



# **The Romance of the Rose**

*Guillaume de Lorris , Jean de Meun , Frances Horgan (Translator)*

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This is a new translation of *The Romance of the Rose*, an allegorical account of the progress of a courtly love affair which became the most popular and influential of all medieval romances. In the hands of Jean de Meun, who continued de Lorris's work, it assumed vast proportions and embraced almost every aspect of medieval life from predestination and optics, to the Franciscan controversy and the right way to deal with premature hair-loss.

## The Romance of the Rose Details

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Author : Guillaume de Lorris , Jean de Meun , Frances Horgan (Translator)

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# From Reader Review The Romance of the Rose for online ebook

## Elaine says

I fully admit, first of all, that I am judging this novel by a modern perspective. But, here I am, the reader, and I bring to this what I have lived and therefore do I really have to justify judging it by a modern-day perspective? I live in the year 2010!

And, in the year 2010, this is racist, sexist and homophobic and it was painful to read. It made me not happy to have come from the European tradition, genetically and culturally. I feel such empathy for people who read this who are of color and have to read how "the perfect lover" is a white European male with blond hair, because I am a lesbian woman who had to read that "the perfect lover" had to be a man, but could not love other men, which would be "against nature." Awful.

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## Nikki says

The Romance of the Rose is worth reading mainly if you have an interest in medieval texts and particularly in those that express 'courtly love' (or fin'amours, whichever you think more accurate). It's one massive allegorical dream sequence, the work of two writers, and it was massively influential on later medieval writers.

This translation, by Charles Dahlberg, is very readable, though it is a prose translation. Obviously this isn't a modern novel, but I found it quite fun to read -- this translation, at least, captures a kind of energy and playfulness to it. At the same time, I can't say I was riveted, or that I'd read it if I wasn't so heavily involved in other courtly love texts.

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## Vladana Perli? says

Da ne znam da je ovaj roman napisan u XIII vijeku, nikada ne bih pogodila! Zaista, i poslije hiljadu godina, on sadrži u sebi nešto savremeno. Izuzetno mi se dopala sama ideja, alegori?ni likovi, stil pisanja (koji je neo?ektivano pitak za djelo nastalo u srednjem vijeku) i ono što najviše za?u?uje - poprili?no napredno razmišljanje za to vrijeme. Zapravo, sve što odlikuje ovaj roman, ?ini mi se, tako odudara od srednjeg vijeka - ili samo nisam ?itala dovoljno fin'amor literature? Prije ?e biti ovo drugo, ali to, na kraju krajeva, nije ni bitno; važno je da sam, zahvaljuju?i ovom romanu, po prvi put vidjela ljepotu u onome što sam do sad znala samo kao "Mra?no doba". Naravno, sve ovo vrijeme govorim samo o prvom dijelu (jedinom pravom!) "Romana o Ruži", odnosno o onom dijelu koji je napisao Gijom de Loris. Ono što je Žan de Men u?inio jeste, po mom mišljenju, *sacrilège*! Tako izopa?iti jedno predivno djelo izrazito talentovanog mladi?a - djelo puno simbolike, nježnosti, mladala?kih ideala i dubine, i to izopa?iti ga nastavljaju?i na njega mizogini?ne misli koje gaze po idealima postavljenim na samom po?etku romana, te nimalo se ne trude?i da se održi poruka i dosljednost likova, sasvim protivrje?e?i njegojoj osnovnoj ideji - ne može se nazvati nikako druga?ije do svetogr?e!

Zbog toga bi trebalo da se svi pravimo da taj drugi dio uopšte ne postoji, jer o?igledno ne sadrži nikakvu umjetni?ku vrijednost. Uostalom, da de Men nije tako sramno povezao svoj rukopis sa djelom de Loris, on bi bio potpuno bezna?ajan, lišen svakog smisla, a s vremenom i zaboravljen.

Prava je šteta što je ovo djelo ostalo nedovršeno, što je ko zna kakva zla kob zadesila mladog Gijoma! Ne znam šta se zbilo s autorom, da li je njegovo pisanje naglo prekinuo kakav bodež il' ma?, pa on nije stigao da stavi ni zarez na kraju stiha, ali znam da će njegova ideja živjeti još dugo (a bezvremenost te ideje je zapravo ona "savremenost" koja se osjeća u romanu i koju sam pomenula na početku ovog prikaza).

