His sweetheart, Joy, appears next. They are the first couple, also the first combination of “love”, depicted in the whole story, and, in the narrator’s mind, they are perfectly matched since they all look beautiful and well-dressed. Courtesy, an honorable lady shows up and leads the narrator to join the carol. There are also other members in the carol, which are women called Beauty, Wealth, Generosity, Openness, and Youth, who are depicted as beautiful and sweet. Then, another male character appears, a man distributing love to others is called the God of Love, a young man called Sweet Looks was kept beside him. There are arrows owned by the God of Love. Five swift and pretty ones are named after great virtues: Beauty, Simplicity, Openness, Company, and Fair Seeming. The other five have bad meanings in names: Pride, Villainy (which is the same as the character depicted on the wall outside), Shame, Despair, and New Thoughts.

When the carols stop, every character goes out and makes love with their lovers. The narrator then begins to explore the garden. A huge number of beautiful trees and animals are introduced. After touring the entire place, a fountain emerges. The fountain is called the Fountain of Love, where Narcissus was punished and fell in love with himself. Beside the fountain, there are rosebuds, which the narrator longs for but failed to reach to it since they are surrounded by hedges. However, before he can take any action, he is attacked by the five fair arrows of the God of Love, which enter his heart through the eye with points that could not be pulled out. The narrator is in great sorrow and misery when the God of Love asked him to do homage to Love, to which he agreed without hesitating. Therefore, Love willingly and happily counsels the narrator about how to pursue his lover before he finally disappeared.

#### 4 Terminology

Pope-Holiness: *Pope* is the bishop of the Roman Catholic Church, while *Holiness* is the quality of being holy, which is religious and pure. The combination of the two words suggests a religious loyalty [11, 12].

Sirens: (in ancient Greek literature) one of the creatures who were half woman and half bird, whose beautiful singing encouraged sailors to sail into dangerous waters where they died.

Farandole: A lively Provençal dance in which men and women hold hands, form a chain, and follow a leader through a serpentine course

Jongleur: An itinerant medieval entertainer proficient in juggling, acrobatics, music, and recitation

Rotrouenges [13]: A type of lyric poetry, although no existing source defines the genre clearly.

Samite [14]: A rich medieval silk fabric interwoven with gold or silver

Sergeant: In medieval European usage, a sergeant was simply any attendant or officer with a protective duty.

Seigneur: The feudal lord of a manor

Gown: A loose flowing outer garment formerly worn by men

Chaplet

## 5 Interpretation and Argumentation

There are several classifications of the good and the bad virtues worth noticing in the text, which not all actually fit with the general conception of the good and bad in the 13<sup>th</sup>-century people's minds. Based on the author, all of the followings are the names of bad characters in the story and thus are considered bad features of humans: Hatred, Felony, Villainy, Covetousness, Avarice, Envy, Sorrow, Old Age, Pope-Holiness, Poverty, Pride, Shame, Despair, New Thought, Resistance, Foul Mouth, Fear, Misdeeds, and Jealousy.

Among the names of those evil characters, it is not so common to see Pope-Holiness, Poverty, and New Thoughts classified as evil among the understanding of the people in Medieval France, especially under the control of Christianity.

Literally, Pope-Holiness means the sacredness of the Pope, the bishop of the Roman Catholic Church. Bishop is a clergy person ranking above a priest. In the rule of Christianity, its disciples must claim their absolute obedience toward Pope since he is the proxy of God. However, in the poem, Pope-Holiness is one of those evil carved figures on the outside wall of the Garden of Love, who is portrayed as a hypocrite by Guillaume. It is shown in the stories that the author believes that the Pope, often the leader of the diocese, is a man that only seems to be respectful and lettered, while his inside is tedious and does harmful things to people. The narrator concluded Pope-Holiness in the poem: "In public she looks as if butter would not melt in her mouth; her face is simple and sad, and she seems a saintly creature. But there is no wickedness under heaven that she does not think of in her heart." [15] Furthermore, when talking about those tricksters who betrayed women, the author writes "these tricksters fatter than an abbot or a prior", which places abbot and prior, both clergies, in a negative position.

The rebuttal towards Christianity can also be seen when discussing poverty and wealth in the poem. According to A.L. Maycock, it is unfaithful to say that this piece of work exhibits the refute of Christianity [16]. Indeed, one cannot draw the conclusion of

an entirely “hopeless degradation of Catholic priesthood”, but the anti-Christianity elements should not be ignored. In the thirteenth century, Dominicans and Franciscans began to replace the Monastics as one of the dominion groups of people in the religion. In order to imitate Christ’s life, Franciscans are not allowed to have either private or common property. Poverty became a lifestyle they longed to live. Nevertheless, Poverty is also one of those wicked figures on the wall. What is more, when portraying the character of Wealth in the Garden of Love, the narrator mentions that no one can pose harm to her. It is clearly stated in the book, “The great power of rich men to bring both aid and trouble is not just a thing of today and yesterday: all the greatest and humblest have done honor to Wealth. All hoped to serve her for the love of deserving well of her, and each one called her his lady, for everyone feared her: the whole world was in her power.” [17] The author is trying to tell the reader that if you can rule the money, no one can have power over you. On the basis of love, it is also stated in the book that the only thing that can attract the hearts of man is Wealth. This contrast against the concepts established in Christianity is quite evident in the text.

