Chapter 7

COURTLY LOVE

HAPPINESS REGARDLESS OF CHILDREN

HAPPINESS RESEARCH CAUSED quite a furor in the early 2010s. The centuries-old view that people who have children are happy and people who do not are to be pitied was shaken by several large-scale studies. The consensus of this research was that couples who are not parents are happier than those who are. The Norwegian economist Thomas Hansen, the Italian economist Luca Stanca, and the American scientists Angus Deaton and Arthur A. Stone all concluded that around the world, people are better off on average if they do not have children. Hansen contrasted common opinions with empirical data and tried to clarify why the idea of parental happiness dominates the social discourse, although the advantages of childlessness objectively outweigh the disadvantages. Stanca expressed himself particularly drastically: "the optimal number of children may be zero."[1] In contrast, Deaton and Stone remained more cautious, pointing to uncertainties, difficulties in drawing comparisons, and the issues with viewing parents as unhappier per se.

At first glance, the love stories in this chapter also create the impression that people who do not have children are happier: Tristan and Isolde, Erec and Enite, Iwein and Laudine, who remain permanently childless, are happier together for longer than Riwalin and Blanscheflur, Herzeloyde and Gahmuret, or Kriemhild and Siegfried, who have a child together. A closer look, however, reveals that the happiness of these couples is not influenced at all by the category of (in)fertility. Neither are some burdened by an unfulfilled desire to have children, nor do the others regret their parenthood, nor—unlike those who yearn for chastity in Chapter 6—are they committed nonparents. (In)fertility does not seem relevant to the protagonists of the courtly love narrative, where happiness depends solely on the presence and reciprocal love of one's partner.

With my seventh and final narrative model, I focus on the connection between happiness, sexuality, and reproduction. Courtly romances and

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[1] Stanca, "Suffer," 749. Cf. Deaton and Stone, "Evaluative and Hedonic Wellbeing"; Hansen, "Parenthood." Deaton and Stone stress that the findings for the USA cannot be applied worldwide. In countries with a high fertility rate, life with children is viewed much more negatively than in countries where fertility is low.

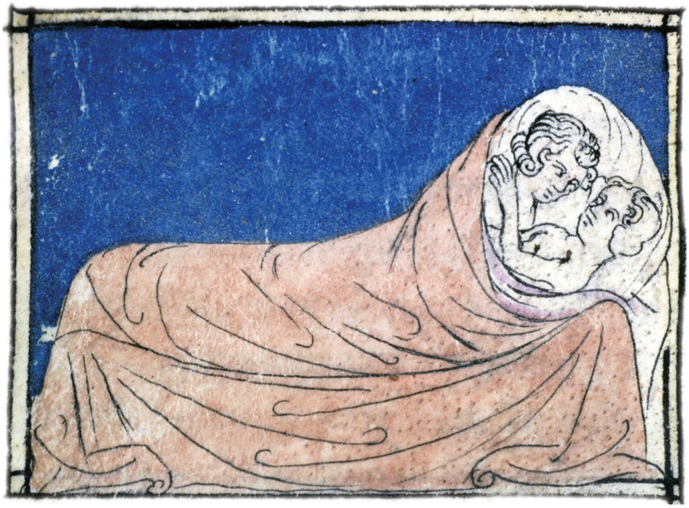

Figure 7. “Lovers’ union.” In *Roman de la rose* (first half of the fourteenth century), 3.8 × 5.3 cm. Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, MS Acq. e doni 153, fol. 196v. Reproduced by permission of the Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana.

love songs (*Minnesang*) centre around the emotional and erotic relationship between two lovers, whereas the implications for fertility are largely ignored or only relevant when the love ends. This focus on partner love rather than parental love is illustrated in this miniature (first half of the fourteenth century, Fig. 7). It comes from a Florentine codex of the *Roman de la rose* (Romance of the Rose),[2] a thirteenth-century allegorical love story that was very influential in the Middle Ages. There are numerous similar depictions of the act of love.

Two figures are lying together under a blanket. The fine lines on the red background make it look like the covers are moving. Only the couple’s bare shoulders, arms, necks, and heads are visible. The covered bodies almost completely occupy the lower part of the picture, encouraging viewers to imagine what is happening between the sheets; the genitals would be exactly in the centre of the bottom half of the image. An essential feature of the narrative of courtly love is immediately apparent: wrapped in the same blanket, the lovers form an intimate unity. Their faces are turned to each other, both seek the other’s gaze; with her naked arm, the woman tenderly embraces her lover. The bed scene could easily be extended to the moment of conception if a small human being were drawn into the heavenly blue area above the couple. Yet the two lovers would hardly notice it because they are not longing for a baby; they only have eyes for each other. In the medieval romances, the characters who do not think about (in)fertility at all are perfectly happy.

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[2] Cf. Peruzzi, *Il Codice*, 61.

Isolde's Childlessness: Love Instead of Reproduction

Tristan and Isolde are among the greatest lovers of world literature. Although their medieval love story has been retold and adapted time and again, no one imagines the couple as young parents. The silence on the subject of (in)fertility is particularly striking when you read the aesthetically sophisticated version by Gottfried von Strassburg (ca. 1200–1220). Gottfried, who is firmly on the two lovers' side, does indeed talk about childlessness, but only in relation to Isolde's husband Mark.

Mark's Duty to Procreate

At first, the Cornish king is childless by choice. Long before he marries, he makes a conscious decision not to have children.[3] The decisive factor is his nephew Tristan, whom Mark always wants to have by his side. He met his sister's son by chance and is fascinated by him. Tristan is polite, eloquent, and clever. He knows how to hunt, plays chess and stringed instruments, and is the best companion Mark could wish for. Fearing that Tristan might leave him to rule his father's realm, Mark promises him his own throne. He publicly vows to always share his property and kingdom with Tristan and to make him his sole heir. This presupposes that there will be no closer relative than his nephew. The medieval law of succession also affects the actions of the ruler in Gottfried's *Tristan*. Mark succeeds in his strategy of renouncing marriage and parenthood in Tristan's favour. Although Tristan goes to Parmenia, kills the occupier of his land, and reestablishes his power relations, he then returns. Tristan justifies this to his followers with his appointment as heir to the Cornish throne. In Cornwall, Tristan legitimizes his calling through increasingly heroic deeds. He frees his uncle's country from high tribute payments to the Irish king by killing his envoy. He then tricks the messenger's sister into healing his poisoned wound. Unrecognized, Tristan stays on enemy territory until his recovery and meets the young Isolde. Yet, his incredible successes provoke hatred and envy at the Cornish royal court. This makes Mark's childlessness a cause of conflict.

The king's council intrigues against the heir to the throne and demands that Mark fulfill his duty to reproduce. His councillors constantly urge him to take a wife and produce an heir. Gender is secondary; even a daughter would do. Yet the king cannot be swayed. He sees his decision for childlessness not as a defect, but a privilege, as he can choose his favourite candidate.

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[3] Gottfried von Straßburg, *Tristan*, vv. 5151–67, 8350–577, 10561–66.

In Mark's opinion, his succession is well in order. He even legitimizes Tristan's appointment with the divine will that has given them this excellent heir. Mark invokes God twice to confirm his decision. He would never marry or accept a queen at court as long as Tristan lived. Instead of strengthening his nephew's position, however, Mark achieves the very opposite: Tristan's enemies are so hostile that he fears for his life and asks that his uncle get married. Mark remains unaffected by Tristan, too, at first. He tells him to be silent and renews his resolution to remain childless. Apart from his nephew, he does not want any other heir. Only when Tristan threatens to revoke the succession agreement and return to Parmenia does the king change his mind; he asserts he is innocent and concedes to Tristan's wishes.

