

Inversion of Perspective: Courtly Love

Theodor Valamoutopoulos

*“If I took the trouble to dwell at some length on courtly love in my Seminar on ethics, it is because it allowed me to assert that sublimation concerns women in love relationships, at the cost of constituting them qua Thing.”*¹

Even *“if it no longer takes place with a beautiful woman or with a lady, is accomplished in a darkened cinema with an image on the screen,”* courtly love, *“a technique, or the art, of love [...] called platonic or passionate idealism”*² appeared and prevailed for a time, exalted by generations of artists. In a time of *“uninhibited fucking”*³ in the *“manner of bandits,”* women found themselves reduced to a correlative, that of a *“function of social exchange, the support of a certain number of goods and of symbols of power.”*⁴ Meanwhile, many of the men who were later designated as saints were willing to endure extreme personal discomfort and to deny themselves ordinary human pleasures for the sake of their faith (like St. Bernard de Clairvaux).⁵

This appears to be in confluence with the heresy of the Cathars, which spread mainly in the south-central region of France but could be found throughout Italy, Flanders, and the Rhineland.⁶

Their beliefs were founded on a dualistic approach to the world, in a line of tradition spanning from Gnosticism to Manichaeism, where the good God and the heavenly realm were of spirit only, while matter, was *“the fabric of a realm ruled and fashioned by the devil.”*⁷

In praise of love and asceticism, they demonstrated a devaluation of earthly pleasures and condemnation of Church powers. Even more importantly, they exercised their beliefs with equal appreciation for men and women in all aspects of life and religion.⁸

There and then emerged the troubadours (*trouvères* in France or *minnesingers* in Germany) who wrote poems of history, satire, and, most importantly, love. Particularly attached to the nobles of

¹ Lacan, J., *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XVI: From an Other to the other*, ed. J.-A. Miller, trans. B. Fink, Polity Press, 2024, p. 199.

² Lacan, J., *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book III: The Psychoses*, ed. J.-A. Miller, trans. R. Grigg, New York, Norton & Co, 1997, p. 254.

³ Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book VII, The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, ed J.-A. Miller, trans. D. Porter, London, Routledge, 2008, p. 168.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 182.

⁵ Smith, A.- P., *The Lost Teachings of the Cathars: Their Beliefs and Practices (English Edition)*, Watkins Media. Kindle Edition, p. 10.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p.7.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p.37.

⁸ Martin, S., *The Cathars: The Rise and Fall of the Great Heresy*, 2005, Oldcastle Books.

Languedoc, who were often *both* Templars and Cathars⁹, they took woman from *litter* and turned her into the *Thing*.

They produced a unique sublimation, “*as the result of a collective education that remains to be defined and is called art.*”¹⁰ “*By inverting the use of perspective*” they transformed a blob of rejects into an object of admiration: “the structure of *anamorphosis.*”¹¹

⁹ Smith, A.-P., *The Lost Teachings of the Cathars: Their Beliefs and Practices op.cit.*, pp. 14-15.

¹⁰ Lacan, J., *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, op.cit.*, p 139.

¹¹ Lacan, J., *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed. J.-A. Miller, trans. A. Sheridan, New York, Norton & Co, 1978, p 87.