These views could not come from a pious Christians. Thus, Guillaume’s attitude on Christianity is shown directly. To see this more thoroughly, Guillaume might not be the person that has a great fortune of wealth or live in a very high rank. It is believed that there might be conflicts in religion between the medieval poor and the ruling class, in which the poor would have negative feelings about those clergies of high rank.[18] In this case, the author sees the value of wealth, rather than the poverty valued by Franciscans, and considered those who are of high-rank clergies as hypocrites. Not so long after the book was written, the medieval was gradually walking towards its end, along with the appearance of the different views on religion.

Despite the bad virtues introduced in the text, there are also beautiful characters named after positive features: Idleness, Diversion, Joy, Courtesy, Sweet Looks, Beauty, Openness, Simplicity, Company, Fair Seeming, Wealth, Generosity, Youth, Hope, Sweet Thought, Sweet Talk, Fair Welcoming, Reason, Chastity, and Rose.

Among these good characters, it is demonstrated that a great appearance plays an important role in one’s persona and love affairs. There are more than one characters that are named after words that mean “looking good” such as Sweet Looks, Beauty, and Fair Seeming. Furthermore, when the God of Love talks about sorrows in love, he poses that Sweet Looks, given by Hope, is a thing that can assuage the torment. Also, the description of the Garden can also show the value of looking good. The Garden depicted in the dream is extremely beautiful and has countless species of trees and animals, which shows the author’s imagination of the paradise garden.

Besides characters named after features, there is one important character in the story called the God of Love, who teaches the narrator, as well as our readers, about Love. It is reasonable to assume that the character of the God of Love in the text comes from Cupid in ancient Greek mythology, whose power is realized by the bow and arrow that whoever shot him would fall in love and indulge in their own desire. The God of Love in the book also has a bow and arrow. He kept two Turkish bows, one is filled with knots and the other is well ornamented, and ten arrows, five are named after good virtues and five with bad names. When the narrator is attacked by the Love, he was in such pain that he found himself falling into a fanatical desire for the rosebuds since he

believes that is the only thing that could alleviate his soreness. It is not uncommon in poems and stories to see the sign of Cupid, who represents love all the time.

Though the emergence of desire and love is narrated in a way that Cupid causes all these emotions, the love depicted in the rest of the story is rather secular.

There is no word as “marriage” discussed in the text when the God of Love tells the narrator how to pursue love, which sets itself apart from other medieval works. There are only feelings and emotions in love. By saying “there is no greater paradise than to have one’s beloved at one’s desire” [19], the author states the true sentiment of love besides the duty of marriage and social demands. A lover is someone one can turn to when feeling depressed since “it is a very pleasant thing when one has a man to whom one dares to tell one’s counsel and one’s secret” [20]. The author also reproaches the act of not giving love by mentioning the story of Narcissus, who was punished because he failed to give his love to Echo. However, this does not mean that sentiments solely can do everything. The God of Love demands that one need to pay great attention in order to love, which includes decorating themselves decently. [21] This also suggests that the author focuses greatly on appearances.

Love is not something that is full of happiness, just like the garden in the dream. There are always sorrows and torments. The God of Love mentions the miseries of loving someone secretly. This is the love of pure emotion and differentiated from love based on a marriage that is mentioned as a sin in other medieval works.[22]

However, pure love is not a possession that one can acquire easily. A man might think love is expensive and the humbleness would come to him when falling in love. It is also normal to think “I ask for a possession too dear”. [23] Therefore, the author suggests the reader always held hope when pursuing love. The suggestions of which are completely based on sentimental feelings, which makes the Romance of the Rose stand out because it strikes the deep feelings in our hearts.

## 6 Conclusion

The Romance of the Rose by Guillaume de Lorris exhibits to readers its gorgeous Garden to teach a lesson. He classifies the evilness and the merits in a way of allegorical narration, which does not all actually fit with the general conception of the good and bad in the 13th-century people’s minds. Based on this categorization, the anti-Christianity is also worth noticing, especially when looking at how Guillaume describes Poverty and Wealth.

Though the emergence of desire and love is narrated in a way that Cupid causes all these emotions, the love depicted in the rest of the story is rather secular. By the exhortation of the God of Love, one learns that pure love is not a possession that one can acquire easily. Mentioning nothing about marriage, the author suggests the reader always held hope when pursuing love. The suggestions of which are completely based on sentimental feelings.

In conclusion, unlike other primary sources, the Romance not only makes us get a glimpse of the history back then, but it also strikes the deep feelings in our hearts.

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