

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-00011-7 - Ethics and Enjoyment in Late Medieval Poetry: Love After Aristotle

Jessica Rosenfeld

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

## ETHICS AND ENJOYMENT IN LATE MEDIEVAL POETRY

Jessica Rosenfeld provides a history of the ethics of medieval vernacular love poetry by tracing its engagement with the late medieval reception of Aristotle. Beginning with a history of the idea of enjoyment from Plato to Peter Abelard and the troubadours, the book then presents a literary and philosophical history of the medieval ethics of love, centered on the legacy of the *Roman de la Rose*. The chapters reveal that “courtly love” was scarcely confined to what is often characterized as an ethic of sacrifice and deferral, but also engaged with Aristotelian ideas about pleasure and earthly happiness. Readings of Machaut, Froissart, Chaucer, Dante, Deguileville, and Langland show that poets were often markedly aware of the overlapping ethical languages of philosophy and erotic poetry. The study’s conclusion places medieval poetry and philosophy in the context of psychoanalytic ethics, and argues for a re-evaluation of Lacan’s ideas about courtly love.

JESSICA ROSENFELD is Assistant Professor of English at Washington University in St. Louis.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-00011-7 - Ethics and Enjoyment in Late Medieval Poetry: Love After Aristotle

Jessica Rosenfeld

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

# CAMBRIDGE STUDIES IN MEDIEVAL LITERATURE

## GENERAL EDITOR

Alastair Minnis, *Yale University*

## EDITORIAL BOARD

Zygmunt G. Barański, *University of Cambridge*  
 Christopher C. Baswell, *University of California, Los Angeles*  
 John Burrow, *University of Bristol*  
 Mary Carruthers, *New York University*  
 Rita Copeland, *University of Pennsylvania*  
 Simon Gaunt, *King's College London*  
 Steven Kruger, *City University of New York*  
 Nigel Palmer, *University of Oxford*  
 Winthrop Wetherbee, *Cornell University*  
 Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, *Fordham University*

This series of critical books seeks to cover the whole area of literature written in the major medieval languages – the main European vernaculars, and medieval Latin and Greek – during the period c.1100–1500. Its chief aim is to publish and stimulate fresh scholarship and criticism on medieval literature, special emphasis being placed on understanding major works of poetry, prose, and drama in relation to the contemporary culture and learning which fostered them.

## RECENT TITLES IN THE SERIES

Edwin D. Craun *Ethics and Power in Medieval English Reformist Writing*  
 David Matthews *Writing to the King: Nation, Kingship, and Literature in England, 1250–1350*  
 Mary Carruthers (ed.) *Rhetoric Beyond Words: Delight and Persuasion in the Arts of the Middle Ages*  
 Katharine Breen *Imagining an English Reading Public, 1150–1400*  
 Antony J. Hasler *Court Poetry in Late Medieval England and Scotland: Allegories of Authority*  
 Shannon Gayk *Image, Text, and Religious Reform in Fifteenth-Century England*  
 Lisa H. Cooper *Artisans and Narrative Craft in Late-Medieval England*  
 Alison Cornish *Vernacular Translation in Dante's Italy: Illiterate Literature*  
 Jane Gilbert *Living Death in Medieval French and English Literature*  
 Jessica Rosenfeld *Ethics and Enjoyment in Late Medieval Poetry: Love after Aristotle*

*A complete list of titles in the series can be found at the end of the volume.*

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-00011-7 - Ethics and Enjoyment in Late Medieval Poetry: Love After Aristotle

Jessica Rosenfeld

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

# ETHICS AND ENJOYMENT IN LATE MEDIEVAL POETRY

*Love after Aristotle*

JESSICA ROSENFELD



CAMBRIDGE  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-00011-7 - Ethics and Enjoyment in Late Medieval Poetry: Love After Aristotle

Jessica Rosenfeld

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore,  
São Paulo, Delhi, Dubai, Tokyo, Mexico City

Cambridge University Press  
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)

Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781107000117](http://www.cambridge.org/9781107000117)

© Jessica Rosenfeld 2011

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception  
and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,  
no reproduction of any part may take place without the written  
permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2011