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## **John Hughes says**

Seminal French Medieval text about man's quest for gaining acceptance by the opposite sex. Tinged with Ovidian Playfulness and a surprising turn to Boethian contemplation later on.

One of Gilbert Highet's 3 must read works of the Middle Ages along with Chaucer and Dante. Was surprised how much I enjoyed it, particularly in its latter stages - the work definitely picks up when Guillaume de Lorris is replaced as author by Jean de Meun (about 1/5th of the way through)

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## **Crito says**

This poem is so goddamn weird I have no idea what to think of it. There are tons of manuscripts with interesting art so here's a few to give an idea.

It's a pretty wild ride. On its face, it's an allegorical account of courtly love in which various concepts are personified into actors who help or oppose the protagonist pursue his love, for example the Lover's greatest enemy, Rebuff, finds out from Evil Tongue that Fair Welcome helped the Lover kiss the Rose, so Rebuff has Jealousy lock Fair Welcome up in a fortress, and it's up to our hero's lord, Love, and conscripted allies such as Friend, Boldness, Pity, Wealth, Constrained Abstinence, and False Seeming to help him storm the fortress so Fair Welcome can reunite him with the Rose. Very quickly it gets bloated and ridiculous, and it's pretty funny when the action happens and these allegorical figures are physically fighting on the battlefield. However a large bulk of the poem consists of long monologues by figures such as Reason and Nature who are advising the Lover on how love should work. Boethius is Jean De Meun's model for these monologues, and quite a bit of the poem is a regurgitation of ideas in The Consolation of Philosophy. However these nearly always overstay their welcome, run down countless digressions, tend to be more boring than entertaining, and we know them to be farcical so it's as equally difficult to take them seriously. There are a few glimmers of fun in these, like Genius' imperative to "put your minds to ploughing vigorously," Nature's account of an animal uprising, Reason's speech on why we should skip innuendo and just call testicles testicles, and Friend's exhaustive account of a jealous cuckold wifebeater. But it's closer to exhausting a lot of the time, and Jean de Meun really had no idea how to contain his writing like the more reserved Guillaume de Lorris. If I'm to recommend this it's because for one it's pretty important for Medieval literature and historical perspectives of love if you're into that, and secondly it's such a strange unique poem that it's interesting even when it's boring.

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## Elisabeth G. Wolfe says

The first part of the *Roman*, the original section written by Guillaume de Lorris (R1), isn't bad... a bit risqué for my taste, but the allegory is clear enough, and the imagery is nicely fanciful and suits the pleasant little story of a love affair gone wrong. There's certainly room to argue that Guillaume intended to continue R1 at some point or write a sequel but never got around to it, but R1 stands alone well enough.

Then Jean de Meun got hold of it.

Jean de Meun, to use modern parlance, was a fanboy whose OTP was Abelard/Heloise. And his continuation (R2) is fanfic of the most cringeworthy sort. He *doesn't even try* to keep the message or the characterization consistent with R1, and he also tries--and fails--to write in somewhat the same style as Boethius. The result is a rambling raunchfest that I gave up on and wouldn't even have attempted to read had it not been required for a class.

I find it somewhat baffling that many later medieval readers, including my friend the *Pearl* poet, looked on the combined version of the *Roman* (R3) as an allegory with seriously edifying spiritual meaning.

Apparently there was no little controversy over such a reading even in the Middle Ages. But I suppose there's no accounting for taste or bias, especially across such a span of time.

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## J. Alfred says

I'm not sure where, but I vaguely remember C.S. Lewis mentioning this book as though it were distasteful. The man knows what he's talking about: this is a strange fourteenth-century allegory where Cupid and Venus help a man make war on a girl's Chastity and her attendants, Shame, Fear, and Jealousy (not making this up) while dodging the superfluity of marriage. The book ends when the guy finishes his pilgrimage and picks the rose in the center of the once-defended garden. There are some odd digressions by sanctimonious-sounding persons with names like Nature which chastize mankind for things like usury and sodomy, yet doesn't mention adultery whatsoever. Not recommended!

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## Greg says

This long allegorical poem, the first part of which was written by Guillaume de Lorris, and the second part by Jean de Meun, was a classic of medieval literature. In this poem, many virtues and sins are anthropomorphized and take the form of actors in the world. It is a tremendous accomplishment of literature, and has many high points. "Though Hope be courteous and debonair, She's never certain." I love this line, and find it eminently quotable. Jean de Meun's passage, "Reason Defines True Happiness", is a natural continuation of the developing philosophy of the age, which would many years later find its natural flowering in the enlightenment, but for the time was posited by medieval philosophers.

