

# ROMANCE

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 **Routledge**  
Taylor & Francis Group  
NEW YORK AND LONDON

## INTRODUCTION

Romances are generally composed of the Constant Loves and invincible Courages of Hero's, Heroins, Kings and Queens, Mortals of the first Rank, and so forth; where lofty Language, miraculous Contingencies and impossible Performances, elevate and surprize the Reader into a giddy Delight which leaves him flat upon the Ground whenever he gives of, and vexes him to think how he has suffer'd himself to be pleased and transported, concern'd and afflicted at the several Passages which he has Read, viz. these Knights Success to their Damosels Misfortunes, and such like, when he is forced to be very well convinced that 'tis all a lye.

William Congreve, "Preface to *Incognita*, 1691"

"Romance" is most often used in literary studies to allude to forms conveying literary pleasure the critic thinks readers would be better off without.

Margaret Doody, *The True Story of the Novel*, 15

Romance is a notoriously slippery category. Critics disagree about whether it is a genre or a mode, about its origins and history, even about what it encompasses. Yet, paradoxically, readers are often able to identify romance

almost tacitly: they know it when they see it. My students call it “that fairy-tale feeling,” a mixture of the archaic and the idealizing, much like the ingredients that the Restoration dramatist William Congreve identifies above. As Doody reminds us, however, despite this accessibility or perhaps precisely because of it romance has often been singled out for censure as an unworthy form of literature.

This volume charts the multiple, protean transformations of romance throughout literary history. Instead of settling on a single definition in the hope of capturing romance in its original shape, it demonstrates how different conceptions of the term emerge dynamically, in opposition to other types of literary production. Moreover, it argues that romance, as a critical idiom, may be most useful to contemporary readers if it retains some of its historical commodiousness and is conceptualized as a set of literary strategies that can be adopted by different forms. Thus, although the chapters that follow focus on texts that have been generically identified as romances, however controversially, in different periods of literary history, they simultaneously present an understanding of romance as strategy. Focusing on what romance does and enables within a narrative not only reveals its bones, but shows most clearly how it appears within a variety of genres. The dialectical movement between the many kinds of romance as genre and romance as strategy affords the fullest sense of the term. While no one book could encompass all the manifestations and varieties of romance, the following chapters aim to provide a broad theoretical and historical survey of its multiple incarnations.

Precisely because the history of romance is so complex, the term serves as a touchstone for larger questions of literary and cultural theory. By exploring various definitions of romance, readers may find ways to conceptualize broader problems of genre, reception, and the political import of imaginative literature. To this end, this volume considers the following questions: How does the history of romance as a category force us to rethink the historicization of literary forms? What kind of definition can we provide for our own time that is both historically situated and yet flexible enough to help us recognize and analyze new forms of romance? Also, how do reactions to romance register cultural attitudes towards the marvelous or to narratives with a broad popular appeal? To what extent is the resistance to romance a resistance to the imaginative force of literature, or to readerly pleasure?

## DEFINITIONS

The definition of romance in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) reads a little like Borges' fable of the Chinese encyclopedia, with categories that range from the minute to the universal and which are often mutually exclusive.

Here is an abridged version, limited to definitions relevant to our purposes:

### Romance:

- I. 1. The vernacular language of France, as opposed to Latin. In later use also extended to related forms of speech, as Provençal and Spanish, and now commonly used as a generic or collective name for the whole group of languages descended from Latin.
- II. 2. A tale in verse, embodying the adventures of some hero of chivalry, esp. of those of the great cycles of medieval legend, and belonging both in matter and form to the ages of knighthood; also, in later use, a prose tale of a similar character.  
Orig. denoting a composition in the vernacular (French, etc.), as contrasted with works in Latin.
3. A fictitious narrative in prose of which the scene and incidents are very remote from those of ordinary life; esp. one of the class prevalent in the 16th and 17th centuries, in which the story is often overlaid with long disquisitions and digressions. Also occas., a long poem of a similar type. The immediate source of this use was app. F. roman.
  - b. A romantic novel or narrative.
4. A Spanish historical ballad or short poem of a certain form. From Sp. romance, whence also F. romance. Attributive uses, as romance-book, -verse, etc., are common in works on Spanish literature.
5. That class of literature which consists of romances; romantic fiction. spec. a love story; that class of literature which consists of love stories.
  - b. Romantic or imaginative character or quality; redolence or suggestion of, association with, the adventurous and chivalrous. spec. a love affair; idealistic character or quality in a love affair.

6. An extravagant fiction, invention, or story; a wild or wanton exaggeration; a picturesque falsehood.

The definition ranges from the linguistic to the literary, and eventually escapes the realm of language altogether, to settle on what is perhaps the most frequent meaning of the word in common parlance: a love affair.

While all these meanings are important for literary notions of romance, the critical idiom needs to be disentangled from other definitions. The term that I will discuss is not specific to the romance languages; in fact, as we will see, the cognate terms for "romance" in those languages have very different meanings. Neither is the term historically specific: although critics working in different fields and national traditions might argue that theirs is the true or original romance, the force of the term comes precisely from its transformations and reiterations over time. Nor is literary romance necessarily concerned with eros, although this popular sense of the term often permeates it. Finally, literary romance must be distinguished from the category of the *Romantic*, which describes a specific period in literary history (and is the subject of another volume in this series).

## GENRE, MODE, STRATEGY

In the narrow literary sense, *romance* is the name given to a particular *genre*: the narrative poems that emerge in twelfth-century France and quickly make their way around Europe (as in OED II.2). These popular poems were known as romances because they were written in the vernacular, or *romance*, languages derived from Latin (OED I.1), as opposed to Latin itself, which was the traditional language of learning. These poems are typically concerned with aristocratic characters such as kings and queens, knights and ladies, and their chivalric pursuits. They are often organized around a quest, whether for love or adventure, and involve a variety of marvelous elements. This is the genre from which we derive our popular sense of romance, as in the epigraph above.

But this more restricted definition of romance quickly becomes problematic, as we realize that the thematic preoccupations of the genre, and at least some of its formal characteristics, continue to make their appearance throughout Europe for many centuries. The term is variously applied to everything from Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, to Shakespeare's

late plays, to seventeenth-century French classicizing fictions, to Harlequin romances. Moreover, medieval romance reaches back in time as well as projecting forward: many of the twelfth-century romances take their plots from much earlier stories, and seem as closely related to prior literatures in their subject-matter as to each other in their form.

The tendency for certain characteristics of the medieval chivalric form to overflow its specific limits has led some critics to propose a different, much broader notion of romance, one that transcends the specificities of genre and can be variously applied to verse or prose texts in a variety of historical settings. The most influential exponent of this sense of romance in the twentieth century was the structuralist critic Northrop Frye, who described romance as one of the central *modes* of literature in two seminal studies, *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957) and *The Secular Scripture: A Study of the Structure of Romance* (1976).

Frye follows Aristotle to suggest that fiction may be classified "by the hero's power of action, which may be greater than ours, less, or roughly the same" (Frye 1957: 33). Romance is one of the modes that features a superior hero:

If superior in *degree* to other men and to his environment, the hero is the typical hero of romance, whose actions are marvelous but who is himself identified as a human being. The hero of romance moves in a world in which the ordinary laws of nature are slightly suspended: prodigies of courage and endurance, unnatural to us, are natural to him, and enchanted weapons, talking animals, terrifying ogres and witches, and talismans of miraculous power violate no rule of probability once the postulates of romance have been established.

(Frye 1957: 33)

This definition focuses on the hero to the exclusion of other elements (begging, for example, the question of the *heroine*), and leaves much unspecified. It also threatens to set romance apart from other kinds of literary production, as though the category were impermeable and self-sufficient. Despite these problems, however, it usefully expands romance from a particular genre into a more general type of literary production.

