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THE TYPOLOGY OF THE MEDIEVAL ROMANCE IN THE WEST AND IN THE EAST

The classical form of the romance (courtly romance or chivalrous romance, the epic, romance tale) was created in the 11th-13th centuries in different countries by an entire series of great poets and authors, among whom Thomas, Chrétien de Troyes, Wolfram von Eschenbach, Gottfried of Strasbourg, Nezâmi, Rustaveli and Murasaki Shikibu had considerable influence on the development of their respective families of literature.

The medieval romance, which discovered the "inner man" in the epic hero, constitutes a completely separate variety of the romance genre, in the same way as the modern novel ("the bourgeois epic"). The essential difference between these two types of romance does not derive from the survival in the former of vestiges of tales and epics, but from the painting of reality in the second with all its prosaic limits.

Historically, the medieval romance can be inserted in the line of the ancient love romance, formed of heterogeneous elements, perfectly foreign for the most part to heroic-epic traditions and occupying a complementary position of strict alternance relative to the

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ancient epic. The epic, which sings of heroes whose free initiative is organically mingled with the collective destiny of a people or of a city and whose actions, even involuntary ones, determine the destiny of the world, this epic is the opposite of the romance which is interested in strictly private characters and their individual destinies, toys of fate. When they struggle against their destiny, heroes of a romance can only "maintain themselves" in the flow of vicissitudes in order to save their personal existence, their mutual love and their fidelity.

The ancient romance was but one of the many sources for the medieval romance. In its purest form, it was resurrected by Byzantine literature of the 12th century with, of course, certain medieval correctives. Ancient mythology served in Christian culture simply as archetype of the manifestation of the life of the soul. The rhetorical description or lyrical expression of the inner life was of more importance than the external adventures of the subject. Moreover, in one of these Byzantine romances by Eumathius, the enslavement of the hero to the powers of Eros is contrasted with his role as messenger at the festivals of Zeus. This type of confrontation of personal feelings and social obligations was one of the characteristic traits of the medieval romance.

The Greek romance, enriched with elements of oriental tales and Christian apocrypha, had a certain influence on the French romance (the idyllic romances *Floir et Blancheflor, Aucassin et Nicolette*) and on the romance epics of the Near East and Middle East, but this influence remained peripheral and for all practical purposes did not touch the group of works which include the essential monuments of medieval romance literature. As for the Roman epic and Latin adaptations of certain epic and quasi-historic Greek traditions, these had no dominant influence either on the romances of the era, even though they may have inspired what is called the "ancient cycle" which represented a preliminary phase in the development of the French courtly romance.

It is useful to note that the medieval reader carefully distinguished between the romance or the romance epic and his national heroic traditions, claiming, as we know, a rigorous authenticity for these chronicles and religious legends. On the other hand, he sometimes confused the romance with pre- or para-romance forms which included an element of artistic fiction, such as tales and

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lyric-epic poetry of a panegyric or didactic nature, the legendary accounts of the lives and loves of the poets, etc.

The literary genres which inspired the medieval romance were quite varied and differed largely from one cultural-historic area to another, but the classical forms which developed from these multiple sources, despite their highly defined national coloring, reveal the specific quality of the romance genre, that which is essential to it.

The French romance is characterized by an extremely clear rejection of the national heroic epic and its themes, encouraged by the national-historic nature of the *chansons de geste*, which in one manner or another modeled French political history.

On the other hand, a little more tolerance can be observed with regard to the Latin epic, no doubt thanks to a greater historic and cultural distance which authorized more freedom in the treatment of episodes and characters from ancient myths, and consequently more easily submitted to the constraints of the courtly stamp. But the principal source from which the medieval French romance drew its subjects is indisputably the Celtic heroic tale with its brilliant mythological fictions. The "Celtifying" medievals demonstrated the direct genetic line between the Breton romance and "genres" specific to the old Celtic (Irish) store, such as the *ehtr*, the *imram*, the *aïthed* (visits to another world, fantastic navigation, the kidnapping of women). These are not in fact separate "genres", but rather thematic groups, varieties of the Celtic heroic tale. In German lands there was an attempt to treat the national epic in a courtly manner (particularly in the first part of the *Nibelungenlied)*, which was possible because the Germanic epic themes go back to the quite distant period of the great tribal movements, and the Goths and Huns of those ancient times were generally regarded as legendary peoples. Nevertheless, it was the French romance with its Breton (i.e. Celtic) themes which was the principal source of inspiration for the German courtly romance.

In Georgia, the romance epic is in no way indebted to the chronicles of history nor to the Christian traditions so closely associated with its national conscience. Instead it goes back to the heroic-legendary epic narration (of the *Amiran Daredjaniani* type), in which local myths, tales and "wandering figures" are combined in the mists of legend. Conventionally the action always refers to

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the Arab-Persian-Hindu oriental world.

In the true Arab countries, there were no classical models of heroic epics or romance epics. In the *Sirat d'Antar* and other "biographies" along the same lines, the "cosmopolitan" stratum, made up of elements of adventure and chivalry, was directly centered on archaic tribal traditions. The direct participation of folklore can be quite clearly seen in these works, both in the genesis of the narration as well as its form.

A similar genre is represented by *dastans*, Persian and Turkish epics, semi-folkloric with romance episodes, whose interpretation, nevertheless, does not exceed the level of the tale. This epic form was quite widespread in the Middle Ages in Persian and Turkish-language literature.