Mark involves his council in the search for a wife. They soon come up with Isolde of Ireland, whose beauty and virtue Tristan had previously praised. Isolde would undoubtedly be a worthy wife, and the marriage would bring significant political gains. Yet an alliance seems completely unrealistic due to the longstanding enmity between Cornwall and Ireland. Aware of this difficulty, Mark concurs with the council's choice, hoping to be able to avoid marriage altogether. Counting on the unlikelihood of the match, he swears to marry none other than Isolde. This time, too, Mark's advisers have other plans. They are less interested in the successor to the Irish throne than in the death of the appointed heir to the Cornish one. Tristan is to present the suit to the enemy's royal court and, hopefully, lose his life in the process. Despite Mark's protest, Tristan immediately agrees to the dangerous bride-quest, and completes it. He kills a terrible dragon in Ireland to win the favour of the queen and the promise of Isolde's hand. Tristan not only conveys Mark's proposal of marriage to her and her mother, but also tells them of the Cornish king's original wish to remain childless and unmarried. Once again, the beloved nephew is named as the reason for Mark's desire to live, but the future queen's duty is also implicitly determined. She is to give the kingdom an heir.

Rewritten Discourses of (In)fertility

When the marriage was solemnized, the problem of childlessness should have shifted from Mark to Isolde. In medieval literature, when a male ruler marries, he has usually done his reproductive duty; his wife is the one to ensure the birth of an heir to the throne. Yet Isolde does not have a child, although she has sex regularly and even sleeps with two men—but surprisingly, this is never presented as a problem. This silence is symptomatic of the narrative of courtly love. Gottfried's *Tristan* certainly addresses aspects that could be relevant to (in)fertility, but they are rewritten and reinterpreted. My case is particularly well supported by these "rejected alternative interpretations" (*Abgewiesene Alternativen*):[4] in this seventh narrative, childlessness is meaningless because love absorbs all.

On the return journey from Ireland to Cornwall, the wooer and the bride are thrown together. Inadvertently, Tristan and Isolde consume the love potion that was intended for her wedding night with Mark. Although, compared to other medieval authors, Gottfried minimizes the power of the potion, for him it also marks the beginning of the passionate love affair. In a moment, Isolde's hostility to Tristan disappears and love takes upper hand. The two become one heart and one soul, sharing every joy and sorrow, and aching for physical closeness. The love potion is such an integral part of the Tristan material that hardly anyone doubts its significance.[5] From the perspective of (in)fertility research, however, one has to wonder why on earth the mother gives Isolde a love potion to take with her on her journey. For a young queen who is to found a dynasty and needs to prove herself in a foreign realm, a remedy for sterility would have been much more appropriate. Even before marriage, the discourse on (in)fertility is recast for the first time. The queen does not use her magic out of feudal interests, but in accordance with the courtly ideal of love: mutual affection is more important than reproduction.

During the voyage, Tristan and Isolde confess their feelings and make love. Nevertheless, completing his mission, the nephew hands his lover over to his uncle. But even after their marriage, Tristan and Isolde cannot and will not let each other go. They secretly continue their love affair at the royal court, which is soon gossiping about them, and try to keep up appearances with cunning and deception. Mark feels wracked with doubt. There are many signs that his nephew and his wife are cheating on him, but he cannot be sure. Finally, he demands that Isolde submit to God's judgment. Once again, a historical (in)fertility discourse is alluded to, but the issue is reframed. The court proceedings are reminiscent of church marriage trials, but *Tristan* is not about fertility. Like Cunigunde in Ebernand's legend, in Gottfried's romance, Isolde must prove her loyalty. Even her temporary banishment from court is not justified by her infertility. Rather, Mark breaks off his relationship with his wife because he can no longer tolerate her affectionate behaviour toward Tristan.

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[4] Schulz, *Erzähltheorie*, 350–59.

[5] Cf., e.g., Johnson, "This Drink," 87–112; Keck, *Die Liebeskonzeption.*

The most serious deviations from the scholarly discourses on (in)fertility can be observed in theology. In the eyes of the church, Tristan and Isolde are committing the grave sin of adultery. According to the basic principle of reproductive theology, the queen's childlessness could be understood as God's punishment, but there is no evidence for such a view. Rather, the author, who in medieval literature is difficult to distinguish from the narrator, sympathizes with the lovers from the first and shows great understanding for their behaviour. Gottfried pulls off the feat of giving the illegitimate love affair even more legitimacy than marriage. The contrast to the negative value of sexual desire seen in the narrative of chaste marriage could not be greater. Sexual union erases all heartache and gives Tristan and Isolde the greatest happiness; but it can never last due to the precarious love triangle. Gottfried rewrites the theological discourse by glorifying the lovers' willingness to suffer. Tristan and Isolde are presented as martyrs to their love, whose story is intended to comfort all unhappy lovers.[6]

Isolde's childlessness casts a shadow—not on the exemplary lovers, but on the Cornish king. Gottfried reveals the unfavourable conditions for procreation in the royal marriage by showing us the king and queen's bedchamber. While all of Tristan and Isolde's encounters are erotically charged and nonverbal, Mark and Isolde engage in a war of words in bed. Mark uses intimate situations to question Isolde about her relationship with Tristan. This considerably impairs his sex drive. When he wanted to sleep with Isolde, his mistrust prevented this, the narrator tersely remarks.[7] The fact that Mark does not fulfill his duty to procreate is so problematic because Tristan has disqualified himself as heir to the throne. His love affair with the queen threatens the stability of the kingdom. Mark is unable to free himself from his barren wife and his unfaithful nephew, which testifies to his impotence as a ruler. Only the Cornish king is characterized as deficient.

Happiness Through Partnership: The Ideal of Intimate Unity

The formula for happiness in courtly literature is simple: requited love. But those who doubt their beloved's affection, are rejected, or lose their partner must suffer greatly. The beloved is considered outstanding, incomparable, and unique, and thus cannot be replaced. German sociologist Niklas Luhmann distinguishes in *Love as Passion* (1982) between three types of love: courtly love, passionate love, and romantic love.[8] Contrary to Luhmann's opinion, these three do not arise in successive evolutionary stages, but are all developed in courtly literature. I therefore use courtly love as an umbrella term for the various medieval concepts of love and refer to Luhmann's narrower type as lofty love, or courtship love. Although the three types of love yield differing degrees of attainable and lasting happiness, they are united by the lovers' childlessness.

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[6] Gottfried von Straßburg, *Tristan*, vv. 1–244. On the "religion of love" cf. Ranke, "Die Allegorie," 16. See also Kasten, "Martyrium und Opfer."

[7] Gottfried von Straßburg, *Tristan*, vv. 13769–71.