Frye is also interested in the meaning of romance (what Fredric Jameson calls the semantic, rather than the syntactic, register [1975: 136]) as a

*mythos* or archetype, a kind of universal paradigm for fiction. Frye's *mythos* of romance involves a series of adventures, collectively labelled the *quest*, that pits the hero against his antagonist in a simple, dialectical structure. As Jameson points out, romance is organized around the conceptual opposition between good and evil (Jameson 1975: 140). Characters are generally for or against the quest in a straightforward fashion, although of course the villains may practice deceit. A general example of this archetypal plot is the story of the hero who kills the dragon or sea-monster that terrorizes a kingdom, and then marries the king's daughter (Frye 1957: 186–9). Perhaps one of the most famous versions of this plot in English literature is the story of the Redcrosse Knight (aka St. George) and his fight against the apocalyptic dragon who terrorizes Eden in Book I of Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (1591, 1596).

The presentation of these archetypes in romance, Frye suggests, is characterized by idealization and wish-fulfillment: the projection of the social ideals of a ruling class onto literary heroes and heroines. Thus romance generally involves aristocratic protagonists, or ones who are miraculously revealed as such after living a lower-class existence, in a kind of "blood will tell" move in which social status is ultimately disclosed. Romance also generally upholds such normative values as fealty and chastity, although not always in an uncomplicated fashion. While Frye himself is not particularly interested in political readings of romance, he describes its engagement with dominant ideologies as the "kidnapping" of romance in order to "reflect certain ascendant religious or social ideals" (Frye 1976: 29–30). Conversely, Frye notes, romance is often marked by a persistent nostalgia for some other time (or, one might add, place) that undermines the social ideals of the here and now. The idealization of romance is often achieved through a nostalgic purchase on the past. Romance values the antique and the exotic, and expresses a powerful longing for what came before,

In fable or romance of Uther's son  
 Begirt with British and Armoric knights;  
 And all who since, baptized or infidel  
 Jousted in Aspramont or Montalban,  
 Damasco, or Marocco, or Trebisonde,  
 Or whom Biserta sent from Afric shore

When Charlemagne with all his peerage fell  
 By Fontarabbia.

(Milton, *Paradise Lost*, l. 580–8)

The nostalgic evocation of other times and places, complete with exotic nomenclature, as in the passage above, challenges our understanding of romance as a socially conservative form. Through the lens of nostalgia, the past can pose a significant challenge to the present. This sense of romance as an alternative to contemporary reality proved very powerful for the Romantics, in the early years of the nineteenth century, when the return to an idealized past was perceived as a reprieve from the cultural ravages of industrialization.

Part of the problem with Frye's notion of a romance mode is that it relies very heavily on an archetypal idea of literature, according to which all texts fall into one category or another, and exhibit certain inherent characteristics. This works less well when we attempt to describe hybrid texts, or those which seem to include moments of romance without existing fully in the "mode." One challenge when defining the critical idiom thus involves accounting for romance as one aspect of a text, rather than simply the category into which the whole will fit.

Frye also necessarily subsumes the differences among texts to his interest in identifying a continuity or tradition. Jameson notes that although Frye's approach does not limit romance to one historical moment, it tends to erase the markers of history and to make romance self-identical over the course of time (Jameson 1975: 155–6). Jameson, as a historical materialist, is more interested in accounting for the form that romance takes in specific historical and ideological contexts. He reads medieval romance, for example, as a response to the "emergent class solidarity" of the feudal nobility: the knight who appears evil by virtue of his unknowability and oppositional stance is eventually revealed as a version of the self, while evil is projected onto an otherworldly realm of magic (Jameson 1975: 161). This understanding, as I discuss in Chapter 3, has been refined and challenged by medievalists who have attended to the specific and local historical contexts of individual romances.

In more general terms, Jameson recalls for us the importance of envisioning the history of romance as a reflection of particular ideological contexts:

A history of romance as a mode becomes possible, in other words, when we project it as a history of the various codes which, in the increasingly secularized and rational world that emerges from the collapse of feudalism, are called upon to assume the literary function of those older codes which have now become so many dead languages. Or, to put it the other way round, the fate of romance as a form is dependent on the availability of elements more acceptable to the reader than those older magical categories for which some adequate substitute must be invented.

(Jameson 1975: 142-3)

Jameson's inquiry is thus concerned with tracing the function of romance in a particular time and place, as well as with charting how romance is updated to fit the changing "codes" of its culture.

Although Jameson never makes it explicit, Frye's notion of the "kidnapped romance" animates his investigation; what for Frye is a deformation or deviation from romance's enduring nature is for Jameson the whole point of an inquiry into mode or genre. For our purposes, it is important to recognize that romance, like many other literary forms, is allusive and self-referential, constantly harking back to a literary and cultural tradition, while also highly adaptable to particular historical and ideological contexts.

Post-structuralist theory invites us to consider romance in terms of what it performs as opposed to what it is. Thus Patricia Parker's reading of romance focuses on what it *does* and *undoes* within texts. One of Parker's central contributions is to recognize that romance can appear within texts that are not necessarily in a romance genre or mode. Parker reads romance primarily as an undoing or complication of narrative progression in texts that range from epic to lyric. In this view, romance is "a form that simultaneously quests for and postpones a particular end, objective, or object" (Parker 1979: 4). Resolution becomes elusive, and identity fraught, in texts characterized by "the connection between naming, identity, and closure or ending" (Parker 1979: 5). Parker is interested more in the dilation and error of romance, in the ways that it interferes with the teleological progress of the narrative, than in the quest itself: "For poets for whom the attainment of an end is problematic, or impossible, the focus may be less on arrival or completion than on the strategy of delay" (Parker 1979: 5).

For purposes of this discussion, I would like to adapt Frye and Parker's contributions to consider romance as a literary and textual *strategy*. Under this definition, the term describes a concatenation of both narratological elements and literary topoi, including idealization, the marvelous, narrative delay, wandering, and obscured identity, that, as Parker suggests, both pose a quest and complicate it. I find this the most useful notion of romance because it accounts for the greatest number of instances, allowing us to address the occurrence of romance within texts that are clearly classified as some other genre and incorporating the hybridization and malleability that, as we shall see, are such key elements of romance. The instrumental notion of romance as a recurrent textual strategy allows us to recognize its many manifestations and transformations throughout literary history; it may well be our best chance to capture its protean nature, as well as to address the broadest definitions of the term. But it also allows us to deconstruct the many oppositions set up by literary history, such as romance versus epic or romance versus novel. These become more complicated once we identify the presence of romance within its ostensible opposites.

### ENGLISH ONLY?

Part of the problem with defining romance as I have endeavored to do above is that while critics may apply the term to literature in a variety of languages, those languages do not have a word for this sense of romance. *Roman* in French or German now means simply *novel*, as does *romanzo* in Italian. *Romance* in Spanish is a short ballad form (OED 4A). Conversely, when Spanish critics wish to refer to the sense of romance that I have been discussing, they call it *lo novelesco*. This peculiar situation has led some critics to challenge the very term romance as outdated or limited by the constraints of a particular critical tradition.

Margaret Doody argues that critics working in the Anglo-American academy essentially invented the distinction between novel and romance in order to imagine an English origin for what was a much older form (Doody 1996). In this schema, she argues, literary theory adopts as its gold standard the notion of progress towards realism: "The Novel replaces the Romance as Reason replaces Superstition, and as the Model-T Ford replaces the horse and carriage" (Doody 1996: 3). Doody is interested in

tracing a longer history for the novel while avoiding progressive or teleological models. To this end, she proclaims: "Romance and the Novel are one. The separation between them is part of a problem, not part of a solution" (Doody 1996: 15).

