

FORBIDDEN LOVE: THE ARABIC  
INFLUENCE ON THE COURTLY  
LOVE POETRY OF MEDIEVAL  
EUROPE

HONORS THESIS

Presented to the Honors Committee of  
Texas State University-San Marcos  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements

for Graduation in the Honors College

by

Annie Schultz

San Marcos, TX  
May, 2012

FORBIDDEN LOVE: THE ARABIC INFLUENCE ON THE COURTLY LOVE  
POETRY OF MEDIEVAL EUROPE

Thesis Supervisor:

---

Susan Morrison, PhD  
Department of English

Co Supervisor:

---

Joann Labay, MA  
Department of English

Approved:

---

Heather C. Galloway, Ph.D.  
Dean, Honors College

**COPYRIGHT**

by

Annie Ruth Schultz

2012

## **FAIR USE AND AUTHOR'S PERMISSION STATEMENT**

### **Fair Use**

This work is protected by the Copyright Laws of the United States (Public Law 94-553, section 107). Consistent with fair use as defined in the Copyright Laws, brief quotations from this material are allowed with proper acknowledgment. Use of this material for financial gain without the author's express written permission is not allowed.

### **Duplication Permission**

As the copyright holder of this work I, Annie Ruth Schultz, authorize duplication of this work, in whole or in part, for educational or scholarly purposes only.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

I would like to express deep gratitude to my two thesis supervisors: Dr. Susan Morrison and Ms. Joann Labay. Both provided an extreme amount of insight and support for my idea. This project would never have come to fruition if it were not for their patient revisions and willingness to discuss anything and everything with me. I thank Dr. Morrison not only for her avid participation in this project, but for teaching fascinating classes that inspired me to dream up scholarly ideas and for her guidance and mentorship throughout this year. I thank Ms. Labay for teaching a course that planted this idea in my head, for her enthusiasm in my pursuit of this thesis and for her patient and kind editing.

Recognition and thanks is owed to Amjad Abunseir, my former Arabic professor, for instilling in me a passion for the Arabic language and for taking time to aid me in the accuracy and legitimacy of this project. Recognition is also owed to Dr. Heather Galloway and the Honors College faculty and staff for providing an opportunity for undergraduate students to explore their academic interests.

Lastly, I want to thank my family for cheering me on and supporting me in all that I do. I would not be the student or the person that I am if it were not for them.

This manuscript was submitted on May 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2012.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<b>Page</b>
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	v
ABSTRACT .....	vii
CHAPTER	
1. INTRODUCTION .....	1
2. THE LOVE TREATISES .....	3
3. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS OF ARABIC LOVE POETRY .....	8
4. COURTLY LOVE AND THE ROMANCE – A COMPARISON OF POETIC GENRE .....	14
5. SURIVAL OF THE ARCHETYPES .....	19
6. CONCLUSION.....	26
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	27

## **ABSTRACT**

### **FORBIDDEN LOVE: THE ARABIC INFLUENCE ON THE COURTLY LOVE POETRY OF MEDIEVAL EUROPE**

by

Annie Schultz, B.A.

Supervised by Dr. Susan Morrison and Ms. Joann Labay

Texas State University-San Marcos

2012

Although it is generally accepted that the romance genre of medieval Europe was influenced by the French troubadour poets, the poets were themselves influenced by the Arabian love poetry of Spain during the Islamic caliphate. The theme of forbidden love graces the pages of many of the courtly love tales of chivalry that came out of medieval Europe. The Iberian Peninsula, the meeting point of France and Spain (the Pyrenees), harbored an exchange of culture in the twelfth century; this thesis will explore the themes of forbidden love found in Arabian love poetry and their influence on the writing of the troubadour poets.

The character Tristan the Knight, the hero of the widely known popular and ill-fated affair between Tristan and Isolde, can be found in many different poems, epics, and stories. Focusing on the story of Tristan and Isolde and the character Tristan, an evolution of themes is revealed: from Arabian poetry, primarily that of Ibn Hazm, and the canon of characters and themes constructed by Arabian literary scholar Ibn Dawud, to the troubadour love poems, ultimately to occur in Tristan's story found in the Arthurian epics. Discussing Beroul's *Tristan*, Gottfried's *Tristan and Isolde*, and Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur*; this study will explore the way in which these tales retain the themes the troubadour poets borrowed from the Arabian love poets, and ultimately how the theme of forbidden love has relevance in our modern day society.

## 1. Introduction

The striking similarities between the Arabian love poetry that flourished on the Iberian Peninsula during the Islamic caliphate of Spain and the troubadour poetry of France becomes clear under close investigation. This study will focus on the comparison of the two genres of poetry.

*Troubadour* and *trobairitz* (the female counterpart to the troubadour) are described as the inventors of the love song as we know it in the western world.



Image source: "Iberian Peninsula Map and Information Page." World Atlas including Geography Facts, Maps, and More.