Unattainable Happiness in Courtship Love

The lack of desire to have children is least surprising in courtship love, which is developed in love songs and is generally regarded as a typical medieval form of love. The protagonist of the song woos his lady love, who will never enter into a relationship with someone so far beneath her. Nevertheless, the lover cannot stop praising his lady and serving her.[9] Meinloh von Sevelingen (second half of the twelfth century) explains that every day since he began to court her, he is a little more enamoured of his chosen one. Therefore, in the song *Ich bin holt einer frowen* (I am Devoted to a Lady) he affirms unrequited love with all its painful consequences. Even if he were to die of longing, he would come back to life and woo her again. Other singers of medieval courtly love songs (*Minnesang*) vary this basic structure of courtship love. They are not satisfied with sublimating and aestheticizing their suffering for love but make demands on the lady.

Walther von der Vogelweide (ca. 1203) asks about the nature of love in the song *Saget mir ieman* (Can Anyone Tell Me). Provocatively, he proposes to evaluate love according to the emotions it triggers. Only when it does good does love rightly bear its name. Walther's understanding of happiness is based on reciprocity. In real love, passion is shared; if it is unrequited, one lover alone cannot keep it alive. The singer argues similarly in *Bin ich dir unmaere* (Do I Mean Nothing to You). After professing his love and lamenting her lack of attention, he tries to get his lady to react. She would do well to think about whether he means something to her, after all. In both songs, the wooer appeals to his view that only mutual love is worth anything. His lady should rush to his aid; he has been suffering too long and too deeply from unrequited love. Unlike Meinloh, Walther is not prepared to continue his courtship without hope of success. In the first song, the singer tries to put pressure on his lady. If she wants to continue to be praised, she has to show him her favour. Walther thus reveals that the ideal woman is a male projection.

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[8] Luhmann, *Liebe als Passion*, esp. 49–56; *Love as Passion*, 41–47. According to Luhmann, sexuality in the Middle Ages is sublimated in courtly love, from the mid-seventeenth century lived out in passionate love, then from the nineteenth century integrated into romantic love in marriage. For criticism see Kraß, "Freundschaft als Passion," 100. On courtly love see, e.g., Egidi, *Höfische Liebe*; Schultz, *Courtly Love*.

[9] *Deutsche Lyrik*, no. 18, 58–59; no. 168, 416–19; no. 176, 438–41.

The lady is always imagined as a lover, never as a mother. The wooers are not toying with the idea of getting the lady pregnant or having a child together. Rather, the one they praise surpasses all other women because she does not serve any profane purposes and does not have to fulfill any mandate to multiply. Love is exclusive, as Walther explains in *Bin ich dir unmaere*: it should pierce two hearts and no more. In contrast to the early modern wedding sermons and poems, in which a couple's happiness depends on their parenthood,[10] any extension to a third party is expressly ruled out. If children are mentioned at all in these courtly love songs, it is mainly to extend the love in time: childhood love implies that the suitor has loved his lady from an early age. Heinrich of Morungen (ca. 1200) extends this perspective into the future when his son will one day take up office. The point of his song *Het ich tugende niht sô vil* (Had I Not So Much Virtue) is that the generation shift brings a role reversal. The protagonist imagines that the lady will later suffer greatly out of unrequited love for his son.[11]

Johannes Hadlaub (ca. 1300) tells the unusual tale of a child acting as a go-between in courtship love in *Ach ich sach si triuten* (Ah, I Saw Her Caressing).[12] The singer watches his lady stroking a child and is profoundly shaken. The lover can hardly bear to see her hugs and kisses; all caresses seem eroticized. Johannes Hadlaub contrasts maternal and courtship love so the one intensifies the other. The wooer longs to be able to take the child's place. Although this wish remains unfulfilled in the courtship love songs, the protagonist can at least transfer his desire. When the child approaches him, the lover imitates his lady's behaviour. He kisses the child in the very places his beloved had previously touched. In this way, the child becomes the medium of love, but not its end. The difference to parental love is obvious: the child is a transmitter between unrequited and requited love.

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[10] Toepfer, *Infertility*, 166–69.

[11] *Deutsche Lyrik*, no. 101, stanza 3, 240–41; on love from childhood, see 1088 (index).

[12] *Deutscher Minnesang (1150–1300)*, 160–61.

Happiness Hindered by Passionate Love

Passionate love differs from courtship love in that the desire cannot be sublimated. Sexuality is essential for this form of love and brings both partners the greatest joy. Passionate love differs from romantic love in that it is expressed outside marriage. The lovers can only meet in secret and are always in fear discovery. Their limited opportunities to be together and constant threat to their happiness continually refuel their desire. In *L'amour et l'occident* (Love in the Western World, 1939/1983), the Swiss philosopher Denis de Rougemont (1906–1985) saw the interfering spouse as the main reason that Tristan and Isolde's love endured. Without such an obstacle, they would not have been able to rekindle their love so repeatedly and so fervently. Rougemont considered the idea that Tristan could have married Isolde to be completely absurd and expressed understanding for the male character: Isolde "typifies the woman a man does not marry; for once she became his wife, she would no longer be what she is, and he would no longer love her."[13]

In the courtly romances, passionate love is often contrasted with a husband's behaviour to question the legitimacy of his claim. As early as his prologue, Gottfried von Strassburg makes it clear that Tristan and Isolde are destined for each other and are true lovers. From his point of view, the love potion does not thwart plans for a legal marriage but ensures that those who belong together can be together. Mark, who prefers to live with a man, only agrees to the marriage out of necessity, does not even realize on the wedding night that the wrong bride is being foisted on him, eyes his wife suspiciously: he does not deserve a woman like Isolde at all.

Two verse narratives by Marie de France set out a similar situation.[14] Her protagonists are susceptible to passionate love because they bear the cross of an unhappy marriage. In the *lais* of *Guigemar* and *Yonec* (ca. 1170) a noble, beautiful, and clever woman is married to an old, narrow-minded, and jealous man who imprisons and keeps a close eye on her. According to such men, wives have only one purpose: to give birth. As the young women in both *lais* are emotionally neglected, it seems all too justified that they enter a relationship with an empathetic knight. In both stories, the lady's sexual encounters give her great pleasure. In *Yonec*, the protagonist regains her former beauty through experiencing the joy she had lost during the suffering of her marriage. Her knight gives her all the tender affection she has only ever known from stories. In passionate love, sexuality is always an end in itself and never a mere means of reproduction.

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[13] Rougemont, *Love*, 45.

[14] Marie de France, *The Lais*, 52–99 ("Guigemar"), 210–39 ("Yonec"). Like Mark, the bailiff of Caerwent marries in *Yonec* (vv. 18–20) to obtain an heir.