Rather than rethinking the hierarchy or the terms of the classification, Doody discards the category of romance altogether. This seems a case of throwing the baby out with the bath-water. The applicability and usefulness of the notion of romance we have sketched out transcend the particular myth of literary history exposed by Doody. Yet any critical definition that takes her important argument into account must present romance as something other than a bad alternative or insufficient predecessor to the novel. In fact, we can avoid the progress narrative altogether by turning to an instrumental understanding of romance as a literary strategy that appears in a variety of genres, as I have suggested above. This redefinition accounts for the self-conscious use of romance by authors working within a variety of traditions, and accommodates romance as one of the many voices within the novel, instead of its poor cousin.

This study gives a sense of the place of romance within several national traditions. Romance does not, as we shall see, respect those boundaries, and this approach allows us to move beyond the Anglo-American paradigm identified by Doody. Because I have consistently aimed for the broadest possible definition of romance in the European tradition, however, I will necessarily focus on central moments in this tradition instead of providing anything like a comprehensive history. Even so, it is important to bear in mind that romance relies heavily on allusion and reflexivity, and that it is necessary to trace the historical change in romance as well as its continuity.

In addition to addressing the occurrence of romance in various times and places, this book foregrounds the vexed treatment of romance in literary history. For romance, especially in the instrumental sense I have adopted here, is often defined relatively rather than absolutely, and retrospectively rather than contemporaneously. That is, texts are read as romance primarily in relation or comparison to other texts – as in the opposition between epic and romance – or in order to distinguish them from their successors – as in the distinction between romance and novel.

The frequent controversies over romance that involve questions of definition and scope, and of its value for readers, may, I conjecture, teach us as much about the dynamics of literary theory and history as about romance itself.

## 1

## CLASSICAL ROMANCE

We often use Greek terms and definitions such as tragedy, epic, lyric, to describe texts composed much later, yet for the fictional narratives of the classical world we are forced to rely on more modern terms, retrospectively applied. Discussing romance in Greek and Latin texts, that is, entails bringing to bear much later categories on earlier texts. Antiquity never theorized romance; in fact, much of the neglect that classical romance suffered in scholarship until very recently had to do with the theoretical vacuum where fictional narratives were concerned.

The Greeks had terms for different aspects of these texts: *plasma* (fictitious creation), *drama* (story of action), *diēgēma* (narrative), *historia* (account of what has been discovered), but no overarching category like *novel* (Reardon 1991: 7). Critics have speculated that this critical neglect reflects the low regard in which these fictions were held, despite their presumed appeal to a popular audience (Perry 1967: 4–5). Although critics have traced the connections between the prose fiction of antiquity and such genres as biography, travel literature, and historiography, they generally agree that there was no classification of fictional narratives as a particular genre. In analyzing classical romance, as we will do here, we are therefore necessarily working with categories that would never have been applied by authors, readers, or critics at the time the texts were produced. Yet these categories are hardly arbitrary; in some ways, they have structured

our modern understanding of literary history. As subsequent chapters will show, central distinctions such as that between epic and romance organize our understanding of texts from the Renaissance onwards.

The opposition between epic and romance, explored most recently by David Quint, is perhaps most clearly visible in Virgil's *Aeneid* (29–19 BC) the story of the Trojan Aeneas' foundation of Rome. Virgil juxtaposes Homer's *Odyssey* and *Iliad* in his poem, sharpening the distinctions between these predecessors and exacerbating the ideological implications of their form. Aeneas is nearly derailed from his fated mission by a series of Odyssean adventures, and most seriously by the amorous welcome he receives in Africa from Dido, Queen of Carthage. The Iliadic portion of the poem finally takes Aeneas to Italy, where, after much bloodshed, he will found the Roman nation. It is through the lens of the *Aeneid* that we read epic as an account of warfare leading to the birth of a nation, focused on a martial hero who represents the group. In this context, romance appears instead as a detour or wandering from the teleological thrust of epic, characterized by circularity or stasis and by the seductions of eros and individual adventures.

In order to understand this foundational opposition, this chapter first analyzes the romance strategies of Homer's *Odyssey* (750–700 BC), which one critic calls the “fountainhead” of romance (Reardon 1991: 6). It then surveys the texts that fall under the category of “Greek romance” in the generic sense, and examines the controversies over that classification. At the same time, it charts a broader, alternative understanding of romance as literary strategy in the classical world and touches briefly on some of the many texts that exemplify romance in this sense.

## ODYSSEAN WANDERINGS

Keep Ithaka always in your mind.  
 Arriving there is what you are destined for.  
 But do not hurry the journey at all.  
 Better if it lasts for years,  
 so you are old by the time you reach the island,  
 wealthy with all you have gained on the way,  
 not expecting Ithaka to make you rich.

C.P. Cavafy, “Ithaka”

Homer's poem on the hero Odysseus' return (*nostos*) to Ithaca and his wife Penelope after the Trojan War establishes some of the most enduring and recurring of romance strategies. While the *Odyssey* shares the overall epic form of the *Iliad*, it is focused on a very different set of issues. This is not a poem about war but about the vexed return home. It is concerned far more with the individual hero and his transformations than with any corporate goal. The interest of the narrative lies precisely in the obstacles and detours in Odysseus' way; that is, in the romance that delays his progress while advancing the text.

The urgency of the return is determined by the dire straits in which Penelope and Telemachus find themselves. After twenty years of Odysseus' absence, Penelope is being aggressively courted by suitors who, while they wait for her favor, make free with Odysseus' possessions and consume his wealth. As the suitors become increasingly impatient, Penelope despairs of being able to hold them off any longer. Meanwhile, Odysseus, unwillingly detained by the nymph Calypso on her island, longs for home. (Author's note: For all Greek names, such as Calypso, I have chosen the spelling most commonly encountered in subsequent literary texts in English. I have silently modified the spelling in translations to conform with this principle.) When the goddess Athena finally arranges his release, he is thwarted once again by the vengeful Poseidon and shipwrecked on the coast of the Phaiakians, who, from his first encounter with the princess Nausicaa, receive him kindly. In an extensive narrative detour, Odysseus relates to them his previous adventures, from the aftermath of the victory at Troy to the loss of his men and his sojourn with Calypso. The Phaiakians provide him with a ship and he finally returns to Ithaca, where he must face the challenge of the suitors, grown ever more arrogant in his continued absence.

In a sense, the poem itself opens with a detour. A brief council of the gods serves as exposition, establishing Athena's concern for Odysseus and giving us the basic rudiments of the plot. The scene then moves to Ithaca with the goddess. Instead of Odysseus, we first meet his son, Telemachus, as we follow him on his search for news of his father, a miniature quest in its own right. This embedded narrative of Telemachus' wanderings heightens readerly expectations, providing an oblique introduction to the hero – we hear much about Odysseus before we finally encounter him – and foreshadowing the voyages and encounters of the main plot.

Telemachus travels to the wondrous court of Menelaos, Helen's husband, who describes his own difficult return from Troy to Greece. Although Menelaos has recovered Helen, and acquired a great treasure on his wanderings, his life is marred by melancholy:

How painfully I wandered  
before I brought it home! Seven years at sea,  
Kypros, Phoinikia, Egypt, and still farther  
among the sun-burnt races. . . .  
How gladly I should live one third as rich  
to have my friends back safe at home! – my friends  
who died on Troy's wide seaboard, far  
from the grazing lands of Argos.  
But as things are, nothing but grief is left me  
for those companions.

(Homer 1998: 4.87–111)

(Author's note: Because this translation is so widely used in English-language contexts, I have given Fitzgerald's line numbering for the verse instead of the original's.)

Menelaos' wanderings to the far confines of the Greek world on his roundabout route home anticipate the marvelous travels of Odysseus. Yet Menelaos, who has managed to return home, is paradoxically full of nostalgia (from *nostos*, return and *algos*, suffering) for Troy. So powerful is the yearning for the past that it colors Menelaos' life, even among the splendor of his possessions. Such longing pervades the poem, and this early episode complicates the possibility of resolution to so much wandering desire. The strategy that we see here in the *Odyssey* comes to be one of the primary features of romance: the dilation or postponement of the object of desire rather than its achievement.