However, “although it is widely accepted that the prototypes of the Old Provençal lyric came through the Iberian Peninsula from the Arabic, no one has really explained the flowering of poetry of such quality out of what was essentially an eccentric back-water of medieval Europe” (Damrosch 888). It is these words that drive this study, which aims to prove that the Arabic poets played a substantial role in influencing what would become

the archetypal western love story. This influence not only existed, but caused an evolution of theme and characterization in troubadour love lyrics that would in turn influence the metrical romances and Arthurian epic that feature the great knight Tristan of the Celtic legend of Tristan and Isolde. The legend appears or is alluded to in the poetry of both Bernart de Ventadorn and Marie de France. Tristan is the character of focus in this study because he embodies forbidden love: his love, Isolde, is betrothed to his uncle, King Mark of Cornwall. Through analysis of Ibn Hazm's treatise on love, *The Ring of the Dove*, one can clearly see a theme and set of stock characters that influenced the troubadour poets.

Arabic love poetry followed a strict canon of theme and utilization of stock characters as is evident in A.J Arberry's translation and interpretation of Ibn Hazm's *The Ring of the Dove*. The theme of forbidden and thwarted love is ever present in Arabic poetry, but the object of desire is sometimes camouflaged with the presence of a divine God. This fact, however, does not diminish apparent similarities to and obvious influence upon troubadour poetry. In addition to a similarity in theme, traditional stock characters used in the Arabic poetry can be found in the troubadour courtly romance poetry of medieval Europe.

## 2. The Love Treatises

Andreas Capellanus' 12<sup>th</sup> century work *The Art of Courtly Love* compiles the establishment and influences of the courtly love genre of poetry. It is referred to as a “treatise on love” (Parry 3), as is the Arabic text, *The Ring of the Dove (Tawwaq Al Hamamah)* by Ibn Hazm. The Arabic text was written before the Latin and there are striking similarities between them.

Ibn Hazm was born in Cordoba, Spain (an independent Muslim kingdom at this point) in the tenth century. Ibn Hazm was “primarily interested in theology and law, on which he wrote voluminously ... *The Ring of the Dove* was Ibn Hazm's only experiment in the field of elegant literature [...] and is a treatise on love combining verse and prose,” in which he captures the “nature imagery of the Islamic love poem” (Arberry 3). This material was also rather personal as it contains “memories of the estate of Ibn Hazm’s childhood that had been destroyed in 1013” (Damrosch 867). This concept of longing for a distant memory of which the object no longer exists is a manifestation of the theme in question – a longing for a distant and unfulfilled love.

After the fall of the Islamic Caliphate in Cordova in 1031, “the territory of the Moors was divided among twenty petty kings whom the Spanish historians in derision have called ‘kings of parts’” (Parry 7). Moreover, “each of these petty kings had his court

poets” (7). This situation is similar to that of the historical context surrounding the troubadour poets. In eleventh-century Europe, the courts of small kingdoms were inhabited by resident poets who were charged with entertaining the nobility with love lyrics. As for the Muslim kingdoms, the poets had the freedom to express the feelings that the nobility might not have had the social liberty to express; the poets were the voice of the surrounding people. “Often the poets themselves were the mediums of communication” (Parry 8). Overall, the similarity between the environments of the Arabic poets and the troubadours is undeniable. “A set of wandering poets came into existence, who passed from one court to another or sometimes found shelter with some bourgeois lover of verse. The situation is very much like that which developed a century later in France” (8).

The link between the Arabic literature and that of France that took place at the border of France and Spain on the Iberian peninsula did not stop with the troubadour’s lyrics, “but soon spread into neighboring countries and in one way or another colored the literature of most of western Europe for centuries” (Parry 3). Although it is generally believed that “the origin of courtly love is to be found in the writings of the poet Ovid who lived in Rome in the time of the emperor Augustus” (4), an argument can be made the origin of courtly love is linked to the Arabic love poetry of this time. Capellanus’ and Ibn Hazm’s treatises on love are clear examples of this. The aspects of love that the troubadours and Capellanus alike discuss – how love comes about, what kinds of people fall in love, what happens as a result of unrequited love, jealousy, infidelity – are also discussed by Idn Hazm. It “seems to be that the troubadours were influenced by the

culture of Moslem Spain, where many of these elements can be found before they appear among the Christians” (Parry 7).

Much of Ibn Hazm’s treatise discusses the innate need of a lover to be with his beloved and the consequences of a separation. The story of Tristan and Isolde is one of separation and its consequences. In this way, Tristan and Isolde are relevant to the subject that Ibn Hazm and the Arabic love poets were concerned with. Ibn Hazm “defines love as a reunion of parts of souls which were separated in the creation” (qtd. in Parry 7). He states that “its usual cause is an outwardly beautiful form” (qtd. in Parry 9). Ibn Hazm believes that love comes from an outer force and is therefore out of the lover’s control. “In his view of love Ibn Hazm is by no means unique among the Arabs. We find similar ideas in the works of the philosophers who preceded him, and we find them over and over again in the works of the poets of the eleventh century” (Parry 11). Ibn Hazm’s thoughts on love are manifested in the poetry of Ibn al-‘Arabi and Rumi [see next chapter]. Ibn Hazm is not unique in his ideals; they indicate how the troubadours and writers of the medieval romance genre were influenced not only by Ibn Hazm’s treatise alone, but by an entire genre of Arabic poetry.