In the narratives of courtly love and chaste marriage, the perception of sexuality could not be more different. While sex is judged extremely negatively in the legends, the view of it in romances is enthusiastic. Sexual desire is not considered sinful, but an essential part of a happy life. Remarkably, the courtly authors draw on religious images and concepts in their descriptions of sexual encounters. When Engelhard and Engeltrud sleep together for the first time in Konrad von Würzburg's friendship legend (second half of the thirteenth century), this is staged as a cosmic natural event and a supernatural experience of grace. Konrad compares their joy to the relief of a man suffering from great hunger who can eat his fill at a feast. He exuberantly recounts that for this couple, the door to paradise was opened. This metaphor of happiness stands in striking contrast to church sexual morality. Not abstinence, but sexual pleasure provides a foretaste of eternal bliss or a return to humanity's joyful prelapsarian state. The location of the meeting, an idyllic garden filled with trees, also hints at paradise. The flowers, red roses, and grass seem to be smiling at the lovers, just as they are smiling at each other. Konrad repeatedly speaks of joy (*freude*), delight (*wunne*), and bliss (*saelde*) to describe the overwhelming experience of happiness.[15]

In the paradise of passionate love, there is only room for two. In the lovers' cave episode, Gottfried emphasizes that every other person disturbs their happy togetherness. Tristan and Isolde are temporarily banished from the court and create their own world of love in the forest, where their joy in each other is complete. Instead of indulging in culinary delights or starving in the wilderness, the lovers savour the sight of each other and the delight in their hearts. As the narrator rhetorically asks, why would they need to add anyone else? In his opinion, one and one is a perfect combination. Every third party is one too many and can only irk the lovers.[16] Gottfried creates this formula for happiness knowing full well that only a little later, Mark will discover the lovers' cave. In *Tristan*, Isolde's husband repeatedly takes on the role of third wheel who disturbs the lovers and intrudes on their companionship. Of course, the unwanted husband is not the only one to threaten their happiness; so, do potential children. The idea of Isolde being a mother and caring for a baby is even less compatible with the concept of passionate love than Denis de Rougemont's verdict on the likelihood of a "Mme Tristan."[17]

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[15] Konrad von Würzburg, *Engelhard*, vv. 2955–3167.

[16] Gottfried von Straßburg, *Tristan*, vv. 16850–58: "nu wes bedorften s'ouch dar în / oder waz solt ieman zuo z'in dar? / si haeten eine gerade schar: / dane was niuwan ein und ein. / haeten s'ieman zuo z'in zwein / an die geraden schar gelesen, / sô waere ir ungerade gewesen / und waeren mit dem ungeraden / sêre überlestet und überladen." Gottfried von Strassburg, *Tristan and Isolde*: "Why would they need anyone else, what would they do for them there? Together they were an even number, just one plus one. If they had admitted someone else to their even company of two, then they would have been uneven, and the unevenness would have only been a burden and a nuisance."

Happiness Harboured by Romantic Love

In romantic love, sexuality, love, and marriage come together. The protagonists are allowed to marry whomever they love, so their happiness seems permanently assured. But in romantic love, new problems arise. How can feudal duties be reconciled with the passion and totality of courtly love? Hartmann von Aue describes the difficulties that result in the first two German Arthurian romances, deliberately leaving (in)fertility out of the question.

In Hartmann's first romance (ca. 1180/85), the king's son Erec marries the beautiful Enite, with whom he fell in love on his first adventure. At the wedding celebration, the protagonist in the Old French source text, Chrétiens de Troyes's *Erec et Enide* (ca. 1165), expressly prays before an altar to Mary that she be able to fulfill her obligation to give birth. She asks Jesus and Mary to give her and her husband an heir who will one day inherit the realm.[18] In the German romance, however, Enite does not pray for parenthood. By removing the plea for fertility and increasing the intensity of the sexual encounters, Hartmann creates the image of a romantic couple whose happiness does not depend on reproduction.

Erec loves his beautiful wife so much that he only wants to be alone with her. Instead of continuing his knightly activities or fulfilling his public royal duties, the young ruler withdraws from life at court and spends most of the day in bed with his wife. While Chrétien's Erec often stays abed until noon, Hartmann's protagonist goes back to bed at noon. The couple only leave their love nest to attend mass and for meals. People soon start gossiping about Erec "lying lazily" (*verligen*) like this and his prestige dissipates. The rule that togetherness brings happiness may apply to passionate love, but it only works to a limited extent with romantic love. Noble spouses are obliged to fulfill social duties and are not allowed to devote themselves entirely to their partners. In Chrétien's romance, Erec's companions accuse him of precisely this: he treats Enide not as his wife, but like a lover.

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[17] Rougemont, *Love*, 45.

[18] Chrétien de Troyes, *Erec et Enide*, vv. 2347–53, 2430–41; Hartmann von Aue, *Erec*, vv. 2966–98. See also Bumke, *Der "Erec,"* 87–111.

In Hartmann's version, the hero is so fixated on his beautiful wife that he does not even realize how others are talking about him. He only learns of his bad reputation from Enite, although she would prefer to keep the derogatory comments secret. She finally decides to tell him for fear that Erec might accuse her of something worse, which could be read as a hidden reference to infertility. What else could Enite be afraid of? The suspicion of infidelity that some medievalists have surmised[19] does not fit the context of the plot. A young woman who is in bed with her husband around the clock hardly has time for a lover. It would be more likely that Enite would worry about not being pregnant despite intensive sexual activity. But rather than making this connection explicit, the narrator and his protagonist remain silent on the issue. Without any explanation, Erec orders his wife to prepare to leave. He sets off on one more adventure, this time with her, but treats Enite very badly. Nothing seems to be left of their all-consuming passion; Erec completely withdraws from their intimate companionship at table and in bed and has Enite do the work of a groom. The hero makes full use of his patriarchal power until, after numerous displays of loyalty, he finally returns Enite's feelings once more. At the end of the romance, Erec has learned to reconcile love and rule and to live out his marriage in such a way that his desire no longer poses a threat to society.

In the second Arthurian romance, *Iwein* (Ywain, ca. 1200), Hartmann reverses the problem.[20] Fearing that he will be overwhelmed by passion like Erec, Iwein neglects his wife and his duties as ruler. This romance is also based on the concept of romantic love: Iwein falls passionately in love with the recently widowed sovereign of a mysterious fountain realm, whose husband he has killed. His desire causes him great pain, so he is overjoyed to win the hand of the beautiful Laudine. Securing the rule plays a decisive role here. Laudine is only so quick to take on a new husband because she needs someone to defend her realm. Unlike Iwein, love is not the cause of Laudine's consent to marriage, but its consequence. Although social duties are emphasized more strongly than in *Erec*, the task of reproduction is not mentioned at all in *Iwein* either. Laudine is concerned about having a well-defended realm in the present, not in the distant future. Both protagonists believe that their love is secure but learn that marriage does not guarantee happiness. Laudine is surprised that after just a few days, her husband wants to set off again and take part in tournaments; Iwein learns painfully that a woman can break away from an unreliable husband. In the end, they realize how much they depend on each other and reunite.

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[19] Hartmann von Aue, *Erec*, vv. 3029–49. On the research discussion cf. Scholz, "Kommentar," 747–48.

[20] Hartmann von Aue, *Iwein*.

One would expect to see shifts in romantic love related to (in)fertility. If rulers are required to father children, parenthood is logically a key condition of a happy marriage. But the idea of happiness is not extended from a loving couple to a happy family in either *Erec* or *Iwein*: the protagonists of Hartmann's romances do not want or have children. Nor does anyone close to the couple demand that they provide an heir to the throne. Laudine is not required to marry to bear a son and people do not talk about Erec and Enite failing to produce one. Not even the epilogue to the first Arthurian romance, which extends to the couple's eternal life, mentions children.[21] In the narrative of courtly love, the basic principle of reproductive politics is suspended. Mutual affection is enough to be happy, whereas parenthood and childlessness are completely irrelevant—at least as long as love remains.

Lost Happiness: Children as Compensation

Children become relevant in medieval romances when a relationship ends. Yearning for parenthood is a specifically female motif in the narrative of courtly love. Women long for their disappeared or deceased beloved to live on in their son. The child is therefore not the culmination of a fulfilled love, but compensation for its loss. Through motherhood, women hope to be able to hold on to their happiness beyond the end of a relationship.