That said, the poems are very long. The allegories get a little tired after a while, and at times it just seems like it would be simpler and more effective to drop the poetic form and extoll the virtues of philosophy through simple prose. Especially Jean de Meun appears to be quite unromantic, ironically chastising women in direct conflict with the earlier poem by Guillaume de Lorris, and abandoning emotion and feeling for a sort of cold reason.

That said, this book was quite influential in its time. It has its merits and flaws, but students of western history would benefit by reading it.

See my other reviews [here](#)!

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## **Andriana says**

Commandements d'Amour:

- renonce sans réticence à Vilenie
- garde-toi bien de raconter sur autrui ce qu'il faut taire
- sois avisé et de commerce agréable, doux et raisonnable dans tes propos envers les grands et les petits
- prends garde à ne pas prononcer des mots sales et des vulgarités
- fais ce qu'il plaira aux dames et demoiselles
- évite l'orgueil, qui est une folie et un péché
- règle bien ta conduite selon tes moyens
- consacre-toi à la joie et au plaisir
- chacun doit faire en tout lieu ce dont il sait que ça lui réussit le mieux, car c'est de là que viennent la réputation, l'estime et la faveur
- ne te fais pas passer pour avare; jamais un homme à qui ne plait pas de donner n'a rien su de l'amour
- consacre tes pensées à l'amour sans t'en repentir

Définition de l'amour proposée par Raison: "c'est une paix haineuse, une haine amoureuse, loyauté déloyale, la peur en toute sécurité, l'espérance désespérée, raison pleine de folie, folie raisonnable..."

Amour de l'humanité: "aime-les tous autant qu'un seul, fais en sorte d'être envers tous comme tu voudrais que tous soient envers toi, ne cherche à faire que ce que tu veux qu'on te fasse."

Destin vs libre arbitre: "ne vous laissez pas écraser, vous avez des stylets, pensez à écrire! N'ayez pas les bras comme enveloppés dans des moufles. Martelez, forgez et actionnez le soufflet, aidez Clotho et Lachésis de telle façon que si Atropos coupe six fils il en ressorte une douzaine."

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## **Beth says**

There are many things not to like about this poem. Allegories tend to feel stilted, and this book is populated almost entirely by allegories: embodied virtues, vices, emotions, and mythological deities. The poem itself is an expression of the tenets of the medieval ideal of courtly love - an ideal that tends to offend modern sensibilities on love and relationships. It's a concept of love that seems based in games and artifice. We find the god of love advising the narrator to stay well groomed and practice his horsemanship in order to succeed in love, but without mention of any sort of communication or human connection between two people.

Despite all this, *The Romance of the Rose* has its merits. Once I stopped expecting the many allegories to form a cohesive story and treated them instead as a puzzle of metaphors, I found it much more satisfying. Who can't relate to the idea of Jealousy building a massive castle to obstruct the potential lover? Not only is this work important in understanding the literature and mindset of its time, it sparked my interest with the maze of meaning hidden within its allegories. I also found the ending (or lack thereof) of the portion by Guillaume de Lorris to be intriguing. Ignoring the massively long (and much more bawdy) extension of this poem by Jean de Meun, it left me with the openness and puzzle of imagining how the tale might end.

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If you appreciated this review, check out my blog at [pagesandmargins.wordpress.com](http://pagesandmargins.wordpress.com)