Like Ibn Hazm, “Andreas [was] not a great literary figure [...] but perhaps for that very reason he brings us closer to the actual life of the time” (Parry 3). Both Capellanus and Ibn Hazm comment on the culture of love that they had observed, therefore it is probable that they wrote in and about similar environments. The themes that the troubadours and Capellanus wrote about reflected situations in courtly life; these situations were evidently similar to the courts of the Islamic kings. “In spite of what Ibn Hazm says about the fact that Moslems avoided love affairs with married women, we

find that some of the poets did address their amatory verses to the wives of other men” (Parry 12). This is very similar to the themes of the troubadour poets, which tells of knights who fancied their nobleman’s wife, and to Marie de France’s *Chevrefoil*, in which the banished knight, Tristan, covets the wife of his formal master King Mark.

In addition to the themes of the two works, *The Art of Courtly Love* and the *Ring of the Dove* are strikingly similar in content. This is obvious through a comparison of the chapters of each text.

The Ring of the Dove

The Art of Courtly Love

The Signs of Love

What Love is

Of falling in love

In what manner love may be acquired

Of breaking off

How love may come to an end

Of fidelity

If one of the lovers is unfaithful to the other

Capellanus and Ibn Hazm’s views on love are similar in that they both view love as a means of suffering that brings about the destruction of the parties involved.

Capellanus describes love as “a certain inborn suffering derived from the sight of and excessive meditation upon the beauty of the opposite sex” (28). Ibn Hazm views love as an internal suffering as well, believing that since the object of such powerful feelings is outside of oneself, it is a force that will ultimately lead to the destruction and demise of the lover (868). Both perceive love as force that is both internal and out of human control. Moreover, Capellanus proclaims “that the damage that love creates does not arise out of any action; only from the reflection of the mind upon what it sees does this suffering

come” (29). Ibn Hazm would agree that the idea of seeing and being transfixed on the lover is a powerful force. Ibn Hazm describes that many emotions can be conveyed “by means of a glance” (38). These similar views imply a common cultural opinion of love amongst writers and poets on the Iberian Peninsula.

### 3. Discussion and Analysis of Arabic Love Poetry

Establishing evidence of an Arabic influence on the troubadours necessitates a discussion of the themes often seen in Arabic love poetry. Ibn Hazm's *The Ring of the Dove* provides an exploration of the theme of forbidden love and its consequences. The poets who follow portray themes of love that are clearly discernible based on Ibn Hazm's treatise.

In reading Ibn Hazm's "*Tawwaq Al Hamamah*" – *The Ring of the Dove* or *The Dove's Neck Ring* as it is sometimes referred to by scholars – one can clearly see the theme of an unattainable love in its verses. Ibn Hazm discusses the result of finding the cause of love "in something other than itself [...] its destruction will come about when we lack that which gave it existence" (868). This passage refers to the cause of love being some entity outside of oneself and, therefore, possessing a level of control over the emotion of the lover. The concept of the desired being distant and unattainable to the desirer is clearly evident as Ibn Hazm's word translates to "destruction." Ibn Hazm is obviously implying that a separation of the lover from his beloved will result in the lover's demise. Evidence that the described love is indeed a romantic and sexual love is found in the passage in which the speaker states, "I enjoy conversation when, in it, he is mentioned to me and exhales a [scent] of sweet ambergris for me" (Hazm 868). The excitement at mentioning the desired and the description of ambergris – a scented, waxy substance used in perfumes – both allude to a sexual and romantic rather than a platonic

or family-like love. The imagery of the ambergris scent evokes thoughts of what a modern reader would interpret as pheromones, giving the idea that this love is a natural occurrence and outside the control of the people involved.

It has also been speculated that this passage could be interpreted as one man's love for another man, although there is no evidence of sexuality, merely one man's love for another man. Arberry states in the preface to his translation of *The Ring of the Dove*, that the object of desire in Arabic love poetry is often camouflaged as Allah; this might be because love between two men would not have been accepted in Islamic society (3). According to Anissa Helie, a genre of poetry called *yaari* celebrates male love and was composed by Sufi poets such as Jalal al-Din Rumi (121). Although Tristan and Isolde are man and woman, they are separated by a societal stricture – in their case an arranged marriage – just as the writers of this poetry may have been. A triangulated desire exists between Mark, Isolde and Tristan. There is a loving bond between Mark and Tristan as they are uncle and nephew, which makes Tristan all the more conflicted about his feelings for Isolde, who is married to Mark. This circumstance parallels to the situations portrayed in the Arabic poetry in so far as society has deemed the type of love being felt as inappropriate.