Dido's Fantasy of Fatherhood

The ancient heroine Dido in Virgil's *Aeneid* (29–19 BCE) and its later adaptations provide an impressive example of desire for children as compensation. The powerful ruler of Carthage thinks about having a child for the first time when her lover wants to leave her. Her position of power is permanently weakened by her love affair with the Trojan refugee. Before Aeneas was stranded in Libya with his companions, Dido was an undisputed ruler who had built up her empire through her own wisdom and skill. She abandoned her resolution not to marry again and to remain faithful to her deceased husband for the Trojan hero. Dido fell in love with Aeneas, slept with him on a hunting trip and then continued their liaison at court. She ignored her people's gossip, left affairs of state to her lover, and indulged in the illusion of lifelong love.

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[21] Hartmann von Aue, *Erec*, vv. 10054–135.

As Aeneas prepares to continue his journey to Italy, Dido realizes how precarious her situation is. After voluntarily subordinating herself to a man, she is no longer accepted as a ruler and is despised for her inconstancy. In a great lament, she regrets her behaviour and fervently wishes she had never begun the relationship—or at least that they had conceived a child. If only the Trojan had left her a little son "whose features at least would bring you back to me in spite of all, I would not feel so totally devastated, so destroyed."[22] Dido's desire for a child only arises when it can no longer be fulfilled. Little Aeneas, who plays in her halls and looks like his father, is a projection marked as unreal. Dido's fantasy of having children springs from an explosive mixture of emotions: love, passion, remorse, disappointment, fear, and anger. On the one hand, her longing testifies to a lasting emotional bond, insofar as Dido would like to transfer her love to a potential son. On the other, she confronts Aeneas with the fact that he has failed both as a lover and as a would-be father.

Ovid reformulates this desire to have children in the *Heroides* (Letters of Ancient Heroines; 23 BCE). In her love letter to Aeneas, Dido does not lament that they have not had children but plays with the possibility of pregnancy. As in most letters, the appeal of the *Heroides* lies in the fact that the writer still hopes to be able to keep her beloved man, while the reader knows that the myth has a tragic end. Dido vividly describes to Aeneas what terrible consequences his departure would have for her. She could be banished, attacked, conquered, raped, and killed. She tries to paint an even more horrific picture by imagining an unborn child as the victim of the violence. Dido mentions her potential fertility to exert emotional pressure, manipulate her lover, and increase her own value: "But perhaps it is Dido, swollen with child, / whom you abandon with part of you. / To the mother's fate must be added the child's / you will cause your unborn child to die. / Iulus' brother will soon die with his mother, / one fate will take us both together."[23] Ovid's Dido is a skillful rhetorician. She presents herself as an expectant mother and Aeneas as a fugitive father who provokes and tolerates the murder of his fictitious child. If Aeneas has no sympathy for her, she says, he should at least think of their potential child. The danger she invokes is all the more threatening because Dido refers to his real son. If Aeneas wants to be a caring father, he must stay with her and protect the unborn brother of his Ascanius.

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[22] Virgil, *The Aeneid*, 138–89. Cf. Vergil, *Aeneis*, bk. 4, vv. 327–30: "saltem si qua mihi de te suscepta fuisset / ante fugam suboles, si quis mihi parvulus aula / luderet Aeneas, qui te tamen ore referret, / non equidem omnino capta ac deserta viderer."

In the Middle High German *Eneasroman* by Heinrich von Veldeke (Romance of Aeneas, 1174/84–85), the theme of childlessness fulfills one more function. Dido hopes for both emotional comfort and political support from the imaginary child. She laments her aloneness: she has neither a child nor any other relatives, and urgently needs male support to defend her right to rule. Unlike in the *Aeneid*, Dido does not blame her lover for her misfortune, nor does she formulate longing for a child from her own perspective. Instead, she struggles with herself: "If only you had had a child from me!" ("hetet ir doch ein kindelîn / an mir gewunnen!")[24]

Dido's longing for his fatherhood sheds a different light on Aeneas's departure and the North African princes' contempt. At least from her point of view, one reason that the man she loves is leaving is because she did not bear him a child. By admitting that she has gambled away her own honour, she provides an implicit explanation for her infertility. In Veldeke's German version, childlessness appears to be a punishment from God because Dido thoughtlessly slept with a man. This gives the neighbouring princes one more reason to lower their esteem for Dido. None of her former wooers are interested in a woman who is unfaithful and infertile. Because Aeneas lets Dido cry and does not comment on her hypothesis that he is leaving because she failed to give him a child, this view remains unchallenged. The childless ruler remains alone with her shame and—as in the ancient epic—commits suicide.

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[23] Ovid, *Heroides*, 62; Ovidius, *Liebesbriefe*, letter 7, vv. 133–38: "forsitan et gravidam Didon, scelerate, relinquas / parsque tui lateat corpore clausa meo. / accedet fatis matris miserabilis infans / et nondum nato funeris auctor eris. / cumque parente sua frater morietur Iuli / poenaque conexos auferet una duos."

[24] Heinrich von Veldeke, *Eneasroman*, 72, vv. 6–7. In the English translation, unlike in the Middle High German text, the longing for children is attributed to Dido: "I would be much better off if God had allowed me to get a child from you [...]. Sad to say, I did not." Heinrich von Veldeke, *Eneit*, 27.

Life Must Go On

Courtly love stories in which a longed-for child plays an essential role have a clear timeline. Because courtly love has a basic dyadic structure, relationships with the desired man and the cared-for son cannot be lived out in parallel. A woman is either an ideal love partner or a caring mother. Therefore, the beloved man must leave before the child can take first place in a woman's life. As Marie de France's *Yonec* and Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival* (1200–1210) show, this temporal logic applies to both passionate and romantic love stories. Each eponymous character enters the narrative world at the very point when he can take his father's place at his mother's side.

In *Yonec*, the lady's pregnancy is first mentioned after her lover is mortally wounded.[25] The knight, who could only approach his lady love in the guise of a hawk, fell into the trap set for him by her jealous husband. Feeling death is near, he prophesies that his beloved will give birth to a son. Amid this powerless suffering, the child fulfills a double function: first, to console the bereaved lady in her grief and second, to avenge his parents' misfortune. The dying man instructs his living lover exactly when she should tell his son about his origins, hand him his sword, and ask him to kill her husband. She faithfully carries out all these instructions, gives birth to the child, looks after him carefully, and loves him tenderly. Yonec resembles his father in beauty and reputation. The father is regarded as the strongest, bravest, most beautiful, favourite, and best knight of all time, while the son is praised as incomparably noble, brave, generous, and magnanimous. At the appointed time, the mother tells Yonec his birth story. No sooner has she fulfilled her knight's last wishes than she falls dead on his grave.

Wolfram details how a woman's love shifts from her deceased husband to her unborn son in *Parzival*.[26] Although Herzeloyde is warned in a dream, the news that Gahmuret has died is a harsh blow. Fainting, she sinks to the ground and almost follows her husband into death. Once again, the narrator only announces that a woman is expecting her lover's child when he dies. The overpowering suffering of the widow and the strong will of the unborn child struggle for survival. When Herzeloyde regains consciousness, her first thoughts are of Gahmuret's germinated seed. The child means much more to her than her husband's last testament; she believes that he will come back to life in his son. So as not to kill her lover a second time, she conquers her pain. In her dirge, Herzeloyde changes role—from loving wife to overpro-

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25 Marie de France, *The Lais*, "Yonec," vv. 319–32.