But Persian literature in Iran and in Azerbaidzhan also produced classic models of romance epics as such whose subjects were borrowed in part from archaic Arab legends about the amorous tribulations of poets (*Varke and Gulshakh* by Aïouki, *Laïla and Majnûn*, by Nezâmi) and in part from romance episodes of pre-Islamic Iranian epic traditions (*Wîs and Râmin*, by Gorgâni, *Khosrau and Shîrin* by Nezâmi). The old Iranian subjects from pre-Arab times, with their charm as a national heritage (used fully in this respect by Firdûsi) had already by the 11th and 12th centuries acquired the "neutrality" of legend, especially in Azerbaidzhan. Greek tradition, on the other hand, was but a secondary thematic source for the Persian romance epic (*Vamik and Azra* by Unsari), while in India the romance of Greek inspiration developed from the 7th century on, although it is difficult to ascribe precisely the respective importance of direct genetic lines and typological relations.

In China, just as in the Arab countries, there was no heroic epic properly speaking, nor a true romance epic, and the historical chronicle gave way to vast historic-heroic narratives inspired by the chronicle and oral traditions which to a certain extent took the place of the epic. It was necessary to wait until the 16th century when, using peripheral elements borrowed from one of these historic narratives (*The Wanderings of the River* by Shi Naï Ian'), the first romance, *Ch'in Ping Meï*, was constructed, not of a chivalrous-courtly character but rather erotic instead. In the medieval Far East the romance (and of all medieval romances this was the

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most romance-like) was born not in China but in Japan at the turn of the tenth and eleventh century. Chronologically it does not follow the epic as in Romano-Germanic, Persian and Sanskrit literature, but precedes the historic-heroic narrative which in Japan played the role of epic.

The Japanese romance has in its past not the heroic epic, but only cycles of chronicles, a kind of written tradition from which it resolutely distinguishes itself by its conscious orientation toward a description of manners. Its sources are marvelous narratives deriving from the tale, lyric cycles which are carefully delimited and increasingly impregnated with realism, and intimate lyric journals.

Nevertheless, if the sources of the medieval romance in general, as we have just seen, are quite varied, both in their subjects and in the genre to which they belong, the importance of the role played by the tale and by the marvelous is striking. Epic and legendary material in most cases was not used by the romance until after it had passed through the tale and thereby undergone a certain marvelous transformation or interpretation partially touching on the "adventure" element (although the role of the tale cannot be summed up in that). In the French chivalry romance, what is noted everywhere is the marvelous-heroic tale; in the Japanese romance it is the novelistic tale, etc. Fantastic romances and anecdotal tales also furnished subjects for the medieval romance, but as supplementary and secondary sources, for example in the episode of the ingenious trickery with which the lovers fool King Mark or Shah Moubad (*Tristan et Yseult, Wîs and Râmin*) or in the astute strategems of the wily servants attempting to serve the interests of their amorous master, as is found particularly in *Otikubo-monogatari* and other stories. The tale, in fact, is the folklore equivalent of the medieval romance, and during the entire history of this latter there was interaction between the two. Moreover, the tale was also the channel by which was exercised the reciprocal influence between the romance epic and folklore and popular culture in general. It was precisely through the tale that the heroic-romance epic acquired its character of "popular story" (Arab *sirats*, Iranian-Turkish *dastans*, heroic Chinese narratives and analogous forms in Neo-Indian, Indo-Chinese and Indonesian literature).

In contrast to the epic, the tale is based on the individual destiny

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of the hero which is presented as a series of trials beginning with the nuptial rituals and, even prior to that, with initiatory rites. The knight who performs exploits for his personal glory recalls in many respects the hero of a tale who "wins" the daughter of the king plus half his kingdom, and in the trials to which he is subjected it is not rare to find features of a ritual initiation. (The clearest example of this is the story of Perceval/Parzival whose initiation in several stages forms the thread of the first "didactic" romance.) Many deeds performed by the heroes of other romances by Chrétien de Troyes or in the poem of Rustaveli, etc., have the character of nuptial trials in their aspect of fantastic "difficult" tasks. Moreover, it is also through the tale that the medieval romance absorbed a certain number of mythological motifs. The heroic Celtic tale helped ancient Celtic mythology penetrate the French courtly romance whose chivalrous fiction was highly colored therefrom. It would be wrong to think that the medieval romance only accelerated the demythologizing process which had already begun in the tale and which in the end transformed the ancient mythic themes into pure adventures. The question is much more complicated than that. There is a certain ambivalence about the manner in which romance assimilated the mythological heritage. The medieval romance, which consciously admits poetic fictions as a manifestation of creative invention and of art, certainly distances itself from sacred or "official" mythology, whether religious or national-historical (to which the heroic epic still belonged), but it replaces it to a certain degree with its own "mythology"—individual and romance-like. As a domain of romance fiction, this is constructed from mythological material which is "profane" for a given author and his milieu ("foreign", apocryphal, etc.) and whose archetypical sense reappears. It is in this way that ancient mythology was used "archetypically" in the Byzantine romance, and similarly Celtic mythology was applied to the French romance, where both were part of Christian culture. In the French romance, the archetypical reinterpretation of profound mythic themes was favored by the mixture and interpretation of several mythological traditions, not only Celtic traditions but also other ones—ancient, gnostic, alchemist—with Christian apocrypha and Christian orthodoxy. It is precisely in the creation of this synthesis that all the Grail mythology was formed. This resurgence of archetypes is stressed by

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Claude Levy-Strauss in the parallels he has outlined from the extremely ancient folklore of the American Indians, parallels which have no other significance than a typological one.