Odysseus himself is introduced as the object of Menelaos' longing:

And there is one I miss more than the other  
dead I mourn for, sleep and food alike  
grow hateful when I think of him. No soldier  
took on so much, went through so much, as Odysseus.  
That seems to have been his destiny, and this mine –



drunken fall to his death from the enchantress' roof. (The figure of the man undone by his own appetites reappears in Spenser's treatment of the Circe theme in Book 3 of *The Faerie Queene* as the stubborn Grille, who refuses to be restored to humanity.) More importantly, the threat of stasis appears at times without being associated with a specific gender, as in the episode of the Lotus Eaters, an entire people devoted to oblivion:

We came to the coastline of the Lotus Eaters,  
 who live upon that flower. We landed there  
 to take on water. All ship's companies  
 mustered alongside for the mid-day meal.  
 Then I sent out two picked men and a runner  
 to learn what race of men that land sustained.  
 They fell in, soon enough, with Lotus Eaters,  
 who showed no will to do us harm, only  
 offering the sweet Lotus to our friends –  
 but those who ate this honeyed plant, the Lotus,  
 never cared to report, nor to return:  
 they longed to stay forever, browsing on  
 that native bloom, forgetful of their homeland.  
 (Homer 1998: 9.92–104)

Unlike the female monsters and enchantresses elsewhere, the Lotus Eaters mean no harm. Yet the magic plant works powerfully on Odysseus' men, so that he must force them wailing back to the ships. This episode reminds us of the considerable energy that the narrative exerts in order to remain a quest. Much like Odysseus' men, readers of romance must be summarily hauled from the pleasures of stasis and embarked on new episodes.

There are interesting echoes of Circe, who is first introduced weaving at her loom, in Odysseus' faithful wife. Penelope's most famous delaying tactic against the suitors is to promise that she will choose one of them when she has finished weaving a shroud for Odysseus' aged father, Laertes (Homer 1998: 2.103–14). But Penelope unweaves each night what she weaves during the day, and thus manages to hold off the suitors for three years before she is finally betrayed by her maids. Her weaving on the loom becomes a powerful metaphor for the narrative itself, as it advances and

retreats with each obstacle to Odysseus' return. Yet even though her weaving associates her with both the dissembling and the delay that characterize enchantresses like Circe and other figures of female depravity, Penelope remains eminently virtuous. In her case, delay enables, rather than obstructs, the possibility of Odysseus' ultimate return.

For the cunning Penelope as for her husband, shape-shifting and tale-telling are survival strategies. Strikingly, these characterize the hero and heroine as much as their antagonists, virtually animating the narrative. While the *Odyssey* participates in the idealizing that is typical of romance, it does not idealize in simple moral terms. Odysseus is cunning, but not always a good leader: he often puts his men at risk unnecessarily, as in the Cyclops episode. He lies when necessary, and is ruthless in furthering his individual goals. In particular, the constant emphasis on disguised identity and surprising revelation suggests that transparency is not particularly valued. Instead, the wish-fulfillment of romance is intimately connected to the pleasure of delayed resolution and extended narrative.

Odysseus' disguises and lies provide the occasion for that much more storytelling. In fact, he invents even more adventures than he has actually experienced, and gives no less than five false accounts of himself, to everyone from Athena to Laertes. This multiplication of the plot into many false accounts provides an additional set of narrative detours. The trickery also offers the possibility of spectacular scenes of testing and recognition, as Odysseus' family and servants gradually realize who he is. These scenes essentially structure the second half of the poem, as Odysseus assembles the team of loyal companions that will enable him to vanquish the suitors (Murnaghan 1987: 20). While romance features transformations and deceit, it also enshrines the notion of an essential identity that can be revealed by signs. Thus Odysseus' aged nurse finds a scar from an old hunting wound; his hound recognizes his master's voice; Penelope herself confirms that he is her husband by testing his knowledge of their marvelous bed, hewn from a living tree around which the house is built.

In historical terms, the successful return of Odysseus, his defeat of the suitors, and his reunion with Penelope served as a powerful model of the *Nostos*, or returning hero. As Irad Malkin has observed, the figure of Odysseus was especially meaningful for the Greeks who, from the ninth century BC on, sailed beyond Ithaca to explore, trade, and colonize: "The resourceful, persevering, self-made man was the appropriate hero for

people who sailed away *and* expected to return” (Malkin 1998: 2). Thus the Odyssean romance serves to animate early voyages from the safety of home to unknown geographies, essentially reversing Odysseus’ own itinerary in the poem. The success of the hero’s quest for home, however delayed, encourages countless quests for distant lands. Despite the often wandering energies of romance, that is, it may still serve the interest of far more deliberate enterprises.

### THE GENRE OF “GREEK ROMANCE”

The entire form of the Greek romance can be considered an elaboration of the period between initial desire and final consummation.

John J. Winkler, “The Invention of Romance,” 28

In Greek romance . . . the normal means of transportation is by shipwreck.

Northrop Frye, *The Secular Scripture*, 4

Whereas the *Odyssey* constantly complicates its protagonist, emphasizing the humanity and fallibility of the hero, the fictions traditionally known as Greek or, more precisely, Hellenistic romances are characterized by a strategy of idealization and wish-fulfillment. Yet they share with the *Odyssey* an emphasis on delay and postponement as the main engines of narrative interest, strategies that are, indeed, the very sources of the narrative. They are centrally concerned with *erōtika pathēmata*, or the sufferings of love. As a genre, this group of prose fictions features a similar boy-meets-girl plot in each case, characterized as follows by B.P. Reardon:

A handsome youth and a beautiful girl meet by chance and fall in love, but unexpected obstacles obstruct their union; they are separated, and each is launched on a series of journeys and dangerous adventures; through all their tribulations, however, they remain faithful to each other and to the benevolent deities who at critical junctures guide their steps; and eventually they are reunited and live happily ever after.

(Reardon 1991: 5)

From the vantage point of many centuries of romance this all seems trite, but John J. Winkler makes a convincing argument for the oddity of this

plot in a society that actually regarded marriage as an institution fully separate from romantic love. In a seminal essay entitled “The Invention of Romance,” Winkler suggests that the “love-leading-to-marriage” story – that is, the idea of conflating eros and marriage – may well have been imported to Greece from the Near East, first in the *Odyssey* itself and later in the idealizing romances (Winkler 1994: 36).

Part of the originality of these narratives lies in their focus on the experience of private individuals. If the *Odyssey* is remarkable for its relative effacement of corporate values as it emphasizes the heroic singularity and aloneness of Odysseus, these later fictions take individuation even further, as they relate the extraordinary adventures of ordinary mortals, albeit ones of high station, in a complex world. The setting is a crucial part of the story, with characters tossed about by both literal storms and the workings of inscrutable fate in a wide world of unfamiliar locales and exotic settings. Historically, these texts reflect the fractured and hybrid reality of the Hellenistic and early Roman periods, when the relative cultural homogeneity of Greek civilization gave way to the multiplicity of an imperial world. Greeks in the Near East were exposed to a variety of other cultures, while natives of these areas learned Greek. The fertile cultural cross-pollination of this world may well explain the late appearance of these complex narrative fictions. While the context was broadened and enriched, the individual’s place within was proportionally reduced. Moreover, identity and experience in such a world were much less fixed, determined less by membership in a community than by chance, travel, or circumstance (Perry 1967: 48).

The characters in Greek romance suffer constantly the effects of greater forces. While they are hardly passive, they face repeated obstacles to any enterprise – fate seems to have it in for them no matter what they do. Neither are all the heroes of these stories men. In fact, the female protagonists are often markedly more active and resourceful than their male partners. And as they are constantly the object of unwanted attentions, they are called on to exercise that resourcefulness to protect both their chastity and their lives. In a sense, the single-minded fidelity of the characters functions as a kind of textual remedy to the indeterminacy of identity in a fundamentally dislocated world. The erotic attachment is the one thing that remains unchanging as hero and heroine move through a vast geography.