The next few lines however, do seem to allude to a sense of worshipful following, like that toward Allah: “Even if the Prince of the Faithful should be with me, I would not turn aside from [my love] for the former” (Hazm 868). The Prince of the Faithful Ibn Hazm refers to in this passage is the Prophet Muhammad. This allusion leads the reader to believe that the speaker has thus far been referring to a religious or spiritual love. The western reader would recognize the overall theme of thwarted love from the troubadours’

poetry and that of the courtly love poets. A common theme in both genres is the unattainable. Both are concerned with the forbidden and how it contributes to love as a powerful force. Capellanus quotes Ovid's *Amours*, "we strive for what is forbidden and always want what is denied us" (34). Ibn Hazm describes a phenomenon of yearning for the unattainable, "if I recall my distance from him, I choke as though with water like the man who yawns in midst of dust storm and the sun's noonday heat" (868). Ibn Hazm uses the concept of thirst as a metaphor for striving for the forbidden. The yearning and longing being described in this passage illustrate thwarted love; it is the very essence of thwarted love. Moreover, Ibn Hazm describes "men [that] have observed that [he is] a youth driven desperate by love; that [he is] brokenhearted, profoundly disturbed" (869). Evidently, the Arabic poets were interested in the senses – the ambergris mentioned before and the thirst described in this poem. The Arabic poets viewed love as a natural occurrence, something that is a part of their physical as well as their psychological nature.

Another Arabic poet, Jalal al-Din Rumi, (mentioned above) who may have influence the troubadours, was a great mystic born in Afghanistan, but who emigrated to Quniya in Rum, Anatolia (hence his name) "to further his education and expand his knowledge of Sufism, a major religious and philosophical movement" (Damrosch 598). His relevance is his belief in Sufism and its central focus of love and intimacy for one's soul and for God. The Sufi movement in Islam celebrated love and the inner thoughts and feelings of the individual. Those who practiced Sufism believed in "a love that disregards rites and formulas and concentrates on inner feelings" (598). His poetry is similar to the motivation of the troubadours – a celebration of feelings of love and romance, as well as a focus on the individual.

It is possible the troubadours' themes and motivation are Arabic in origin, perhaps evolving from the Sufist sect of Islam. After all, both Ibn al -'Arabi (another poet of this genre) and Ibn Hazm travelled and lived on the Iberian Peninsula, just over the Pyrenees from France where the troubadours were writing. Rumi, as discussed above, composed poetry about love between men, often celebrating "a love of his master." "There was a definite school among [Arabic poets of this time] which advocated platonic love. These poets taught that a man shows his good character and his good breeding by practicing a chaste love (*al-hawa al-'udri*) rather than a sensual love" (Parry 11). Rumi's poetry appears to be a source of the themes of the forbidden and thwarted love as "he used language of romance [...] for many of his poems are songs of sexual love and drunkenness and often reveal a sense of ambiguity and the excitement of the forbidden common to much Sufi poetry" (Damrosch 598). In his poem "Have you ever seen any lover who was satiated with this passion?", Rumi compares a lover satiated with passion to a fish satiated with the sea (Damrosch 600). "In separation, the lover is like a name empty of meaning; but a meaning such as belovedness has no need of names" (600). This passage illustrates a passionate love that he could not stand to be separated from. This is the sort of ambiguous, but vital, love that interested the Arabic poets as well as the troubadours. Rumi writes that "life without [his beloved] is a torture and an agony to [him]" (600). Although this poem appears to be in worship to Allah, the language of desperation to be reunited and not separated from an object of desire is not only a link the other Arabic poets, but to the troubadours as well.

With a clear interest in forbidden and deceptive romance, Rumi certainly wrote about themes that interested the troubadours: an individual's love for another and the

repercussions that often result from love, such as deception, heartbreak, jealousy, and longing. The troubadours were also interested in all of the conflict that arises when one individual loves another – the other person being of a different class or social standing or even promised to someone else. Moreover, the love stories that the Arabic poets and the troubadours were telling were ones of an individual's struggle. It is the expression of one's feelings that is the root of the genre that would develop into the romance genre. Arabic love poets sparked the fire of this movement.

Another noteworthy Arabic love poet, whose poetry contains the theme of thwarted love, is Ibn al-'Arabi. This poet "travelled across Iberia seeking wisdom and guidance" (Damosch 872). "His poetry transposes ... the lyric themes of nature, nostalgia and love." His "Gentle now, doves," certainly exudes the theme of a young lover tormented by separation from his love (Damrosch 872). Ibn al-Arabi's love poetry was most likely an influence by the Sufi movement. The celebration of the individual was a progressive ideal in both medieval Arabic and European literature that breaks away from religious writing that glorifies God to write about the emotion and turmoil of an individual.