Among the myths "enumerated" in the medieval romance we should note the quest for magic objects and cultural auxiliaries in another world; the abduction of women in the name of exogamy; mystic marriage with the Earth goddess; annual myths associated with the ritual celebration of the new year; the struggle of the hero incarnating the forces of the cosmos against the demoniac forces of chaos; the mythic theme of the powerful king-priest on whom depends the fertility and the wealth of his kingdom; initiatory myths and rituals, among others the enthroning of the king, and many other mythic themes. It goes without saying that all of these mythic themes are present in "romance mythology" in a quite revised form. To take a curious example of the creative transformation which the romance imposes on the archaic mythic theme, we can recall the Frazerian mythic theme of the king-priest which is used each time in a corresponding style, by the French romance in the Grail Cycle (the old king-fisherman wounded in the genital region becomes impotent, and his infirmity is the cause of his country's sterility; salvation must come from the ritual questions which Perceval must ask and from his compassion; the youthful hero himself must take the place of the invalid king); by the Persian romance in *Wîs and Râmin* (the old king Moubad, magically stricken with sexual impotence, is replaced by the youthful Râmin who takes his wife from him—a situation which is found in a vestigial state in *Tristan et Yseult*). and by the Japanese romance in *Genji-monogatari* (Genji abducts the concubine of the old emperor-father and in a just turn of events himself later falls victim to an analogous fate). Moreover, on this ancient archetypical foundation (marriage with the mistress of the country or the goddess of fertility, love/death, the incest of the founding ancestors, etc.) a new romance "mythology of love" is developed through the use of a religious symbolism (the believer who is immersed in the divinity).

Thus can be seen the considerable importance of the tale and of the marvelous (in which the mythological sources should be included) for the formation of the romance. But there is still a great distance to be covered from the marvelous epic or magical account

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to the romance. The episodes in which the claimant in marriage must use heroic and fantastic prowess to overcome the obstacles arrayed against him in order to ensure victory over his rivals, or accounts which retrace the quest for the chosen partner whom the hero knows only from her portrait or from descriptions of her beauty by those who have seen her, and other similar motifs, are perfectly at place in the tale, but do not in themselves transform the tale into a romance. Similarly the semi-folkloristic adventure accounts of the *dastans* type are not romance either.

In general the role of folklore in the formation of the romance was rather limited, and folkloristic productions favored the multiplication of pre-romance forms of the adventure account but could not create the romance which tends toward the representation of the tragedy of individual passion as an expression of the intimate and unique essence of the character and toward the introduction of the first rudiments of psychological analysis. The interest in the fate of the individual manifested in the tale had to be completed by an interest in the hero's emotions and by the description of a psychological life as such. And this step, which leads from the marvelous principle of the tale to a properly romance principle, was only accomplished with the powerful, although sometimes indirect, influence of lyric poetry. The influence of Alexandrine poetry on the ancient Greek romance was not insignificant. But there, rhetoric won out. On the other hand, the lyric element was increasingly affirmed in the Byzantine romance (in particular in the work of Nikita Evgenian in which a rationalist amorous rhetoric is visibly evident).

The Georgian romance epic (Rustaveli) apparently was subject to the quite strong influence of panegyric poetry.

The West European courtly romance (Romano-Germanic) was in turn quite influenced by the poetry of the troubadours and the minnesingers. And in the Near Eastern romance epic, the influence was that of the sublime lyricism of Arab *uzrits* and of Sufi Persian poetry. Unlike the biographies of the troubadours, Arab biographical legends about the loves of the poet-singers were subsequently picked up again in the form of verse poems. (Corresponding motifs can be found in the Arab heroic-romance epic of Antar and in the Persian romance epics of Ourve-Varke and of Keis-Majnûn. There also exists a distant and much later Western analogy: the lyric

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poetry broken up by prose in Dante's *Vita Nuova* which in a way led to the amorous prose rhetoric of Boccaccio's *Fiammetta*.) Similarly, lyric influences can be sensed in the technique of monologues and dialogues in Persian language romance epics.

The role of poetry was particularly important in the formation of the Japanese romance. From lyric anthologies with prose commentaries (a literary genre also known in the Muslim East), the path led to lyric cycles included in a prose context, the *uta-monogatari*, whose most remarkable model, the *Ise-monogatari*, is clearly a "biographical" lyric cycle surrounded by prose of the poet Ariwara-No-Narihira (cf. Keis-Majnûn and Dante), and finally to the prose romance with multiple verse quotations. The symbolism and various poetic processes deriving directly from Japanese lyric traditions are largely represented in the *Genji-monogatari* by Murasaki Shikibu. The many descriptions of nature and human feelings are presented as a *tanka* developed in prose, so to speak.

And so where the medieval romance was formed by a certain rejection of the heroic epic (in Europe and the Middle East), the process included at least two steps: a first step towards the tale (accent on the individual destiny and the personal adventures of the hero); and a second step from the marvelous adventure of the tale to the description of internal conflicts (with use of the lyric experience and new concepts of love).