The five complete extant examples of what is conventionally known as Greek romance, in the narrow generic sense, with their probable dates, are Chariton's *Chaereas and Callirhoe* (first century AD), Xenophon of Ephesus' *Ephesiaca* (second century AD), Achilles Tatius' *Leucippe and Clitophon* (late second century AD), Longus' *Daphnis and Chloe* (late second century AD), and Heliodorus' *Ethiopica* (third or fourth century AD). Most of these datings are regarded as provisional. Given the intense new interest in these texts, it is likely that new evidence will force critics to reevaluate their dates. Their action is set several centuries before the date of composition, at the high point of Greek culture. The titles of the "big five" refer either to the pair of lovers or to a significant place in the development of the story (several are known by alternate titles, so that *Ethiopica*, for example, is also referred to as *Theagenes and Charicleia*), reflecting the importance not only of the central love story but of the extended imperial geography within these fictions.

Although these texts are less concerned with monsters than the *Odyssey*, their locales often provide a geographic rationale for marvels and magic. Critics have also suggested that many of their apparently fantastic details, as well as their structure, may derive from popular religious cults and the myths associated with them (Stephens and Winkler 1995: 314–15). Often, however, the narratives tax verisimilitude most heavily in their constant reliance on coincidence and chance. The *deus ex machina* of authorial dictum intervenes again and again both to shatter the characters' hopes and to rescue them from a certain death at the very last minute. It is exhausting even to read about these extreme reversals, but part of the generic "contract," so to speak, is that the perils and pitfalls will, however improbably, lead to a happy ending.

For our purposes here, I will take Heliodorus' *Ethiopica* as a paradigmatic case of the idealizing romance. It is generally considered the most sophisticated of the five central texts, and enjoyed a wide following among writers and critics in early modern Europe, including Cervantes and Racine, who, as the story goes, memorized the text after having it repeatedly confiscated and burned by his teachers (Winkler 1994: 23–4). Heliodorus makes constant reference to the *Odyssey*, underscoring the poem's important role as a romance precursor, while also developing his own highly elaborate structure and narrative stance. The story of the young lovers' meeting at a religious festival and of the much-deferred consummation of

their love is also, simultaneously, a story of the return to origins, a narrative restoration of order and identity.

The opening of *Ethiopica* is widely admired as an example of both *in medias res* immediacy and almost cinematic perspectivism:

The smile of daybreak was just beginning to brighten the sky, the sunlight to catch the hilltops, when a group of men in brigand gear peered over the mountain that overlooks the place where the Nile flows into the sea at the mouth that men call the Heracleotic. They stood there for a moment, scanning the expanse of sea beneath them: first they gazed out over the ocean, but as there was nothing sailing there that held out hope of spoil and plunder, their eyes were drawn to the beach nearby. This is what they saw: a merchant ship was riding there, moored by her stern, empty of crew but laden with freight. This much could be surmised even from a distance, for the weight of her cargo forced the water up to the third line of boards on the ship's side. But the beach! — a mass of newly slain bodies, some of them quite dead, others half-alive and still twitching, testimony that the fighting had only just ended. To judge by the signs this had been no proper battle. Amongst the carnage were the miserable remnants of festivities that had come to this unhappy end. There were tables still set with food, and others upset on the ground, held in dead men's hands; in the fray they had served some as weapons, for this had been an impromptu conflict; beneath other tables men had crawled in the vain hope of hiding there. There were wine bowls upturned, and some slipping from the hands that held them; some had been drinking from them, others using them like stones, for the suddenness of the catastrophe had caused objects to be put to strange, new uses and taught men to use drinking vessels as missiles. There they lay, here a man felled by an axe, there another struck down by a stone picked up then and there from the shingly beach; here a man battered to death with a club, there another burned to death with a brand from the fire. Various were the forms of their deaths, but most were the victims of arrows and archery. In that small space the deity had contrived an infinitely varied spectacle, defiling wine with blood and unleashing war at the party, combining wining and dying, pouring of drink and spilling of blood, and staging this tragic show for the Egyptian bandits.

# ROMANCE

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 **Routledge**  
Taylor & Francis Group  
NEW YORK AND LONDON

## 2

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### MEDIEVAL ROMANCE

And with that word he drew towards the fire  
And took a light, and framed his countenance  
As if to gaze upon an old romance.

Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*

Although medieval romance is the corpus most readily identified as a genre by present-day critics, the term originally referred not to a class of texts but to a linguistic and literary operation: the transformation of Latin texts into French. “Romance” derives from the Old French expression “mettre en romanz” – to translate into the vernacular, or romance, language. Generic boundaries for these texts were originally very fluid: many kinds of narratives in the vernacular were called romances, but also “estoires” (stories/histories) or “contes” (tales) (Krueger 2000: 1). The construction of a recognizable genre out of this varied and enormous literature has required considerable critical energy; it is as though, in our day, critics attempted to designate the Loeb Classical Library – the Harvard University Press series of Greek and Latin texts in dual-language editions – as a genre. But the attempt at classification has been helped along by occasional highly self-conscious references to romance within the texts themselves, as in the

epigraph above, and by the strong intertextuality in a corpus of stories that reappears from one text to the next, from one author to another, and across several vernaculars. In this sense, "Any given romance appears simultaneously as a whole or a fragment with respect to that larger intertextual dialogue" (Bruckner 2000: 14). The iterability of romance is a key sign of its cultural currency and historical importance. The romance that repeats "descends to us as the aggregated work of many minds, many hands, and many efforts over the centuries: as the material concretion of the collective will of cultural agents and forces acting over time to preserve, develop, and transmit a story felt to be important" (Heng 2003: 8).

Interestingly, in the field of medieval studies, unlike in Classics, romance is not considered a term of opprobrium. More accessible than hagiography (accounts of the lives of saints) or the *chansons de geste* (epic poems on heroic deeds), romance appeals to modern readers and has been granted a privileged place by critics, relative to its actual role in medieval literary culture (Gaunt 2000: 48). Due to this critical predilection, romance is the bread-and-butter of medieval literary studies, and both the primary and secondary bibliographies are enormous. In this field, romance patently avoids the critical scorn that marks it in other periods of literary history. Yet its very popularity can backfire: critics have pointed out the problematic metonymic association of romance with the Middle Ages, whereby the entire historical period is bathed in a sentimental glow of fanciful idealization. As Rita Copeland incisively notes, already by the sixteenth century "the definitive characteristic of romance is no longer its form, with which its very modernity was bound up, but its content: love, chivalry, adventure, the Arthurian 'golden age,' the exoticism and fancy of a distantly imagined past, indeed, everything associated with the word *aventure*" (Copeland 1991: 220).

This chapter provides an introduction to the medieval romance genre as it has been codified by critics, examining both the congruences and incongruences of the category. I then suggest how understanding romance as a strategy might yield a different corpus, cutting across traditional generic categories to encompass hagiography, *lais* and other vernacular forms.

## COURTS, KNIGHTS, AND CLERKS

The genre of medieval romance is conventionally defined as the group of narratives in the vernacular that emerge around 1150 in the court of Henry II and Eleanor of Aquitaine in England (where Anglo-Norman, a form of French, was the elite language) and tell stories of love and adventure. Although generally situated in a distant classical or Arthurian past, the stories feature all the trappings of contemporary court and chivalric culture, so that, for example, Greek and Roman "knights" skirmish in patently medieval tournaments. The primary sources for this literature are Greek and Roman legends (the story of Thebes, the Trojan war) as well as specific classical texts (Virgil, Statius, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Apollonius), medieval historiography, Celtic legends, and the *chansons de geste*. Since the thirteenth century, romance has traditionally been divided into three subjects (although many texts classified as romances elude this early characterization): the matter of Rome, which includes primarily reworkings of the story of Troy and the *Aeneid*; the matter of Britain, which comprises the stories of King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table; and the matter of France: stories of the French knights made famous by the *chansons de geste*. Although the characters might often resemble those of the earlier French epics, in romances there is a much greater emphasis on the private over the public, on the perspective of women, and on the knights' experience of love. While romance emerges in an Anglo-Norman context, it soon travels far beyond it, with the important German romance tradition, for example, imitating and elaborating on French sources.