26 Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival*, para. 109, v. 1; para. 111, v. 14.

tective mother. Due to her grave misfortune, she believes she is practically entitled to a complication-free birth. A faithful God would allow her child to be born safe and sound.

Motherhood becomes a lifeline that allows Herzeloyde to overcome her grief. Yet it leads her to fixate on her baby as compensation for the loss of his father, whom she hopes to meet again in her son. Her attention is immediately drawn to the newborn's genitals; she is pleased to see that there is a sweet little penis (*visellîn*) between his legs. Herzeloyde showers the little boy with kisses and gives him various courtly pet names. She never calls him by his real name, but always addresses him in French, alternately as good son, dear son, or beautiful son ("bon fîz, scher fîz, bêâ fîz").[27] She breastfeeds the child herself, which is highly unusual for a noble lady in the High Middle Ages, as the narrator approvingly stresses.[28] Yet—in contrast to Grisardis in Erhart Groß (see Chapter 5)—Herzeloyde is less concerned with being an exemplary mother than with satisfying her longing for her beloved. Holding her child tenderly, she feels as if Gahmuret is in her arms again. Herzeloyde does everything she can to preserve this love. To ensure Parzival does not suffer the same fate as his father, she takes him away from court to live in a wooded wilderness. But all efforts to keep the boy from knightly life fail. When Parzival leaves her, Herzeloyde is literally overwhelmed by heartbreak and dies. Separated from Gahmuret's son, she has no more reason to live.

No Consolation Through Fertility

Pregnancy is no panacea for the loss of a loved one. In the medieval romances, a child temporarily helps some women get over the death of their partner, while others remain inconsolable. In the narrative of courtly love, the joy of having a child never equals the overwhelming happiness with a partner. Lovers are always happier than parents, especially as in the courtly literature, they usually have to bring up their children alone. When women die of heartbreak despite pregnancy or childbirth, it is especially evident that a child is no substitute for a partner.

The lesson that a child is no remedy for lost happiness can be taken from the first love story in Gottfried's *Tristan*. The romance begins with Tristan's future parents, who partly anticipate the fate of the main lovers in the story.

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[27] Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival*, para. 112, v. 25; para. 113, v. 4.

[28] Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival*, para. 113, v. 5; para. 114, v. 2. On her presentation as *mater lactans* see Brinker-von der Heyde, *Geliebte Mütter*, 220–3; Miklautsch, *Studien*, 54–59.

Riwalin and Blanscheflur fall passionately in love, overwhelmed by their feelings, and grow ever closer. They find the lack of opportunity for sex so agonizing that they fear they might die. For both of them, this makes their secret love affair all the more satisfying. Their bliss was so perfect, the narrator affirms, that they would not have given it up for anything, even the kingdom of heaven.[29] When Riwalin has to return to his homeland, the pregnant Blanscheflur lets him abduct her. But their happiness does not last. Riwalin falls in battle, and Blanscheflur is frozen with anguish. Her whole being is infused with living love and intense suffering, which threatens to suffocate her will to live. She no longer speaks a word—about either her dead lover or her unborn child. Her motherhood does not allow her to live any longer than is absolutely necessary for the story to continue. Blanscheflur lies in labour for four days before she gives birth to her son—and dies.

Just like Blanscheflur, the mother of the protagonist in Rudolf von Ems's romance *Willehalm von Orlens* (first half of the thirteenth century, discussed in Chapter 3) is not consoled in her bereavement by the fact that she is expecting a child.[30] The very day that her beloved husband dies, the duchess gives birth to a son. Elye initially acts according to feudal protocol. She announces the birth of the heir to the throne, who is to compensate everyone for the loss they have suffered, and makes her followers swear allegiance to him. Only when Elye has secured her son's position as ruler does she let her grief flow. She would rather die than live on in longing for the man she loves. With a great wail, she collapses dead on the open coffin. The logic of succession is not enough in this romance. A son can only replace a father as a ruler, but not as the beloved.

The *Nibelungenlied* (Song of the Nibelungs, ca. 1200) also shows that, to many women in medieval literature, the idea that a child could compensate for the loss of a loved husband was completely alien.[31] The beautiful Kriemhild gives birth to a son after ten years of marriage, to the delight of the royal family in the Netherlands. But little Gunther is completely irrelevant to the rest of the plot. After Siegfried is murdered during a family visit to Worms, Kriemhild does not return to Xanten. In vain, her father-in-law reminds her of the child waiting for her at home. Kriemhild does not accept the argument that her son will comfort her in her suffering once he is older. Instead of thinking of a future without Siegfried and taking up her role as the mother of the heir to the throne, she prefers to stay close to the grave and devote the rest of her life to mourning and revenge. For Kriemhild, her child does not represent a lasting connection to his father. As she nears her own death, Siegfried's sword, not his son, reminds her of her beloved. The grieving widow finds no happiness or consolation in her son, because he is not a personal gift of love. Thus, the social significance of parenthood prevails.

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[29] Gottfried von Straßburg, *Tristan*, vv. 1369–72.

[30] Rudolf von Ems, *Willehalm von Orlens*, vv. 1632–2022. Cf. Miklautsch, *Studien*, 178–81.

[31] *Das Nibelungenlied*, stanzas 712–13, 1084–85, 2369.

Changing Perceptions of Happiness: Life and Literature

Recent happiness research on (in)fertility has met with resistance. Scientists, journalists, and laypeople did not want to believe that nonparents are happier than parents. Cologne-based business journalist Malte Buhse asked in *Zeit online* (2014) how meaningful these studies were.[32] Parents' delight when their children take their first steps or get up on stage in a drama group surely indicated that the opposite was true? In many studies, it is not possible to determine whether children are the key factor in couples' happiness. Other factors may have distorted the results. Perhaps happy and self-confident people are more likely to remain childless because they find it less difficult to defy social expectations and go against the traditional model of family.

Fictional Happiness

It is even more challenging to research happiness in the past. We cannot ask premodern people personally how satisfied they were with their lives. While little information may be gleaned from historical sources, the authors of romances describe in great detail what makes their protagonists happy. Since literary works do not aim for historical accuracy, they cannot be used to draw conclusions about medieval society. Undoubtedly, the happiness lovers find in the narrative of courtly love is fictional. As research into the history of mentalities emphasizes, this motif is genuinely literary, but also typical of the era. The Austrian historian of mentalities Peter Dinzelbacher (1981) proclaimed the "discovery of love in the High Middle Ages," and the medieval Germanist Walter Haug (2004) described the "birth of the modern idea of love"; human life finds fulfillment in an erotic personal relationship between a man and a woman.[33] The popularity of this narrative in the twelfth century is so astonishing because courtly love challenged the norms and values of medieval feudal society. Neither passionate nor romantic love can be reconciled with the marriage practices of the nobility.

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[32] Buhse, "Der kollektive Baby-Blues," *Zeit online*, March 27, 2014.

[33] Dinzelbacher, "Über die Entdeckung"; Haug, *Die höfische Liebe*, 34.