The structure of the medieval courtly romance/romance epic retained in most cases the mark of this two-stage process in the two major syntagmatic elements which make up the romance: in the introductory section which often recalls the heroic tale, the hero is subject to trials which should permit him to achieve the ends which are those of the tale in general (of the type "the princess plus half the kingdom"); and, on the other hand, in the main part—properly romance-like—which "expands" in a way on the introduction, where a moral collision is revealed (reflecting, ultimately, the conflict between the "interior man" and his social "*persona*"). It is this internal conflict which must be described and resolved. In the second part the conflict is interiorized, so to speak. At times we have the impression that the second part repeats the first, but at another level—"internal". Moreover, there is in the first part an accumulation of marvelous motifs from the tale (and even of motifs recalling the stereotypes of the Greek romance

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inasmuch as these, despite everything, are external relative to the newly discovered internal conflicts), while the second part is the one in which the attempt at a psychological analysis and the "moral initiation" unfolds to which the hero is subjected. And so in the introductory part, Tristan overcomes Morholt and the dragon and obtains the hand of Yseult for King Mark (and for himself her love); Erec undergoes the ritual trial of the sparrowhawk and obtains Enid's hand; Yvain overcomes the guardian of the fountain and thereby wins Laudine's hand as well as her property. Lancelot returns victorious from his combat with Meleagant and frees the queen; Perceval overcomes the Red Knight and protects Blanchefleur from her enemies, thereby winning Blanchefleur's love as well as the chance to become master of her domain, and is admitted to the enchanted castle of the Grail which is destined for him; in like manner Khosrau, after a series of misunderstandings and setbacks, meets and subjects Shirin, whom he loves, and after having conquered his enemies, succeeds his father the Shah upon the latter's death. But in the second and principal part, Tristan's "guilty" love for his uncle's spouse, Erec's faint-heartedness which threatens family happiness, Yvain's lightness by forgetting Laudine, his young wife, Perceval/Parzival's selfishness, unable to transcend the chivalrous "label", Khosrau's vanity—these all destroy both individual happiness and social equilibrium.

A new dramatic situation is thereby created, and new trials appear, a kind of verification of the hero's profound feelings and of his social value.

Persian language romance poems, issuing directly from the lyric cycles and tradition about the tragic loves of the poets, differ from this pattern, however. In these poems, the introductory section, where (normally) the marvelous element inherited from the tale usually dominates, is almost missing; and on the whole, motifs which are characteristic of the tale do not play a very large role.

In the Georgian romance, on the other hand (e.g. *Vepkhis Tkaosani*), the entire account has a marvelous nature, and it is the interiorizing of the conflict which is missing. The romance principle, which takes the form of the description of the emotions felt by the heroes, is presented as a sort of superstructure imposed on the main action.

The Japanese romance, which was not inspired by the heroic

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epic and which was formed under the mutual influence of marvelous and lyrical accounts, is a special case. The romance of Genji does not separate into two parts—one related to the tale and the other properly a romance—although tale motifs are largely used in the beginning of the narrative (beginning with the birth of the hero in "a certain kingdom", born to the emperor's concubine, offended by the principal spouse, Genji's future "cruel stepmother"; the prediction of the hero's destiny by Korean wise men, etc.). But subsequently, the motifs of the tale become rarer and are even somewhat parodies. The story of the ugly and awkward Suetsumuhana, who lives in a weed-filled garden, parodies the popular subject of "Sleeping Beauty". The two apparently "marvelous" stories of Akasi and Tamakazura, both relegated to an outlying province and who must, one, become the mother of the future empress and the other "miraculously" find a father and protection in the palace, are basically rather tragic and the tale motifs are adorned with descriptions of masculine inconstancy, palace intrigues, etc.

The *Genji-monogatari* begins like an account similar to a tale and ends like a psychological romance, full of unresolved dramatic situations and saturated with profound sadness.

A major epic form, the medieval romance raises and resolves ideological and artistic problems on a scale comparable to that of the problems raised and resolved in the heroic epic (while the ancient romance, which was limited to the individual sphere and whose theme does not "overlap" that of the epic, was indisputably "narrower" and occupied a more peripheral position in the ancient system of genres). Perhaps we should see therein the reason for which the properly romance principle was found in the medieval romance associated in one way or another with the epic principle: either in a purely negative fashion or in order to harmonize and balance itself with it. For the medieval romance, the question of the relation between the romance principle and the epic principle is absolutely essential, independently even of the role of the heroic epic in the genesis of the romance.