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library*

*Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data*

Rosenfeld, Jessica, 1976–

Ethics and enjoyment in late medieval poetry : love after Aristotle / Jessica Rosenfeld.

p. cm. – (Cambridge studies in medieval literature)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-107-00011-7 (hardback)

1. Poetry, Medieval—History and criticism. 2. Pleasure in literature.

3. Ethics in literature. I. Title.

PN688.R67 2010

809.1'9353—dc22

2010038968

ISBN 978-1-107-00011-7 Hardback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or  
accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in  
this publication, and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is,  
or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<i>page</i> vi
Introduction: love after Aristotle	I
1 Enjoyment: a medieval history	14
2 Narcissus after Aristotle: love and ethics in <i>Le Roman de la Rose</i>	45
3 Metamorphoses of pleasure in the fourteenth-century <i>dit amoureux</i>	74
4 Love’s knowledge: fabliau, allegory, and fourteenth-century anti-intellectualism	107
5 On human happiness: Dante, Chaucer, and the felicity of friendship	135
Coda: Chaucer’s philosophical women	160
<i>Notes</i>	171
<i>Bibliography</i>	219
<i>Index</i>	239

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-00011-7 - Ethics and Enjoyment in Late Medieval Poetry: Love After Aristotle

Jessica Rosenfeld

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Acknowledgments*

This book had its beginnings in a conversation about Aristotle with Rita Copeland, in a cafe on Rittenhouse Square. My work has been indelibly shaped by her ideas and exemplary scholarship, and I remain indebted in countless ways to her generosity and inspiration as my teacher, advisor, and friend. I am also incredibly lucky to have been a student of David Wallace; I am grateful to him for his knowledge and imagination, and for making me an avowed comparatist and a confident scholar. Emily Steiner and Kevin Brownlee were essential advisors, and I am enormously thankful for their instruction, expertise, and faith in this project. I would like to thank Simon Gaunt for being a welcoming teacher and valuable reader during a year spent at King's College London and beyond. I continue to be grateful to Denise Despres, who taught an undergraduate course on medieval literature that showed me what an intellectually rewarding and exciting field of study it could be.

I would like to thank the two anonymous readers for Cambridge University Press for their eminently sound suggestions, which markedly improved the book. Frank Grady gamely read just about the whole thing in various stages and dispensed a great amount of thoughtful criticism with humor. Bruce Holsinger gave incisive comments on an early chapter and later gave me tough but welcome advice about the framing of the book. Holly Barbaccia, Jane Degenhardt, Jennifer Higginbotham, and Elizabeth Williamson were excellent writing companions during the dissertation years. Shane Duarte was and is an indispensable source of knowledge about ancient and medieval philosophy. Many others near and far have given exceedingly helpful feedback on various portions of the manuscript and provided other important support; I especially want to thank Jennifer Arch, Guinn Batten, Hans Bork, Lara Bovilsky, Kim Haddix, Sean Keilen, Irit Kleiman, David Lawton, Robert Lerner, Mark Miller, Allan Mitchell, Anca Parvulescu, Jean-Michel Rabaté, Melissa Sanchez, Julie Singer, and Alicia Walker.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-00011-7 - Ethics and Enjoyment in Late Medieval Poetry: Love After Aristotle

Jessica Rosenfeld

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Acknowledgments*

vii

Without Michelle Karnes as my cheerleader, critic, interlocutor, and friend, my life as a medievalist would have far less enjoyment in it. I'm grateful to my family for their unwavering support, excitement, and constant nudging about when the book would be done already. And I am thankful beyond measure to have Dillon Brown as my first, last, and sharpest reader and strict advocate of the happy life.

A slightly earlier version of Chapter 2 was published as "Narcissus after Aristotle: Love and Ethics in *Le Roman de la Rose*" in *New Medieval Literatures* 9 (2007): 1–39. Part of Chapter 5 appeared in an earlier form as "The Doubled Joys of *Troilus and Criseyde*," in *The Erotics of Consolation: Desire and Distance in the Late Middle Ages*, ed. Steven Milner and Catherine Leglu (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 39–59, reproduced with permission of Palgrave Macmillan. I thank the publishers for permission to reprint.