Some courtly authors themselves emphasize that the happiness they describe is fictional. In a comparison of artforms that anticipates the renaissance conventions of *paragone*, both Gottfried von Strassburg and Wolfram von Eschenbach juxtapose their literary description of the act of love with other artistic representations.[34] Gottfried compares Isolde and Tristan, surprised in bed, to a golden work of art made from a single mould. Arms wound round each other, cheek to cheek, their embrace is sealed with a kiss. The blanket over them reveals their intimacy rather than concealing their nakedness. Above the covers, from the shoulders up, the couple is nestled so close that they appear fused together. In the *Tagelied* (medieval German "day song" about the separation of lovers at daybreak) *Den morgenblic bî wahtaeres sange erkôs* (The Dawn Light Saw at the Watchman's Call"; ca. 1200–1220), Wolfram von Eschenbach says no painter would find it easy to show how tightly the fair, smooth bodies are intertwined, but Wolfram's aesthetic portrayal resembles the miniature from the Florentine codex (Fig. 7) so closely that it almost seems he had seen that image, or one like it. In the manuscript of the *Roman de la rose*, the painter has refrained from depicting the fusion of entire bodies and has instead portrayed the unity of the lovers through the arrangement of the bedclothes. The question of which artform best describes the lovers' happiness reveals something significant here: in courtly literature, sexual bliss is aestheticized.

Literary narratives are no less important for the study of medieval ideas of love, happiness, and (in)fertility just because they are fictional. In her cultural sociology of love, Israeli sociologist Eva Illouz emphasizes that historical narratives and fictional feelings are anything but irrelevant to happiness. In *Warum Liebe weh tut* (Why Love Hurts, 2011), she traces how culturally specific feelings are mediated through various media.[35] Here and elsewhere I have engaged with the question of what prompts the desire for parenthood: for instance in Chapter 4 of this book, on the mystics' desire to mother the infant Jesus, and in *Infertility in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (2022), where I analyzed the cases of childless women seeking an annulment through church marriage courts, the enthusiastic descriptions of the joys of fatherhood in early modern wedding speeches, and the great sorrow lamented by the childless self in the Protestant prayer book.[36] Instead of seeing longing for a child as a female disposition, anthropological constant, or "natural" instinct, I have drawn on Michel Foucault's theory of culture, Niklas Luhmann's theory of communication, and Caroline Walker Bynum's research into the history of piety to explain the affects of infertility through discursive, media, and sociocultural factors.

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[34] Gottfried von Straßburg, *Tristan*, vv. 18195–211; *Deutsche Lyrik*, no. 215, stanza 3, 534–37.

[35] Illouz, *Warum Liebe weh tut*, 359–86; *Why Love Hurts*, 199–215.

In addition to these, Illouz's emphasis on aesthetic and narrative forms makes her approach especially suitable for literary analysis. Literary narratives evoke fictional feelings that can have the same cognitive content as real feelings. They create cognitive templates that people use to form and anticipate feelings. Thus, historical narratives make a decisive contribution to how people perceive, experience, and interpret parenthood. Stories of childlessness and its emotional impact always follow a script, but ideas of love undergo a significant change from medieval to modern times, as happiness regardless of children is abandoned.

In the early modern period, the courtly script for fictional happiness of lovers is rewritten. The basic two-part structure that characterizes the narrative of courtly love is expanded to include a third party, the child, shifting the focus from partner love to parental love. This makes parenthood an essential part of a fulfilled life. Didactic treatises and wedding speeches clearly reflect this shift, as does an uptick in the poetic fertility rate. While the protagonists of courtly romances usually remain only children, Melusine bears ten sons in the early New High German prose romance (first published in 1456) and in his string of affairs, Hug Schapler (first published in 1500) begets son after son.[37] By the sixteenth century, it was no longer enough for a couple to love each other; they had to prove this by reproducing. Children were seen as an expression of their parents' love, evidence of a happy relationship, and the crowning glory of the partnership.

This reinterpretation of happiness spread through the early mass media. The idea that a marriage without children was equivalent to a life without sunshine[38] gained traction through printing and preaching across regional, linguistic, class, religious and epochal boundaries. For centuries, this pattern has shaped people's feelings. "While imagining that they were pursuing happiness, individuals actually served to reproduce humankind," Niklas Luhmann critically notes.[39] In recent decades, the early modern script for marital and parental happiness seems to have lost its influence. Publications in this vein include the polemic by Sarah Diehl, who confidently announces in the subtitle of *Die Uhr, die nicht tickt* (The Clock That Doesn't Tick, 2014) that she is "happy without children." More recent happiness research also documents that individuals no longer necessarily see children as part of a happy life.

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[36] Toepfer, *Infertility*, 95–96, 182–84, 193–96.

[37] *Romane des 15. und 16. Jahrhunderts*, 46–51, 259–72; Schultz, *The Knowledge*, 113–14.

[38] Cf. Toepfer, *Infertility*, 168: "Barren to be and heirless quite, is like a sun that gives no light."

Freedom of Choice and Doubt

Angus Deaton and Arthur A. Stone suggest that people's general attitude toward parenthood should be included in happiness research. They propose that the key question is why people have children. If parents deliberately chose to have children and nonparents deliberately remained childless, the researchers surmise that neither group would necessarily feel more contented. They thus declare freedom to choose as the decisive criterion for happiness.[40] So is choice the main reason to be happy? If you take this approach a little further, happiness should have kept increasing. Western adults have completely different freedoms today than their premodern counterparts: they are largely free to choose their partners, ways to live and love, without being overly restricted by social, religious, moral, and family expectations.

Yet Eva Illouz states that opposite is the case.[41] Sexual liberation and the resulting multitude of choices created new insecurities; love became less intense and happiness, permanently impaired. Illouz argues that "the capitalist cultural grammar has massively penetrated the realm of heterosexual romantic relationships"[42] and has triggered a profound change in the history of love. In the digital age, the logic of the free market is applied to sexual relationships: competition, sexual capital, personal performance, and pleasure are the criteria by which people measure themselves and others. According to Illouz, freedom of choice, rationality, interest, and oversupply change how people look for partners, behave in relationships, and develop feelings. The overwhelming sense of uniqueness that characterized the medieval narrative of courtly love has been "drowned in the sheer numbers of potential partners."[43] The countless options cause people to constantly compare themselves to others, doubt their own feelings, and hesitate to commit. All this leads Illouz to see a negative pattern in relationships today: many people no longer know how to define and judge a happy partnership. The result is generally chronic and structural uncertainty.

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[39] Luhmann, *Love as Passion*, 148; Diehl, *Die Uhr, die nicht tickt*.

[40] Deaton and Stone, "Evaluative and Hedonic Wellbeing," 1328.

[41] Illouz, *Why Love Hurts*, 8–10, 159–62; Illouz, *The End of Love*, 9, 221–23.

[42] Illouz, *Why Love Hurts*, 9.

Medieval literature certainly recognizes insecurities in love when characters hesitate to embark on a relationship because of the potential negative consequences. But the protagonists usually doubt their partner's affection, not their own feelings. Gottfried von Strassburg tells us of the worries that weigh on Riwalin after he has fallen in love with Blanscheflur. He cannot decide whether she also loves him or perhaps even despises him. All these doubts only lead to Riwalin becoming more and more entangled in love. Gottfried illustrates this typical phase of love with the image of snaring a bird. Love is like a lime-twig. A bird that settles on the sticky branch realizes too late that it is trapped. Every attempt to fly away merely spreads the gluelike birdlime further into its feathers. In the same way, the more Riwalin tries to escape love, the more he is drawn into it.[44] Other popular metaphors and symbols such as the love potion or Cupid's arrow also make it clear that courtly love is experienced as a compulsion and force. Such a passion can neither be explained nor justified rationally. The lovers depend completely on each other for their wellbeing; their happiness has nothing to do with freedom of decide.