The medieval romance discovered in the hero not only a private individual (like the ancient romance), but a person whose inner world is opposed in some way to the *socium* in which the hero lives. Even in the Byzantine romance of Eumathius, which, as we

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said, conforms strictly to ancient models, the personal subjection of the hero to the power of Eros is set against his "epic" role, or more correctly his "civic" role, of messenger for the festivals of Zeus. In the Japanese romance itself, where Genji is deliberately excluded by his father-emperor from the imperial family so that he is nothing other than a "private person", each step taken by the hero has a highly defined social resonance, and not just because of his lofty origins. Every act inspired by individual desires theoretically has consequences which are quite far-reaching and which touch many other persons, the social milieu and the State itself. For the Western chivalrous romance and for the epic romance of the Near East, born in part of the transformation of heroic-epic traditions, the problem of the possible non-coincidence of the hero's personal feelings ("romance" principle) with his social obligations ("epic" principle), or of their harmonizing, becomes the central problem. And if in *Tristan and Yseult*, *Wîs and Râmin, Laïla and Majnûn* this non-coincidence is presented as a source of difficulties, it is above all because the principal heroes do not respect their social obligations. The death of Tristan and Yseult, the belated legitimizing of the union between Wîs and Râmin, Majnûn's mystic sublimation in poetry (his sacred madness is the source of poetry; mystic-aesthetic mediation is also indicated in Gottfried's *Tristan*) are illusory solutions in many respects. In the Breton romances of Chrétien de Troyes and in *Khosrau and Shirin* by Nezâmi, the hero himself is the seat of a complex process of harmonizing the "inner man" and the "social" man. The most directly harmonious heroes are those of Rustaveli, for whom the epic and romance principles are syncretically associated, so to speak. In the Western romance, as in the work of the great Georgian poet, the heroes are knight-warriors who confront other knights, not only in tournaments but also in more serious combats in which they must defend ladies threatened with violence or with being dispossessed of their fiefs, who lend a helping hand to their brothers in alliance, their friends and even their suzerain (even though this is much rarer than in the heroic epic), who overcome brigands encountered on the forest paths, magicians, fabulous monsters. Love, which for the knight is the most important manifestation of the "inner man", should not only not be an obstacle to his exploits but it must become the principal source of his chivalry and his

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valor. This is what happens at the very beginning in *Vepkhis Tkaosani*, but in the romances of Chrétien de Troyes the proper social functioning of chivalrous love is only attained after a sort of novitiate, a testing in life, an "education of feelings".

In this respect, but in a much broader sense, the story of Perceval/Parzival in Chrétien de Troyes and in Wolfram von Eschenbach has all the features of a "didactic romance"; in order to become a true knight, the hero must learn to overcome his natural selfishness and to transcend the purely formal notion of chivalrous honor. The "education" of the knight should develop in him a certain amount of humanity and Christian compassion.

In the Persian language romance epic, the hero is usually the shah or the son of the shah, required to respect the honor of his State and of his own rank. If he fails in this obligation, which is the case of Râmin, and in part of Khosrau, he is reproved by the author. At the end of the narrative, however, he generally becomes a model sovereign (Râmin despite his love and Khosrau because of his love).

The education of the prince, the wise man and the prophet is the essential theme in the romance *Iskander* by Nezâmi, an original work which falls halfway between a didactic epic and the romance epic.

As for the relation between the romance principle and the epic principle, two stages can be denoted in the history of the French courtly romance (the largest in the West) and of the romance epic (the genre which predominated in the Near and Middle East). In the first stage (*Tristan et Yseult* by Béroul and by Thomas; *Wîs and Râmin* by Gorĝani), the discovery of the "inner man", of the "affective" life of the hero is expressed in a naive manner by the description of the individual passion for an irreplaceable being as something "supernatural", while destiny is presented as a demonic force bringing on social chaos. The conflict between personal passion and social obligations takes the form of illegitimate love for the king's wife or for a relative, of an adultery which shatters the required social order and paralyzes the praiseworthy "chivalrous" activity of the hero. Before falling in love with Yseult, Tristan represented the true hero of the tale. However, the tragic collision is only resolved by the death of the lovers. Râmin became a just sovereign only after the death of Moubad and the legitimiza-

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tion of his love for Wîs. In these works the indicated meaning is borne by the very subject of the work, strangely similar in the West and in the East. The attempt at a courtly interpretation of this subject by Thomas changes nothing fundamentally, no more than does Gorgâni's irony. Drawing on Thomas' version, the German interpreter of the subject, Gottfried of Strasbourg, exalts the love of Tristan and Yseult in terms of religious mysticism and thereby introduces an element of relativity to the system of ethical representation of the period.

In the second stage of the evolution of the courtly romance/romance epic, particularly in Chrétien de Troyes and Nezâmi who are freer in their use of traditional material, there can be seen taking shape a harmonizing of the romance principle with the epic principle, based on the establishment of a necessary connection between love and deed, moral qualities and social values (a notion which is inspired by the courtly and Sufi concepts of love). Chrétien de Troyes consciously keeps his distance on the subject of Tristan and Yseult, just as he does with the concept of insatiable, fatal and devastating passion (particularly, with regard to the latter, in *Cligès*, but also in *Erec et Enide*, and even ultimately in *Lancelot*); for his part Nezâmi, in *Khosrau and Shirin*, backs away from the manner in which Gorgâni dealt with the subject. The striking parallelism between *Tristan et Yseult* and *Wîs and Râmin* on the one hand, and between the works of Chrétien de Troyes and those of Nezâmi on the other is no doubt of a typological nature, despite hypotheses about the influence of Near Eastern literature on European literature.