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## **Yann says**

Le Roman de la Rose est l'œuvre commune de Guillaume de Lorris et de Jean de Meun, deux poètes du treizième siècle, et a définitivement détruit les préjugés qui me restaient sur la prétendue épaisseur de l'esprit des hommes de ce temps. L'abondance de ce poème, plus de vingt mille vers, n'est nullement un obstacle à l'attention du lecteur, laquelle est également soutenue du début à la fin. La première partie de Guillaume s'apparente au Livre du cœur d'amour épris du mélancolique et désabusé René d'Anjou : l'auteur anime autant de prosopopées que de mouvement du cœur humain lorsqu'il est la proie de l'amour : Jeunesse, Franchise, Bon Accueil doivent souffrir les persécutions de Honte, de Peur et de Jalousie. Les dialogues entre ces personnifications, exercice difficile sont d'une grande variété. Puis lorsque Jean de Meun prend le relais, le poème prend un tour plus ample : Raison se lance dans une tirade remarquable pour vanter ses charmes au narrateur, qui les estime justement bien inférieurs à ceux que Nature lui promet. Les critiques sociales fusent, les références à l'antiquité sont légions, non pas plaquées et récitées, mais bien mâchées et digérées, pour servir au fil du récit. La mythologie et l'histoire offre un réservoir intarissable d'anecdotes que l'auteur prodigue sans avarice, pour le plus grand plaisir du lecteur. La multiplicité des points de vue relance sans arrêt l'intérêt. Arrivé au bout, on constate avec émerveillement que l'auteur a réussi à épuiser le sujet le plus traité de la littérature, l'Amour. Seule réserve, l'appareil critique qui accompagne cette édition est étonnamment léger, et certaines notes de bas de page sont parfois effarantes de platitude.

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## **Roman Clodia says**

The Romance of the Rose was a medieval 'bestseller': over 200 manuscripts of it have come down to us (compared to, for example, about 80 of The Canterbury Tales). The first part (c. 4000 lines) was composed by Guillaume de Lorris in c.1225, and there is an ongoing debate as to whether this was completed or left unfinished.

About forty years later, Jean de Meun wrote a much longer continuation of the poem taking a far more scholastic approach and using the text as a site for academic and philosophical debate. One way, then, of reading the de Meun section is as an 'anti-Guillaume' poem, critiquing the very concept of 'courtly love'.

Horgan's translation is into free and flexible modern prose, making this poem eminently readable and accessible. The introduction, however, and notes are both fairly brief and confine themselves to scene-setting, and source notes.

This is worth reading on its own merits, but is also important as a cultural resource for later medieval romance such as Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde, and Elizabethan chivalric romance such as Spenser's The Faerie Queene. It's also an important context for court revels and pageants throughout the sixteenth century: the Siege of Love motif, especially, is one which is played out at various tournaments and masques at the courts of both Henry VIII and Elizabeth.

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## Teri says

This was a book C. S. Lewis taught in his medieval classes (he discusses it in *The Allegory of Love*):

*“This is a point I would press on anyone dealing with the Middle Ages, that the first essential is to read the relevant classics over and over: the key to everything-- allegory, courtly love, etc. – is there. After that the two things to know really well are the Divine Comedy and the Romance of the Rose. The student who has really digested these with good commentaries, and who also knows the Classics and the Bible (including the apocryphal New Testament) has the game in his hands and can defeat over and over again those who have simply burrowed in obscure parts of the actual Middle Ages.” – C. S. Lewis (Letters of C. S. Lewis, pg. 156)*

*“Two kinds of symbol must surely be distinguished. The algebraic symbol comes naked into the world of mathematics and is clothed with value by its masters. A poetic symbol—like the Rose, for Love, in Guillaume de Lorris—comes trailing clouds of glory from the real world, clouds whose shape and colour largely determine and explain its poetic use. In an equation,  $x$  and  $y$  will do as well as  $a$  and  $b$ ; but the Romance of the Rose could not, without loss, be re-written as the Romance of the Onion, and if a man did not see why, we could only send him back to the real world to study roses, onions, and love, all of them still untouched by poetry, still raw.” --C. S. Lewis*

Update (6/14/17): We made it about 3/4 through the book and decided we had enough. We probably could have stopped with the first half of the book, i.e. the part by the original author. I love allegory and found useful material in here that led to discussions about dating, but in the end felt we needed to move on to other books on our reading list for homeschooling.

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## Katie Mumma says

My rating is for the translation and front matter, not the content. Last 50 pages are a thinly veiled porno. Literally only read this so that I can see Christine de Pizan rip it to shreds. So up yours, Jean.

Honestly, it's a good thing to read for a student of medieval literature, especially one with an interest in the tradition of courtly love. Definitely do NOT skip the introduction and preface, because the roman gets dense and difficult to follow at times. It's also reassuring to read the other reviews and find that I'm not alone in finding this text difficult.

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## Nancy says

**Finished:** 14.08.2018

**Genre:** novel courtly love

**Rating:** A

**Conclusion:**

People have always been people.

Cultures change, but humans don't.

Remember..... l'amour

“The struggle is excessive and the joy is short-lived.” (pg 66)

La peine est excessive et la joie de courte durée.



**Review**

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