Medieval romance emerges as an elite court genre, although the use of the vernacular allows it to reach a much wider audience than its origins would suggest. Generally, romances were initially recited to musical accompaniment before the assembled feudal household, and only some of them were recorded. The characters of romance are those same members of the secular court: kings and queens, knights and ladies, and retainers of various kinds. But the court is more than a setting: it often anchors the narrative with an almost centripetal force. The hero sets out from the court and returns to it once he has proven himself. Simon Gaunt explains this centrality in terms of the court's historical importance: "The court – a legal, financial, and social center – was the forum in which temporal power was exercised and established through rituals designed to demonstrate the

lord's superiority. An intensely political environment, the court was also a place where individuals from a variety of cultural and social backgrounds met" (Gaunt 2000: 47). Romance thus takes its place among the cultural forms that celebrate the court and, as a cultural crossroad, the court becomes the setting for improbable encounters.

The courtly setting accounts for the frequent idealizing tone of medieval romance: in these stories (with some notable exceptions), all the ladies are beautiful, all the knights are valiant, even though the actual events of the plot often undercut the idealizing rhetoric. More importantly, idealization is often countered by a sharp reflection on society: given the political centrality of the court, romance reflects ideological conflicts, and addresses the precise historical context out of which it emerges. Although romance is frequently described as an escapist genre that erases or whitewashes social conflict, it presents a dialectical relation to court ideology. It is often skeptical of absolute distinctions between good and evil, civilized and uncivilized violence, and of the compatibility between erotic and military pursuits. Simply because the romance often deals with individual protagonists and their quests does not mean that it is not acutely concerned with their status as cultural fantasies. For example, the heroic identity that the protagonist achieves often leads to an actual position at court, thereby reinforcing the feudal system (Segre 1985: 19), yet the foibles of the hero or his antagonists often reflect badly on the court itself.

This double valence is built into the narrative structure of romance, as the narrator pointedly fails to identify with the lords and ladies of the story. Instead, he speaks for a class of authors who were most often clerks: men in the lower orders of the Church, who did not serve the role of modern clergy but instead performed administrative tasks for the court. Their essential attribute was their education, which included primarily the ability to read (and thus imitate) Latin texts. Their scholarly values of *clergie* (clerkliness) differ markedly from the aristocratic, heroic *chevalerie* (chivalry) of romance heroes. Knights, that is, did not write romances. As critics have frequently noted, this distance between the clerkly narrator and the chivalric protagonists results in a pronounced irony in many romances, complicating the genre's ideological investments.

One fine example of the authorial irony that destabilizes the idealizing force of romance occurs in Chrétien de Troyes' *Erec and Enide* (c. 1170). As we will see, Chrétien was one of the most self-conscious of clerkly

narrators. His account of an argument between King Arthur and one of his knights at the beginning of his tale, immediately after a glowing description of the court, is highly ironic. The king proposes that the court hunt for the famed white stag of ancient tradition, only to be contradicted immediately by Sir Gawain:

My lord Gawain was not a bit pleased when he heard this. "Sire," said he, "from this hunt you will gain neither gratitude nor thanks. We have all known for a long time what tradition is attached to the white stag: he who can kill the white stag by right must kiss the most beautiful of the maidens of your court, whatever may happen. Great evil can come from this, for there are easily five hundred damsels of high lineage here, noble and wise daughters of kings; and there is not a one who is not the favourite of some valiant and bold knight, each of whom would want to contend, rightly or wrongly, that the one who pleases him is the most beautiful and the most noble."

(Chrétien 1991: 37–8)

Gawain's warning about the dangers of both tradition and competition plays against the reader's expectations, especially since, given the court setting and the gathering of so many knights, we are prepared to admire ritual and combat. In part, Gawain's intervention questions romance's nostalgia for the past against which the contemporary court is measured, and hints at the individual flaws that will endanger chivalric culture in the future. But the knight reminds us also that the very narrative depends on the shattering of equilibrium at the court. Arthur's proposals will surely lead to conflict, but without that conflict there is no story to tell. The irony is compounded by Arthur's obdurate insistence on his royal prerogative: "This I know well, but I will not give up my plan for all that, for the word of a king must not be contravened" (Chrétien 1991: 38).

Ultimately, Arthur himself finds the stag and his choice of maiden is unanimously approved. Yet by pointing out the difficulty of resolving the beauty contest, Gawain challenges the idealizing conventions that Chrétien is establishing: if all damsels are equally beautiful, how is the court to choose among them? The answer – in other narratives if not in this one – is a dangerous perspectivism that threatens the unity of the court. Yet this perspectivism, which appears both ominous and



anti-monarchical through betrayals and challenges to the King's power, and often casts political problems such as succession, consensus, and loyalty in a magical or marvelous vein.

In formal terms, the expansive device of the Round Table, with its multiple cast of knights, proves singularly flexible and productive: there is always another knight to follow, another adventure to recount. Thus the Arthurian corpus enables the iterative quality of romance, since writers may return again and again to the same material, using the Round Table as a literal point of departure for their own narratives. Over several centuries and multiple versions, the overarching narrative absorbs powerful stories that are not logically connected to Arthur: Tristan and Iseult, the quest for the Holy Grail, and so forth. In chivalric romance, the court grounds the individual knight's wandering in search of adventures or his response to a mysterious challenge. It frames the open-ended or obscure excursions with the relative clarity of relationships and identities in the feudal center. In a classic study, Erich Auerbach argues that what distinguishes the romance knight from the warrior of the *chansons de geste* is the unmotivated nature of his excursion: "[The romance knight] sets out without mission or office; he seeks adventure, that is, perilous encounters by which he can prove his mettle. There is nothing like this in the *chanson de geste*. There a knight who sets off has an office and a place in a politico-historical context" (Auerbach 1953: 133). Even this relatively unmotivated agency, however, contrasts markedly with the Greek romances discussed in Chapter 1: in the medieval narratives, adventures sometimes befall the protagonists; more often, however, they are sought out or at least embraced, and then glorified through the appearance of marvels (Nerlich 1987: 5, 12). Recent criticism, in the wake of Jameson's seminal essay discussed in the Introduction (Jameson 1975), has recovered the historical import of romance as a genre that considers everything from the weakness of monarchs to the threat of civil war to the place of women in society. Although this newer criticism is an important corrective to Auerbach's formalism, it is undeniable that romance often presents a peculiar vagueness: relatively weak motivations and underdeveloped causality to undergird action; a fantastical setting that combines the contemporary and the antique, the familiar and the exotic; a deliberate emphasis on mystery and the active disguise of identity and points of reference; a disorienting flatness, with no privileging of one episode over another, of

the fantastic over the realistic, or vice versa. Yet, as Heng has shown, these characteristics do not preclude romance's role as a crucible of cultural fantasy (Heng 2003: 3 and *passim*).

Chivalric romance develops a series of formal traits that accommodate its multiple plot lines and protagonists. At the most basic level, the narrative is segmented into sequential, self-contained episodes – Frye's "and then" narrative (Frye 1976: 47–9). A more sophisticated technique is the *interlace*, where different strands of the narrative are woven together. In a fascinating essay, Eugene Vinaver traces the visual equivalent of interlace in Romanesque ornament, which features entwined, knotted, and plaited "threads" (Vinaver 1971, 77–80). In the textual version, each plot is interrupted to advance the others. Interlace (formal causality) displaces motivation (logical causality) and, especially in the large romance cycles, becomes the structural device that organizes disparate episodic narratives. Thus, as Matilda Bruckner suggests, interlace "offers a potential commentary on the characters, episodes, or narrative segments juxtaposed and woven together" (Bruckner 2000: 25). In the more sophisticated instances, the interruption comes at a point of great suspense, and the narrator only returns to the previous narrative when the reader has become fully engrossed by the subsequent one. Interlace is one of the most fruitful formal contributions of medieval romance, and is consistently exploited by writers, from the Renaissance romance-epic to the twentieth-century comic book ("Meanwhile, back at the Hall of Justice . . .") and other popular genres.