Ibn al-'Arabi's poem "Gentle now, doves", which speaks to the "doves of the thornberry and morning thicket," implores the birds to hear his echo: that of the "longing of a love-sick lover, the moaning of the lost" (873). The described lover, who moans for the lost, is the type of character that would have interested the troubadour poets and that they would have incorporated into their own poetry. An interesting motif that is present in "Gentle now, doves" is the power of the eye. Ibn al-'Arabi describes a "white-blazed gazelle," which is a metaphor in Arabic love poetry for the beloved (Damrosch 874). The

white-blazed gazelle is described as “an amazing sight, red-dye signaling, eyelids hinting” (al’-Arabi’s 874). This passage is noteworthy because it captures what Ibn Hazm describes in his prose as “hinting with the eyes” (38). Ibn Hazm writes, “by means of a glance the lover can be dismissed, admitted, promised, threatened, upbraided, cheered, commanded, forbidden; a glance will lash the ignoble, and give warning of the presence of spies; a glance may convey laughter and sorrow, ask a question and make a response, refuse and give –in short”(38). Ibn Hazm describes the eyes as a vessel of communication between two lovers. An exchange is clearly occurring between the love-sick lover and this white-blazed gazelle meant to symbolize the desired in Ibn al-‘Arabi’s poem. The lover is the character and the “yearning, breaking of the heart” brought about by the circling doves “in rapture, in love-ache” is the theme (al’-Arabi’s 874). The tragic separation of the lover from the desired structures this work, narrative scaffolding clearly emulated by the troubadours as seen in the poetry of Bernart de Ventadorn and the Comtessa de Dia.

#### 4. Courtly Love and The Romance – A Comparison of Poetic Genre

The love lyrics of the French troubadour poets exemplify the genre of courtly love and theme of an unattainable love. Their lyrics proclaim “the easy attainment of love makes it of little value; difficulty of attainment makes it prized” (Capellanus). The troubadours’ lyrics follow identifiable patterns and many feature the same plot structure: “the lion’s share of Occitan [now southwestern France] lyrics concern the love of the troubadour for his lord’s lady” (Damrosch 889). Although romantic love existed in literary writings before the 12<sup>th</sup> century and the troubadours, they and other French writers and poets of this time, such as Marie de France, were unique because they were writing about one individual’s love for another in a time when most writings were religious in nature and meant to glorify God. Not only were these writings secular, they seem to defend adultery and carnal pleasure, which are acts that would have been considered immoral. The troubadour poets’ courtly romance themes transformed as they entered into the romance genre. Examples of this genre include the *lais* narratives of Marie de France, the works of Gottfried von Strassburg, and the legends of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table as seen later in Malory’s *Le Morte D’Arthur*. The love story has carried through genre and time and traces the tragedy of the disenchanted lovers. These authors would defend the courtly lovers in the troubadour’s lyrics, those found in Marie de France’s *lais*, and the story of Tristan and Isolde.

Not only did the troubadour's lyrics exhibit a discernible formula, they contain links to themes of Arabic love poetry. Bernart de Ventadorn is "the most celebrated troubadour ... [and] probably belonged to the court of Eleanor of Aquitaine" (Damrosch 892). "When I see a skylark moving," which "revel[s] in the sorrowful plight of the lover spurned by his powerful lady ... "epitomize[s] Occitan *fin 'amor*" (892). This most celebrated troubadour poet, whose work epitomizes the troubadour style, exposes what appears to be direct influence of Arabian love poetry. For instance, the alleged attraction of a knight to his lord's lady – a socially inappropriate companion for him – parallels the homosexual love expressed in the Arabic poetry, which would have also been socially inappropriate in Islamic society. This drives home the notion of an Arabian influence on the poetry that was coming out of Aquitaine, France bordering the Iberian Peninsula during the Moorish rule over Spain. Another noteworthy aspect of this poem is its mention of this study's character of interest, Tristan. When describing the wretched exile that he has been put in by his love, the speaker proclaims "Tristan, you'll have nothing from me" ( de Ventadorn 894). This allusion to the legendary Celtic lover echoes the fact that Tristan indeed embodies the theme of thwarted love.

A focus of Arabic love poetry, the longing of a young lover for an individual who is unattainable for mainly societal reasons, is a theme the troubadour poets were concerned with as well. Motifs such as "the parting of the lovers at dawn [and] the cruelty of the beloved to her lover" (Damrosch 889) are all concepts discussed by Ibn Hazm in his treatise on love in the form of concealing the secret (Hazm 41). In Bernart de Ventadorn's poem "When I see the skylark moving" theme is rather the lover being

scorned by his desired lady because of class reasons; nevertheless, the overall theme of longing for an unattainable lover is firmly in place. The speaker exclaims, “for I cannot keep from loving the one whose prize I’ll never have” ( de Ventadorn 892). This passage bears remarkable similarities to Ibn Hazm’s description of thwarted love. When we find that the object of desire “is in something other than itself, its destruction will come about when we lack that which gave it existence”(Hazm 868). Loving something unattainable outside of oneself initiates a self-perpetuating cycle of longing and misery. This concept interested the Arabian love poets and later the troubadours. The speaker of de Ventadorn’s work goes on to explain that his lady “took herself from [him] and left desire and a wanting heart” (893). This passage most clearly emulates the style of Ibn al-‘Arabi in that it is similar to the “longing of a love-sick lover [and] the moaning of the lost” and the circling doves that bring about “yearning, breaking of the heart” that are described by the speaker in his own work (de Ventadorn 873).