Modern freedom of choice also includes the possibility of not having to choose. In *Warum Liebe endet* (The End of Love, 2018/2019), Illouz explains that more and more people are deciding not to look for a partner, or to end their current relationship. She sees falling fertility rates as an indication of cultural fear of commitment, especially among men. The structural uncertainty that Illouz describes primarily for romantic relationships can also be applied to parenthood. In the autofictional *Motherhood* (2018), Canadian author Sheila Heti thinks hard about whether she wants to have a child. She talks to numerous people about what motherhood means or would mean for her and her partner. Confronted with differing social ideals, cultural norms, family influences, fluctuating hormones, advice from friends, relationship crises and her own intellectual demands, she finds it very difficult to reach a decision. For a long time, she wonders whether having a baby would make her happier or unhappier. The worry of regretting not having a child and the fear of finding motherhood unbearable are equally present in the first-person narrator's mind. She can barely imagine finding the same fulfillment in caring as she does in writing. So, she ultimately makes what Illouz calls "the choice to 'unchoose.'"[45]

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[43] Illouz, *Why Love Hurts*, 232.

[44] Gottfried von Straßburg, *Tristan*, vv. 828–920.

Such doubts about (in)fertility are alien to medieval narrative literature. Comparable considerations can only be found in the early modern literature on marriage, in which the first humanists discussed its pros and cons before clearly deciding in favour of marriage and family.[46] In the narrative of courtly love, the protagonists do not even think about whether or not they want to have a child with their beloved. Although a passionate or romantic love affair may lead to pregnancy, it is neither a reason to sleep with your partner nor to categorically rule out sex. Not longing for children does not mean that courtly lovers reject children on principle, but that to them, the issue of (in)fertility is irrelevant. Medieval authors thus develop a vision of a society which does not draw a distinction between parents and nonparents.

Alternative Models

Happiness researchers debate what conditions would have to be met for people with and without children to be equally satisfied with their lives. Luca Stanca sees the main perceived drawback of parenthood as the financial burden. Using a worldwide survey, he shows that people with children address money problems significantly more often than people without children. The empirical social researcher Matthias Pollmann-Schult observes that employment has a negative impact on life satisfaction for mothers, but not for fathers, which he explains with mothers' double burden of paid employment and reproductive labour.[47] Feminist authors also see the fact that women take most responsibility for bringing up children and running the household as a key reason why some choose childlessness. Limited childcare options, too little professional and private support, an unequal distribution of domestic tasks, financial and emotional dependency on the main earner and a lack of freedom all contribute to making mothers feel overwhelmed and less satisfied with their life situation than nonmothers. Eva Illouz and Sarah Diehl are therefore asking us to consider alternative models of love and new concepts of life together.[48] To find other possibilities, it is worth taking one last look at the medieval narrative literature.

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[45] Illouz, *The End of Love*, 21. Cf. Heti, *Motherhood*.

[46] E.g., Albrecht von Eyb, *Ob einem manne*; Toepfer, *Infertility*, 176.

[47] Stanca, "Suffer"; Pollmann-Schult, "Parenthood," 85, 95–96.

The protagonists of the courtly romances do not find happiness in the nuclear family, but in an intimate love relationship or in a circle of like-minded people, as is characteristic of King Arthur's knights. Many medieval love and adventure stories are set in the narrative world of Arthurian legend. Iwein and Erec set off from Arthur's court to prove themselves as knights; as a young man Parzival hurries first to the king to obtain a suit of armour. Arthur's court is an ideal world in which different characters meet, yet no one is more important than another; the famous Round Table symbolizes this equality of all knights. At the court of the ideal king, there are no crying babies, no breastfeeding mothers, and no bathing fathers. Arthur's court does not reproduce itself but is rejuvenated by the admission of new members. Here, biological parent-child relationships barely play a role.[49] Fathers do not recognize their biological sons, but experienced men take responsibility for the next generation of knights and introduce young heroes to the art of jousting. Ladies care for their knights, who return the favour with tournament prizes. The love of heterosocial couples can be integrated into the courtly community in the same way as the friendship of homosocial couples or individuals' striving for independence. The alternative social model of Arthurian society provides a way for those who share the same values and ideals to live together. The inhabitants of the Arthurian world do not even consider (in)fertility.

The contrast to the present could hardly be greater: how to encourage people to have children is a hot topic in political and social debates. Illouz takes a refreshingly different approach from the usual population policies. In an interview (2011), she advised women not to make their longing for children dependent on the idea of romantic love. If they wanted children, they should have them either alone or in a community with other women or men who also wanted to start a family but were not their partners.[50] The German journalist Teresa Bücker argued similarly in *SZ Magazin online* (2020): You do not have to be the biological parent to love a child. On the contrary, a family made up of several adults has several advantages. In view of the demands of paid work and the lack of childcare options, family models with more than two parents can greatly promote the wellbeing of everyone involved. People who yearn to be parents would not need to make the fertility clinic their first port of call but could consider living with other adults and their children. Both authors thus argue the case for separating love for a partner and parenthood, as is characteristic of the medieval narrative of courtly love. Unknowingly, they are returning to a tried and tested concept of happiness that was abandoned in the early modern era in favour of idealizing reproduction. Their argument that a nuclear family structure is not needed to bring up children is in line with countless stories from medieval literature.

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[48] Diehl, *Die Uhr, die nicht tickt*, 224–53; Illouz, *Why Love Hurts*, 246–48.

[49] On Arthurian society as an alternative to the patriarchal family see Müller, *Höfische Kompromisse*, 141–50.

[50] Illouz, "Macht euren Kinderwunsch"; Bücker, "Ist es radikal."

Prospects

The cultural history of childlessness is characterized by very different and competing ideas of happiness. Church fathers and philosophers, nuns and noblemen are convinced of happiness in childlessness, whereas Protestant reformers and wedding preachers enthusiastically praise the happiness of parenthood. My research revealed the unhappiness of people who are involuntarily childless, forced fathers, and regretful mothers; some stories were about the great happiness of late parenthood, while others emphasized the intensity of social alternatives or the joys of spiritual motherhood. Whether people with or without children are happier can hardly be answered in general terms. Rather, every self-perception and evaluation of (in)fertility—not only in medieval literature—depends on numerous individual, social, religious, cultural, discursive, and narrative factors. My brief overview shows that emotions around (in)fertility are many and varied.

This heterogeneity is misjudged by those who contrast parents with nonparents and see them as two homogenous groups. More recent research into happiness and (in)fertility has fallen into this very trap. A binary between people with and without children is assumed, then reinforced in and by the study design. To exaggerate, happiness research itself generates unhappiness because it attributes such significance to the category of (in)fertility. The aim of my critical approach to normativity in this book was to overcome such binary thinking and to question the social divide between parents and nonparents. The decisive finding here is the cultural historical plurality and multifaceted approaches to childlessness, from desired, to refused, to regretted parenthood. In the previous chapters, proponents and critics of reproduction dominated at different points, but the distinction between parents and nonparents ultimately become irrelevant in the narrative of courtly love. In the medieval literature, there are at least seven different narratives and models for a happy life, with or without a child.