If we now return to the realm of the composition of the medieval romance, with the dichotomy which we indicated before, we see that the harmonization takes place in the second part of the romance, the principal part. After new adventures representing a profound inner verification of the hero and a process of moral education, Erec and Yvain are reconciled with the choice of their heart and the social value of the chivalrous activity with which they are inspired by love is definitively established by the importance of the exploits accomplished: the one rediscovers the "joy of the Palace" and the other frees the young captive weavers. Lancelot proves to Gwenevere not only the social value of his high deeds, but sublime devotion to the Lady. Perceval/Parzival (at least in the

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complete German version by Wolfram von Eschenbach) is freed of his selfishness and chivalrous "formalism" to live compassion-Christian love; he is united with Blanchefleur and becomes king of the Grail. Khosrau also overcomes his selfishness and frivolity, and, after having wed the noble Shirin, becomes the ideal sovereign. Behind all this is the epic anchoring of the romance principle, the resolution of the conflict between love and chivalrous valor (or shah-like valor in oriental romances).

In Nezâmi's romance, *Laïla and Majnûn*, the characteristic situation of the first stage in the development of the romance (Béroul, Thomas, Gorgâni) seems to be repeated and even to become more pronounced, in that Keis' amorous folly makes of him a person who does not properly continue tribal traditions (the "epic" principle) and isolates him from society; the destiny of the lovers here remains tragic until the end. Nevertheless, contrary to what happens in the romances of Gorgâni and Thomas, harmonization still takes place in the Sufi pantheist conception of love and poetry. Keis' amorous madness seems a divine gift, a factor representing not ruin but creation, a source of poetic inspiration which in turn has a social value. (In Gottfried of Strasbourg's interpretation of the Tristan and Yseult theme certain elements of this approach can be found.) Keis' amorous ecstasy brings him close to figures such as Yvain and Lancelot in the works of Chrétien de Troyes.

In Japan, the classical form of the medieval romance is represented by a work which is quite important in size and remarkable for its artistic merits, although unique in its genre—the *Genji-monogatari* of Murasaki Shikibu—which indicates that we do not have here the two phases indicated above. In the Genji romance, as in *Tristan et Yseult* or *Wîs and Râmin*, the amorous sentiment is the feature which characterizes the person. Individual passion here often takes the form of an aspect of amorous madness leading to the loss of the beloved object and introducing social chaos (violation of the rules of exogamy/endogamy and violation of caste barriers, metaphorical incest of the son/mother and father/daughter kind, disruption of ritual magic and even the normal functioning of the State). But on the level of the *mono-no avare* (the notion of the sad charm of things), love is there treated both as the supreme manifestation of sensitivity (even the incestuous

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transfer of amorous sentiment from the mother to the daughter is presented as a noble "recollection of the heart") and of the affective bond between characters, as well as the natural reaction to beauty and the chief foundation of the beautiful. The beautiful itself is presented as ephemeral, changing and condemned to perish (in conformity with Buddhist representations). Consequently a harmonizing pathos is introduced by the use of aesthetics, which recalls to a certain extent Nezâmi's *Laïla and Majnûn* and Gottfried's *Tristan et Yseult*.

The properly romance principle as an expression of psychic life is also manifested in the exceptional emotivity of the hero (in comparison with the epic) and in attempts at a description and analysis of individual torments, generally associated with relations of an amorous order. Love, which sometimes takes ecstatic forms, is a psychic condition which is absolutely necessary for the knight. The extreme sensitivity of characters in a medieval romance is apparent in the most diverse monuments of the genre. There is, consequently, nothing astonishing in the fact that this trait is literally essential to all the characters of the *Genji-monogatari* (the notion of *mono-no avare* mentioned earlier supposes an aesthetic receptivity as well as a subject/object interpretation, a profound reaction of the subject's sensitivity). Genji is characterized by a particular "recollection of the heart". The manifestation of sensitivity, which often takes the form of elegiac regrets and lamentations, is generally associated with the establishing of limits to human relations. But even heroes as virile as those in Rustaveli's "epic" romance in verse, at the opposite pole of romance, express their amorous torments and the pain of separation with great exaggeration, whether it be over the separation from a dearly beloved or from a friend. The intensity of their sentiments easily makes them lose consciousness.

In the West, attempts at analyzing sentimental emotions consisted initially in applying Ovid's amorous rhetoric and only gradually approached a more profound description of conflictual psychological situations (for example in Thomas). In the Muslim East authors were inspired by treatises on love, generally presenting a very obvious Sufi coloring. The description of sentiments is often tinted with didacticism. In general the medieval romance, oriented not toward the description of a "living man" in the spirit of an

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"imitation of nature" but toward the resolution of certain moral problems limited to the rudiments of psychology, tends toward abstraction in this respect.

The most successful work in this regard is that of Murasaki Shikibu. The sensitivity element, which largely dominates the early chapters of the romance, gives way little by little to a more sober analysis of love and jealousy, of emotion in its most subtle nuances, of sharing and conflict of sentiments, of variations in secret selfish impulses, of the tragedy of mutual incomprehension, of the contrast between internal feeling and external conduct, etc. With its psychological aspect, the Japanese romance goes beyond the limits of the medieval courtly narrative and typologically resembles certain great post-chivalrous European romances, in particular the 17th-century French analytic romance (Madame de Lafayette).