Similar to the themes expressed in the poetry of Bernart de Ventadorn, those of Comtessa de Dia exhibit the theme of a thwarted and forbidden love that is brought on by societal strictures and separation inflicted by class structure. The Comtessa de Dia was “the wife of Guillem de Peiteus and fell in love with another troubadour, Raimbaut Count of Orange,” whom her lyrics are said to be about (Damrosch 894). Although there is little concrete historical knowledge about the Comtessa de Dia, “the lyrics speak for themselves” (894). In her poem, “To sing of what I would not want I must,” she describes being “beguiled and betrayed as [she] would be if [she] were lowly born” (894). The context of this work is obviously that of the Comtessa falling in love with a man of a lower class. This notion of being beguiled exudes a lack of control and a sense of being

helpless to the power that the object of her desire has over her, despite his being of a lower class than she. This concept of the object of desire having power over the tormented lover is present in Ibn Hazm's work when he describes the "cause" that can bring about a "destruction" in the victim of thwarted love because of distance, or as in this case, a class or social separation (868). The distance in the case of the Comtessa de Dia's work is not a geographical or physical distance, but a social one, as the object of her desire is of a lower class and, moreover, she is married to another man. Evidence of this is found in her poetry in which she speaks to her lover: "I'd give almost anything to have you in my husband's place" (de Dia 89). The reader infers from this passage that she is married and carrying on a relationship, although not a sexual one, with someone other than her husband. The reader also knows from the text that the Comtessa has "been in great distress over a knight," while her husband is a lord (de Dia 89,83).

This work also bears remarkable similarities to the story of Tristan and Isolde in that the speaker, married to another man, desires and is in love with a man that is a knight, who is obviously of a lower social rank than that of Isolde's husband, King Mark of Cornwall. Additionally, the lyric "I have been in great distress" (de Dia 89), exemplifies several themes found in the story of Tristan and Isolde. The speaker of the poem exclaims that she has "been in great distress for a knight for whom [she] longed" (89). The speaker of Comtessa de Dia's poem longs for a knight just as Isolde longs for the knight Tristan. The noteworthy aspect lies in a recurring theme of forbidden love in the troubadour poetry that follows the strictures as described in Ibn Hazm's treatise on love and is seen in Arabian love poetry. Evidence of this can be found in the Comtessa's arguable emulation of Ibn Hazm's theme of betrayal in the following passage:

Now I see I am betrayed –

He claims I did not give him love –

Such was the mistake I made ... (895)

Conflict arises when the knight feels betrayed by the lady for allowing herself to be betrothed to another man despite her love for the knight. Ibn Hazm describes betrayal as “so common a characteristic of the beloved” (Hazm 92). Despite being married to another man, the speaker of the Comtessa’s lyric exclaims that her greatest longing is for the knight to lie there in her husband’s place (de Dia 896). Although Tristan and Isolde’s love is consummated, this theme follows in accordance, once again, with their story.

## 5. Survival of the Archetypes

In addition to theme, another significant area of influence between the Arabian love lyrics, particularly Ibn Hazm's treatise on love and the troubadours, is a set of recurring character archetypes. These archetypes, as Ibn Hazm describes them, include the lover, the beloved, the messenger, the reproacher, the helpful brother, the spy, and the slanderer. Ibn Hazm was greatly influenced by scholar Ibn Dawud, most of whose writing pertained to the law in subject matter. His *Kitab al-Zahra* or *The Book of the Flower* was his only work of literature. The first fifty chapters of this work deal with love poetry. His inspiration perhaps came from his supposed unrequited love affair with a male friend – he is said to have died of a broken heart (Raven 133). Both Ibn Dawud and Ibn Hazm portray love as a powerful and uncontrollable force that overcomes the people involved and may ultimately lead to their demise.

The romance of Tristan and Isolde has been told by several different authors, but all of the versions maintain a set of archetypes that are linked to Arabic love poetry. Tristan is the embodiment of the disillusioned lover. The focus of each previously discussed poem or narrative, both those of Arabic and French descent, is on an individual who suffers from the consequences of loving someone out of one's reach. Tristan is a representation of all of love's sorrows and has consequently surfaced in multiple parts of

Europe by several authors. Tristan graces the stanzas of the Bernart de Ventadorn's poetry and the *lais* narratives of Marie de France. The name Tristan is probably derived from the French "tristesse" or the Latin "tristis," both meaning sadness. Moreover, according to the Beroul story *The Romance of Tristan*, the circumstances under which Tristan was born were those of great sorrow. The fragmentary remains of the legend of the birth and early life of Tristan recall that Rivalen, King of Lyonesse, was given the hand of King Mark of Cornwall's sister, Blanchefleur. She died in childbirth and "the child born in sorrow was named Tristan" (Beroul 39).