## ROMANCE GENRES

At the end of the day, romance is, after all, the name of a desiring narrational modality that coalesces from the extant cultural matrix at hand, poaching and cannibalizing from a hybridity of all and any available resources, to transact a magical relationship with history, of which it is in fact a consuming part.

Heng, *Empire of Magic*, 9

As we have seen, the term *romance* referred in medieval times to many different kinds of texts. Even though medieval studies has developed an artificial sense of romance as a genre, the corpus includes prose and verse,

different lengths and subject matters, and so forth. Nonetheless, as Heng has recently argued, chivalric romance, due to its great popularity, is often taken synecdochically to stand in for all kinds of romance (Heng 2003: 4). Heng argues instead for an expansive sense of romance, comprising everything from chronicle histories to travelers' tales, and identified by "the structure of desire which powers its narrative, and the transformational repetition of that structure through innumerable variations" (Heng 2003: 3). Her broad category brings to the fore the "contamination" of multiple genres by romance that medievalists have long acknowledged. It suggests that even for this period we may posit romance as a set of mobile, adaptable strategies for making texts pleasurable. Idealization, narrative delays, multiple obstacles to teleological drives, spectacular reversals of fortune, constant use of the marvelous, a more pronounced role for eros: these romance strategies make their appearance in a wide variety of medieval genres, even in chronicle histories that are not "romanced" or translated into the vernacular.

This instrumental sense of romance allows modern readers to reconstruct the implicit dialogue between many different kinds of medieval texts, and even between texts and the larger culture that surrounds them. It restores the connections between romance as a circumscribed genre, venerated by generations of medievalists, and the richer panoply of popular or folk texts in a more broadly conceived cultural arena. The larger sense of romance reveals, for example, the similarities between certain hagiographic and chivalric texts, equally concerned with idealization; with naming and identity; and with loss, recognition, and restitution (Kay 1997: 14–19). It also explains why so many authors of "romances" appear to have written in a wide variety of genres: the strategies that often characterize their production are not necessarily circumscribed by traditional literary categories.

Heng's central case in point is the English canon Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* (*History of the Kings of Britain*, c. 1138) which challenges the definition of romance even as it exhibits many of its elements. Geoffrey precedes the ur-texts of Chrétien, writes in Latin instead of *romanz*, and "invokes the authenticatory apparatus of historical narration, complete with the citation of earlier historical sources, provision of chronologies, onomastic and geographical descriptions, and a scrupulously causal and sequential recitation of Britain's past" (Heng 2003: 18).

Nonetheless, as critics have long recognized, there is much romance material in the *Historia*. In a controversial argument, Heng proposes that what characterizes Geoffrey as romance is precisely "the articulation of fantasy and history . . . as varieties of cultural work" that rescue its readership from the "communal trauma" of European atrocities in the First Crusade (Heng 2003: 18). Through a careful comparison of Crusade narratives, Heng argues that the fantastical episode in which Arthur confronts a cannibalistic giant at Mont Saint-Michel actually recalls *European cannibalism in the East*, transforming it into a fantastical figure of monstrosity that the hero can lay to rest. Thus, she observes, romance inhabits historical texts as a way both to surface and to contain ideological crises.

Romance also characterizes genres that ostensibly value moral utility over pleasure. Hagiography, the stories of saints' lives, presents multiple formal and structural similarities to what is traditionally considered the romance genre (Vinaver 1971: 111). Many of the most popular hagiographic narratives are vernacular – that is, *romance* – versions of Latin originals, much as the "romances of antiquity" are versions of classical texts. These saints' lives often emphasize adventure and high drama. By the thirteenth century, when vernacular literature was well established, hagiographers foreground the pleasure afforded by their stories, as well as the courtly excellence of their heroes. Most interestingly, their narratives depend on some of the same strategies as the courtly texts traditionally classified as romances: the idealization of the protagonist; the amplification of travails as a series of adventures; the tension between desire and the protagonist's quest. Rather than critiquing the immorality of romance, as Renaissance moralists later did, hagiographers harness its strategies to enliven their own narratives. "Heroic sanctity," as Brigitte Cazelles aptly terms it (Cazelles 1991: 24), depends on a refusal of the earthly in favor of the spiritual, and yet the textual dynamics are strikingly similar to those of chivalric narratives in which a knight must learn to choose virtue over temptation, or refuse eros for the sake of adventure. The most interesting difference, I would suggest, is that the hagiographic corpus offers many more female protagonists. Their chastity, resourcefulness, and versatility often recall the heroines of Byzantine romances, such as Chariclea, who are given shape by their sufferings and resistance. In the *Life of Saint Faith*, written by Simon of Walsingham c. 1210, for example, the heroine's



Instead of consummation and pleasure, the dilation of the lover's patient erotic penance ends with the narrator's deliberate manipulation of romance expectations.

If we take romance in this more expansive sense, it penetrates even where we might not expect it, such as into pure lyric. Although the notion of romance as a narrative strategy of delay seems to make little sense for lyric, an individual poem or series may well recreate the romance sense of error and wandering. Perhaps the most powerful example of this is Petrarch's sequence, the *Rime sparse* or scattered rhymes, a collection of vernacular lyric poems, written 1330–74, that both contemplates and enacts amatory delay. Taken as a whole, the sequence traces the sustained unattainability of the beloved, and the poet's erring in love. A particularly striking example of what we might call the romance lyric is poem 189, which I transcribe in Robert Durling's translation:

My ship laden with forgetfulness passes through a harsh sea, at  
midnight, in winter, between Scylla and Charybdis, and at the  
tiller sits my lord, rather my enemy;

each oar is manned by a ready, cruel thought that seems to scorn

the tempest and the end; a wet, changeless wind of sighs, hopes, and  
desires breaks the sail;

a rain of weeping, a mist of disdain wet and loosen the already weary  
ropes, made of error twisted up with ignorance.

My two usual sweet stars are hidden; dead among the waves are  
reason and skill; so that I begin to despair of the port.

(Petrarch 1976: 334)

Although this vernacular lyric clearly cannot share the narrative thrust of romance-as-genre, it conjures up many of the larger romance strategies that I have identified: the unaccomplished voyage, interrupted by error and wandering, is animated by an erotic desire that both produces subjectivity and casts the protagonist – in this case, the lyric “I” – into conflict with himself. The sonnet even recalls romance predecessors, invoking Scylla and Charybdis. Thus Petrarch's lyric, even at the level of the individual sonnet, may be said to deploy romance, in the instrumental,

strategic sense that I have been proposing, as a kind of textual template for productive longing, the delay that paradoxically yields text.

Medieval romance, whether as the traditional genre or in the expanded sense of strategy that I have presented here, is an enormous field. Though this chapter covers a large range, it can by no means do justice to the huge corpus that could be considered under this rubric. Given the striking interpenetrability of medieval genres, moreover, the category of romance is constantly shifting and expanding. This movement is even more pronounced as romance becomes increasingly sophisticated and self-referential, spawning sequels and rewritings both long before print culture and in the first age of print. In this sense, we should perhaps speak of how these iterable and iterated texts participate in or draw on romance, instead of categorizing them as individual instances.