The Breton romances of Chrétien de Troyes—*Erec et Enide, Yvain, Lancelot, Perceval*—are generally understood in a diachronic perspective as complex and zig-zagging creative development, dictated in part by the orders of great figures such as Marie de France or the Count Philip d'Alsace (the work of Nezâmi is often presented in the same manner). Nevertheless, much more productive is the approach which consists in seeing in this a well-defined synchronic system whose various elements are complementary and reflect themselves back and forth as in a set of mirrors. These different romances exhibit a certain number of almost identical motifs and, more importantly, an identical syntagmatic structure which, in the framework of the dichotomy of composition which we have indicated, is organized in the following manner: an optional prologue on the hero's childhood (I_1); the description which serves as connection to the action of the first part with the appearance of the "aggressor"/"lack" (to use V. Ia. Propp's terminology) (I_2); the first marvelous exploits and the winning of the lady (I_3); a "failure" in the hero's biography which serves as connection to the principal romance action (II_1); the principal action itself (II_2) which leads to the harmonious resolution of the conflict and the social reintegration of the heroic figure (practically the same syntagmatic structure is found in Nezâmi's *Khosrau and Shirin.*

In the final analysis, the system of the Breton romances by Chrétien de Troyes is a variation on the "love/chivalry" collision using the complementary opposites of "courtly love/Christian

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love" and "formalist and profane chivalry/true chivalry", and also "conjugal courtly love"/"adulterous courtly love". At the high point (II_1), the hero disrupts the balance between "love" and "chivalry"; then, gradually, this balance is restored. Erec disrupts it in favor of love and Yvain in favor of chivalry. Lancelot seems at first glance to disrupt it in favor of chivalry (he hesitates a little before taking his place in the dwarf's cart), but in fact he disrupts it in favor of love (submission to the lady, to the point of feigning defeat in a tournament, etc.); Perceval disrupts it in favor of chivalry in the first part of the narrative when it is a matter of love for his mother and for Blanchefleur, and then in favor of love—but then it is a matter of Christian love and compassion. *Erec* and *Yvain* are two romances which are strikingly similar, one being practically the mirror reflection of the other; a comparison of the two of them gives a richer idea of their common significance and of the importance of "moderation" in the ethics of Chrétien. In fact, the attitude of Chrétien himself toward values such as "moderation" or "courtly love in its conjugal form", which are apparently important to him, seems somewhat hesitant and variable, for example, in *Lancelot* (where the author sings of ecstatic love and courtly adultery in a half-serious, half-ironic tone) and in *Perceval* where the exceptional personality of Perceval, both "simple" and "redeeming", is contrasted with the character of Gauvain, described as the "normal" knight but with a certain irony). Although Chrétien defends well-defined ideals (particularly the ideal of the lady-spouse), this does not prevent him from having a rather large register which makes of him, up to a certain point, the distant precursor of Ariosto and Cervantes. Undeniably the antinomy-complementarity which we have noted between *Erec* and *Yvain* also exists between *Lancelot* and *Perceval*, although somewhat less evidently—which can be explained by the fact that *Perceval* is contrasted not only with *Lancelot* but with all three romances taken together. For *Perceval* is enlightened by a new ideal. The contrast of Christian mercy with courtly love/chivalrous courage represents an evolution in the poet's world view and makes *Perceval* an infinitely more complex work, both on the paradigmatic as well as the syntagmatic level. Chrétien does not abandon his former ideals, but these are found in a lower level position of truth, a lower degree to be surmounted in order to attain the new ideal,

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and the author's artistic system is enhanced and enriched. The religious-moral problematic in *Perceval* is heightened and made clearer in Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival* where the confrontation is widely developed between sin, apostasy and repentance, elements which appear in the course of the hero's "education". There, too, the structural complexity of the work is thereby augmented (which is also the case in the transposition of *Erec* and of *Yvain* by Hartmann von der Aue), and the register of Christian chivalry is expanded to the point of attaining a Western-Oriental synthesis.

The specifically romance quality of the syntagmatic format of Chrétien's romance is stressed by the fact that the same format can be found in Nezâmi's romance epic, particularly in his *Khosrau and Shirin*, which is made up of: a prologue on the hero's childhood, as in *Perceval* (I_1); the description associating the action to the introductory part (I_2) and its development, which draws its inspiration, in fact, not from the heroic tale, but from the oriental tale of the "Thousand and One Nights" type, or from the subject of a Hellenistic romance (the main action of the first part, moreover, is presented in the form of four small symmetrical narrative developments); the dramatic connection of the second part (II_1), here a double crisis which recalls both *Erec et Enide* (Shirin reproaches Khosrau the beloved for his laziness, unworthy of a shah) and, paradoxically, *Yvain* (by Khosrau's selfish, although temporary, scorn for Shirin's love and honor); and finally the resolution of the conflict and the development of the principal action which harmonizes everything (II_1). The wealth of this work's content is revealed both by the manner in which the hero is cast from one extreme to another as well as the complex end of the narrative which combines the happy (Khosrau's marriage and just government) and the tragic (the death of the pair of lovers caused by the heir's perfidy). On a slightly different level, a comparison can also be made of more "philosophical" tales relative to the moral formation of an ideal knight (Chrétien's *Perceval*) and of the ideal monarch (Nezâmi's *Iskander*).

As we know, the structure of Nezâmi's other romance, *Laïla and Majnûn*, diverges from the syntagmatic format, but despite the contrast with *Khosrau and Shirin*, the two romances form a well-defined "pair" (Khosrau is distracted from sublime love by the

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concrete realities of his princely condition, and Keis, on the contrary, sacrifices the material and social side of life for amorous folly. Thanks to love, Khosrau becomes a just monarch; and, on the other hand, love will lead Keis to a mystic renunciation of the world, etc.).