Marie de France uses the sadness and tragedy surrounding the character Tristan in her *lais* narratives. Marie de France, best known as author of the *lais*, wrote in the "French dialect called Anglo-Norman, probably for the French-speaking Norman audience in England around the court of Henry II and Eleanor of Aquitaine" (Damosch 904). The *lais* is a collection of narratives, "tales of courtly love and adventure based on the oral traditions of Brittany" (904). The Norman Conquest of 1066 "opened up a vogue for" the Celtic legends that included those of Tristan and Iseult, King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table (904). This lineage of influence is important to the purpose of this study because it illustrates that the character archetypes in the *lais* narrative "Chevrefoil" went on to influence the Arthurian legends and become widespread as mechanisms for western storytelling. "Marie translated her Celtic sources into French verse" and set up conflicts centered around "social constraints and individual desires" (904). Societal strictures and constraints are important ingredients to the theme of forbidden love, as is evident in the prose of Ibn Hazm in which he describes love between two men, though it was not necessarily sexual. Arabian love poetry was often centered on

a relationship that was thwarted due to societal strictures. While Tristan and Isolde are obviously not homosexual, their love is thwarted due to a societal mandate: Isolde's arranged marriage to King Mark. While "the scenario of the brief tale of *Chevrefoil* [is] based on the famous legend of Tristan and Yseult," Marie de France focuses on a small episode of the story following Tristan's banishment from court; the important part of this story to this study is the characterization and the stock archetypes that Ibn Hazm outlines. These similarities solidify an Arabic influence on the troubadour's courtly romance poetry.

The first and most important archetype is the **tormented lover**; the "one who loves very faithfully [and] is sad when he cannot satisfy his desires" – in this case – Tristan (Hazm 868). Ibn Hazm addresses the lover throughout his treatise in outlining the elements of love; the lover is the object of his message. Such was the case with the troubadour poets; they were striving to reach the lover and the heartbroken on a personal level by sharing their own stories, whether autobiographical or fictional. This is arguably the deepest connection between the Arabic love poet and the troubadour; an outcry for love, the poetry as a vessel through which the individual could finally express longing, desire, heartache, and passion in an artistic outlet. Moreover, the troubadours created an expression of love as more than a frivolous, fleeting emotion or a distraction from religious faith and devotion to God. They made it something worthy and noble, honorable enough to enter into the epic tales of knighthood, glory and courage. This power is exemplified in the following passage from *Chevrefoil*:

With the two of them it was just

As it is with the honeysuckle

That attached itself to the hazel tree:  
 When it has wound and attached  
 And worked itself around the trunk,  
 The two can survive together;  
 But if someone tries to separate them,  
 The hazel dies quickly ... (de France 915)

The passage portrays two lovers as essential to one another's survival. Similar to the previously mentioned metaphor of thirst, the honeysuckle and the hazel tree are elements in nature that develop and grow out of natural causes; they do not choose their existence or their fate.

There are several other archetypes that Ibn Hazm clearly describes in his treatise that appear in the troubadour's poetry. The first character is embodied by Brenguein – as she is called in Marie de France's work – Yseult's "companion and waiting-woman" (915). Brenguein is described as loyal to Yseult in Marie de France's version of the tale, but the extent of this **waiting-women's** loyalty is most clearly demonstrated in both the Beroul and Gottfried von Strassburg's versions. As Michael S. Batts points out in his analysis, Brangane, as she is called in the Gottfried tale, is persuaded by Isolde to substitute for her on her wedding night so that she appears to have preserved her virginity for her true love (Batts 57). Batts describes this loyalty as a part of "the special providence that protects lovers" (57). This notion is evidence of the vitality of this character to the story and the importance of her role as a loyal servant and, in some instances, a loyal messenger. The Brenguein serves as both **messenger** and **lookout** for the two lovers when they meet in the woods in Marie de France's work. This follows in

accordance with the messenger that Ibn Hazm describes in his treatise. He describes the messenger as someone who is “possessed of initiative and the ability to supply out of his own understanding of things,” and someone who is able to “keep secrets and preserve trusts,” and, most importantly, is “loyal, cheerful, and a sincere well-wisher” (Hazm 39). This description is applicable to both versions of this character in the aforementioned works. Moreover, Ibn Hazm states that women “are frequently used” in this role (40).

The core characters and basic plot structure of the story of Tristan and Isolde remain largely the same throughout the various versions. In the Beroul story, Brangain, “Yseut’s maid,” is the cause of the lover’s permanent unification (Fredrick 44). Yseut’s mother entrusted Brangain to deliver a love potion that she had concocted for Yseut and Mark. Brangain mistakenly gives the potion mixed with wine to Tristan and Yseut, “neither knew that it held for them a lifetime of suffering and hardship” (Beroul 44). Not only does Brangain serve as the force that unites the two lovers, she repays them with a loyalty so deep that she agrees “to take Yseut’s place in Mark’s bed on the wedding night” (45). This scenario appears in the Gottfried version of the story as well as is discussed above (Batts 57).

