



Idleness Working: The Discourse of Love's Labor from Ovid through Chaucer and Gower

Gregory M. Sadlek

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Inspired by the critical theories of M. M. Bakhtin, *Idleness Working* is a groundbreaking study of key works in the Western literature of love from Classical Rome to the late Middle Ages. The study focuses on the evolution of the ideologically-saturated discourse of love's labor contained in these works and thus explores them in the context of ancient and medieval theories of labor and leisure, which themselves are seen to evolve through the course of Western history. What emerges from this study is a fresh appreciation and deepened understanding of such well-known classics of love literature as Ovid's *Ars amatoria*, Andreas Capellanus' *De amore*, Alan of Lille's *Complaint of Nature*, Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun's *Roman de la rose*, John Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, and Geoffrey Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*.

In his provocative approach to these works, Gregory M. Sadlek finds a tradition of love constructed as labor, a tradition that forms a little-noticed complement to the better-known tradition of love as passion or madness, masterfully explored in Denis de Rougemont's *Love in the Western World*. In fact, two different traditions of love's labor—one rhetorical, playful, and focused on the labor of courtship; the other serious, philosophical, and focused on the labor of reproduction—arise individually but are later combined to form some of the most vexing and imaginative love poetry of the Middle Ages. The study traces a steady "embourgeoisement de l'eros" [a making bourgeois of love] in a tradition with strong ties to the medieval aristocracy. In the end "work," constructed by means of a rich array of labor vocabulary and imagery, is presented as a necessary but fulfilling component of human existence, a philosophical position that in some aspects foreshadows the Protestant Work Ethic.

Idleness Working will be of special interest to students and scholars of classical and medieval literature—Latin, English, and French—but especially to those interested in the histories of love or labor.

Gregory M. Sadlek is Jefferis Chair of English at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. He is the author of numerous articles and reviews.

PRAISE FOR THE BOOK:

"Sadlek's carefully researched and convincingly argued book will serve a broad audience."- D.W. Hayes, *Choice*

"It is hard to do justice to Sadlek's complex tracing of the traditions and connotations of labor through the Middle Ages, the intersection of class and work, the importance of social productivity, the problems of acquiring wealth in an age that espoused monastic poverty. His study covers what he considers to be the major spokesmen of labor ideologies, placing them in their appropriate social context, which shaped the development of labor."-Audrey DeLong, *Sixteenth Century Journal*

"Sadlek's monograph proves to be intriguing and challenging insofar as it opens numerous perspectives

toward courtly love. . . . Sadlek is to be commended for his remarkable interdisciplinary approach."?Albrecht Classen, *Mediaevistik*

"Gregory M. Sadlek's fine book, *Idleness Working: The Discourse of Love's Labor from Ovid through Chaucer and Gower*, is a stimulating read that analyses the intersection of love and labour in poetic discourse, taking into consideration en route his subject's connections with acedia, the invention of the mechanical clock and its effect on measurable time, courtly love, Max Weber and the Protestant work ethic, Richard Fitzralph's 1357 sermon *Defensio Curatorum*, and the English labour crisis in the wake of the Black Death." ? Valerie Allen and Margaret Connolly, *Year's Work in English Studies*

"[A] wide-ranging, stimulating discussion that will be of considerable interest to medievalists in a variety of disciplines. . . . This is an excell

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