In Japan, the single "classical" model of the medieval romance, the *Genji-monogatari*, includes a whole universe of characters and subjects, grouped around the romantic biography of Genji. This romance is an entire system unto itself, organized in an extremely original fashion, like a great musically lyrical fresco, with motifs and variations on themes in different "registers".

Genji, the specifically romance hero, would be unthinkable not only in an epic, but even in a chivalrous romance. All his adventures, practically, are of an amorous nature. There is no mention of his warrior's role, nor even of his political role. His personal sentiments are, of course, in conflict with his social obligations, but this is not a matter of chivalrous valor.

The story of Genji recounts not only the formation of a hero, but the cycle of a life, from birth to full flowering to decline, a cycle which is partially repeated in his closely related descendants and heirs. Instead of a linear development, the characteristic model for the Western courtly romance, we have a cyclical model of the unfolding of life, with no true beginning nor end, corresponding to Far Eastern and Buddhist representations. If Chrétien de Troyes' hero (and even Nezâmi's) is able to overcome his weaknesses and his faults through the experience of difficulties of life and to become from then on a "savior" for others, Genji, even after having overcome the errors of his youth, is obliged to observe the fatal consequence of these until his death, to undergo the Buddhist karma as a punishment not only for faults which he committed when young, but also for those committed in his previous lives.

In fact, karma controls the very composition of the romance; the culpable liaison of the hero with his father's wife ends not with the death or the purification of the hero (cfr. Tristan/Râmin), but with a punishment deferred until the same situation is repeated. For Genji's youthful spouse betrays him in turn, and his heir is the child of another man.

The ritual calendar of Shinto/Buddhist feasts and the changes in functionaries which accompany them (since the characters were

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generally designated by their official titles, the names of these characters form a sort of mobile system of removable "masks") and the cyclic succession of season and phase of the moon play a very important role in the very structure of the romance, and as symbols of the cycle of life. The succession of seasons even serves as background for the entire narrative, and in certain chapters it serves particularly as accompaniment to the succession of events and moods. In general, the author makes broad use of specific natural traits for classification: several feminine faces, either contrasted or parallel, are characterized by the names of plants with violet flowers; two ladies in particular are associated with the sun and the moon; others with place names. Landscapes, and frequently a mournful autumn landscape, are harmonized with the description of the feelings experienced by the characters.

A whole series of mythological and lyrical archetypes—not only annual cycles and autumnal landscapes under the moon, but motifs such as incest, black-souled killers, the river as expression of the chaos and the flow of life are transformed into leitmotifs. Similarly, there is a repetition of certain situations: meetings and separations, sickness and death, withdrawals into monasteries, the killing of Genji's other mistresses by the black-souled Rokudze. The multiple parallels and associative relations between the very numerous figures and scenes of the romance give the composition of the work the aspect of a lyric-epic "symphony".

As we have seen, the classic forms of the medieval romance in the various countries of Europe and Asia have many traits in common (this similitude is particularly clear in the typological parallels between French language literature and Persian language literature). But these characteristics of the genre common to the various bodies of literature stand out against a background of cultural-historic differences (differences in cultural areas) and national differences which are absolutely fundamental. The traditions and sources which contributed to the formation of the romance differ quite clearly depending on the situations. There is a predominant influence of the marvelous-epic principle in Europe and in Georgia; of the marvelous-lyric principle in Japan; a more or less balanced mixture of the two in the genesis of the Persian language romance epic. To this can be added the special influence of the Christian tradition in the West, of legends dealing with the

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loves of poets in the Muslim East, of the intimate lyrical journal in Japan.

Artistic conceptions reflect in part the disparity of cultures—"Christian", "Muslim", "Buddhist"—taken in their widest sense. The common ancient heritage, and more particularly Neo-Platonism, is in many points similar to the Romano-Germanic and Irano-Transcaucasian cultural areas (Neo-Platonic and Sufi concepts of love are quite similar). Western Christian finalism underlies the linear perspective of the representation of the hero's destiny as "epic" activity and as struggle against the forces of evil and of chaos. On the other hand, Oriental-Buddhist representations underlie the cyclic model of the eternal return, in which are combined both good and evil, where the completed act invariably sets in operation the principle of karma, from which derives a disposition for passive contemplation and melancholic detachment. In the "Muslim" romance epic, in theory closer to Western models, the role of the hero is played not by the knightly warrior but by the Oriental prince's son in whom an effort is made to develop not so much his valor as his wisdom. The linear model is combined with the cyclical model (although the essential question is to make of the hero a perfect man, we are also shown his old age and death at the end of the narrative). As for the Japanese romance, its psychological skepticism and impressionist aesthetics find no correspondent in European consciousness except in much later historical stages.

In general, the medieval romance marks the beginning of a fully conscious artistic invention and of individual creation. It represents the summit of medieval narrative literature.

The discovery of the "interior man" in the "hero" gave to the medieval romance an obviously "humanist" content which in certain respects constitutes an anticipation of the humanist anthropocentrism of the European Renaissance. But this, of course, is not sufficient reason for associating one or another literary monument of the 11th-13th centuries with the culture of the Renaissance. With its idealizing "sublimation", the medieval romance has a beauty of its own, a unique beauty unknown to Renaissance culture.

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