Marie de France’s interest in the story is easily identifiable as she uses the character of Brangain (the character is named Brenguen in Marie’s story) as a “faithful servant” to Queen Isolde (de France 110). In Marie’s story “Guigemar,” a similar story in structure to that of Tristan and Isolde, a knight washes up onto a shore and his wounds are cured by a courtly lady and her maiden. The maiden serves as a messenger between the two lovers as she “could see from appearance that [the lady] was in love with the knight ... but the lady did not know whether or not he loved her ... the maiden went to

the knight” (de France 49). This female messenger serves as a key part in the story of the lovers as mentioned by Ibn Hazm (see previous chapter). Not only does the vital character of female messenger survive as the versions of the story of Tristan and Isolde evolve and change, it can be linked to Arabic prose of the Iberian Peninsula.

While the loyal maiden and messenger unifies the lovers, her opposing force is the **spy**. In the Beroul story, the spy is a mere forester who stumbles innocently upon Tristan and Isolde. He is described as “frightened and pale” when “he had found the bower they had slept ... followed their tracks until he had reached the place where Tristan had made his abode. He saw the sleeping pair and recognized them” (Beroul 89). Although the forester is described as an innocent bystander, he rushes to court to inform King Mark of his findings and Mark offers him “as much gold and silver as [he] wants” (90). Conversely, in the Marie de France narrative, “Chevrefoil”, the spy is described as a “cunning chamberlain” sent by Mark (de France 50-51). This character contrasts with the humble forester in the Beroul version. Marie creates a more diabolical character, hired by King Mark, who seeks out the lovers deliberately, rather than stumbling upon them by chance. Marie’s more cunning and diabolical character resembles the *lauzengiers* that appear sporadically throughout the troubadour’s poetry. For instance, the Countess of Dia refers to spies in the employment of her jealous husband. She describes them as “sneaky,” “nasty-worded,” and “out to do [her] harm” (91). The spies in Thomas Malory’s *Le Morte D’Arthur* and Gottfried’s *Tristan* feature a more clearly defined spy character and give him names: Sir Andre and Marjodo respectively. Both of these characters are noblemen and under the employment of Mark, resembling more closely the sneaky *lauzengiers* of the troubadour’s poetry or the chamberlain in the narrative of

Marie de France than the humble forester of the Beroul story. However, all of these characters closely mimic the character of the spy discussed in Ibn Hazm's prose.

## 6. Conclusion

Based on the above discussion of theme, plot structure, and characterization, a reader of both the Arabian love poets and Ibn Hazm's treatise on love could clearly see a connection to the troubadour's poetry and to the romance genre. There is no question about the cultural exchanges that took place on the Iberian Peninsula during the Islamic caliphate of Spain, but perhaps one might not realize the extent to which the Arabic world influenced our western one and how our love stories are told. A love story has the ability to transcend language and culture; the feeling of love of one individual for another is universal. Perhaps that is the reasoning behind the romance genre of storytelling being the one to undergo such a global influence. This influence is vital to understand in our modern day society because it represents the concept that all ideals and feelings are global and common to all persons. Our world is small when seen through the lens of a love story.

## Bibliography

- Arberry, A. J. Preface. *The Ring of the Dove; a Treatise on the Art and Practice of Arab Love*.  
By Ibn Hazm. London: Luzac, 1953.
- Bogin, Magda. *The Women Troubadours*. New York: Paddington, 1976.
- Béroul. *The Romance of Tristan*. Trans. Alan S. Fedrick. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970.
- De France. *The Lais of Marie De France*. Trans. Glyn S. Burgess and Keith Busby.  
Harmondsworth: Middlesex, England: Penguin, 1986.
- Capellanus, Andreas. *The Art of Courtly Love*. Trans. John Jay Parry. New York:  
Ungar, 1959.
- Hazm, Ibn. *The Ring of the Dove; a Treatise on the Art and Practice of Arab Love*. Trans.  
A.J.  
Arberry. London: Luzac, 1953.
- Helie, Anissa. "Holy Hatred." JSTOR. *Reproductive Health Matters*. Web. 07 Dec. 2011.  
<<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3775979>>.
- "Iberian Peninsula Map and Information Page." World Atlas including Geography Facts,  
Maps,  
Flags. Web. 19 Apr. 2012.  
<<http://www.worldatlas.com/webimage/countrys/europe/iberian.htm>>
- "Iberia, The Meeting of Three Worlds." *The Longman Anthology of World Literature*. Ed.  
David  
Damrosch. 1st ed. Vol. B. Pearson Education, 2005.860-904.
- "Marie de France." *The Longman Anthology of World Literature*. Ed. David  
Damrosch. 1st ed. Vol. B. Pearson Education, 2005.904-916
- Nykl, A. R. *Hispano-Arabic Poetry: and Its Relations with the Old Provençal  
Troubadours*.  
Baltimore, MD, 1986.

Parry, John Jay. "Introduction." *The Art of Courtly Love*. By Andreas Capellanus. New York:

Ungar, 1959. 4-24.

Raven, Wim. "The Manuscripts and Editions of Ibn Dawud's Kitab Al-Zahra." *The Manuscripts*

*of the Middle East* 4 (1989): 1-5.

"Troubadour and *Trobairitz*." *The Longman Anthology of World Literature*. Ed. David Damrosch. 1st ed. Vol. B. Pearson Education, 2005. 888-897.