Beyond proposing the expansion of genre into strategy, it is important to dispel certain easy categorizations of romance. As the readings of Chrétien and Marie de France show, romance may easily reconcile idealization with devastating irony, the marvelous and magic with penetrating realism. Similarly, its desirous wish-fulfillment and emphasis on individual quests by no means place it outside history; if anything, as Heng argues, romance becomes a particularly effective tool for intermingling history and collective fantasy. Romance confronts us with the paradoxes of narrative. While there is an undeniable misogyny and sadism in its frequent association of eros with delay, and its subjection of both heroes and heroines to endless tests and trials, these obstacles turn out to be wildly productive in narratological terms: they literally make the story, and in the process often construct the subjectivity of their protagonists.

## 3

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## ROMANCE IN THE RENAISSANCE

### THE (RE)INVENTION OF ROMANCE

As the vernacular literature of the Renaissance enters into a rich conversation with its classical and medieval antecedents, romance is extensively refashioned into a range of new possibilities. The Greek romances, rediscovered in the sixteenth century, are widely translated and imitated. The novella tradition, from Boccaccio to his multiple imitators, builds on a number of romance strategies and provides many of the plots for Renaissance drama. Central figures such as Ariosto, Spenser, Tasso, and Cervantes elaborate on the tradition of medieval romance, deconstruct classical epic by exposing and questioning its conventions, and constantly engage in generic play. In the theoretical debates about the nature and value of romance, as well as in the texts debated, one can trace the origins of its conceptualization as a literary strategy of pleasurable multiplicity, opposed to the single-mindedness and political instrumentality of epic. That is, whereas epic is most often associated with stories of effective quests, corporate achievement, and the heroic birth of nations, romance challenges these narratives by privileging instead the wandering hero, the erotic interlude, or the dangerous delay.

David Quint explains this opposition, so central to the literary history of the Renaissance, through the figure of the enchanted boat. In chivalric romance, he claims:

such ships embody the adventure principle that is a ubiquitous, perhaps essential feature of romance narrative: counterbalancing an equally constitutive quest principle, it accounts for all the digressions and subplots which delay the quest's conclusion and which come to acquire an attraction and validity of their own . . . In epic narrative, which moves to a predetermined end, the magic ship signals a digression from a central plot line, but the boat of romance, in its purest form, has no other destination than the adventure at hand. It cannot be said to be off course. New adventures crop up all the time, and the boat's travels describe a romance narrative that is open-ended and potentially endless.

(Quint 1985: 179)

Despite his insistence on the difference between romance and epic, Quint acknowledges the presence of the former in the latter. The best way to understand this tension is to recognize romance as a strategy that occurs in many different kinds of texts, and that has a particularly productive role within epic.

The Italian Renaissance produced sophisticated, complex instances of the strategic or instrumental sense of romance. Perhaps most dazzling is Ludovico Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* (1516, 1532). The poem is based on the martial, epic tradition of the *matière de France*, the heroic medieval narratives about Roland, the great knight of Charlemagne who helped his king resist the Saracens. The most famous of these narratives was the eponymous, eleventh-century *Chanson de Roland*, but the tradition of the heroic Roland was widespread. The *Furioso*, with its hero gone mad for love, counters its predecessors by foregrounding a multiplicity of satiric and erotic plots. Ariosto follows in the footsteps of his predecessor, Matteo Boiardo, who had already romanced the warrior by having him fall in love with the elusive Eastern princess Angelica in his sprawling, unfinished *Orlando Innamorato* (1483, 1494). Ariosto returns to Boiardo's plot in a dazzling, highly self-conscious text that, from its opening lines, challenges the parameters of both epic and chivalric romance. The poet promises to sing "of knights and ladies, of love and arms, of courtly chivalry, of

courageous deeds" (Ariosto 1974: 1.1). With a deliberate nod to the opening lines of Virgil's *Aeneid* ("I sing of arms and the man"), he raises ladies and love, which are central concerns of the romance tradition, to the same level as the epic pursuit of war. This concern with love will mark the signal Renaissance texts that combine epic and romance, and which themselves imitate Ariosto, such as Torquato Tasso's *Jerusalem Delivered* (1581) and Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (1591, 1596). For all of these texts, the tension between martial quest and erotic detour will be a central organizing principle.

Ariosto's concern with female characters leads to one of the striking innovations of Renaissance epic: a hugely expanded role for the female knight. In Ariosto and in his followers, these characters, Bradamante, Marfisa, Clorinda, dress as men for most of the text and are, in some cases, only belatedly recognized as women. Although, for some, agency is circumscribed by an early death or a capitulation to marriage, their extended disguise, which results from choice rather than from necessity, complicates the gender politics of chivalric romance.

Ariosto acerbically exposes the inevitable contradictions of chivalry, and reminds the reader of its fundamental obsolescence in the age of gunpowder. Yet his poem nonetheless serves as a *summa* of the romance tradition, combining classical precedents such as the enchantress Alcina, based on Circe in the *Odyssey*, with a full cast of medieval marvels, such as magical weapons, giants, sorcerers, enchanted castles, and a formal tour de force of interlacing narratives that weave together multiple plots. The main strand traces the hero's fruitless quest for Angelica, whose union with the humble soldier Medoro drives Orlando mad. The deranged knight abandons his king, Charlemagne, at the height of the Saracen assault, and almost causes the fall of Paris. Orlando is finally restored by the knight Astolfo, who, in one of the most comically spectacular of romance quests, travels to the moon in search of the warrior's missing wits. Ariosto also invents an illustrious story of dynastic origins for his patrons, much as Virgil attempts to establish the retrospective legitimacy of Augustus in the *Aeneid*, and via a similar use of proleptic prophecy, fully accomplished in the reader's own time. Thus the female knight Bradamante and her beloved Ruggiero, the poem tells us, are destined to be founders of the house of Este, although she spends most of the poem haplessly searching for him while he is repeatedly distracted by other objects of desire. The

dynastic motive is constantly ironized, particularly when Astolfo learns from no other than St John, scribe to Jesus himself, that writers manipulate the truth to suit their patrons. As Patricia Parker observes, "Romance in Ariosto is not only subjected to a thorough anatomy of its characteristic errancy – the sense that its potentially infinite digression and variety may be resistant to completion or authorial control; it also becomes a means of revealing the fictiveness and errancy of all literary forms, including epic and even Scripture" (Parker 1990: 615).

Ariosto's poem addresses the incompatibility of romance and epic: the conventions of the former, which involve magical voyages and heroes wandering off the field of battle in pursuit of a beautiful maiden or into some treacherously beguiling space, are precisely about evading the latter, while the irreverence of his tone belies the seriousness of heroic poetry. The matter-of-fact marvels of romance are constantly ironized: Ruggiero, for example, goes red in the face for shame at the unfair advantage his magic shield confers on him, and drops it in a well (Ariosto 1974: 22.90–4). More importantly, the *Furioso* underscores the contrast between the easy mobility of romance – the mobility of individuals across geographical borders but also between different religious or racial camps – and the obsessive concerns with separation and difference of the emerging early modern states. The wandering of romance occurs during a suspension of royal power and royal prerogatives, and of the individual's duty to his liege. Individual chivalric encounters while the heroes are away from the front do not observe the same rules as collective battles, so that the Christian knights occasionally experience love or friendship for the "infidels" whom they are collectively fighting. Thus romance challenges the political myth-making of epic, and its tight networks of obligation and belonging.

The capaciousness and wry waywardness of the *Furioso* foreground romance as an ideal strategy of narrative expansiveness, trumping the single-minded, collective purposefulness of epic with rich detours into individual experience, erotic delay, and the exploration of alternative perspectives. Yet Ariosto reveals a certain ambivalence about this suspension, as though in rueful recognition that narrative ultimately requires a return to a teleological or quest mode. Certain episodes stage this recognition in what we have come to perceive as a familiar romance maneuver, associating stasis or error with the female agents of eros. Damaged or emasculated warriors must be hauled back to the battlefield, as when Orlando's wits

Of Spain's ladies, for I know not  
 How, given the good contained there,  
 Love does not consume the world.  
 (Ercilla 1993: 18.64, my translation)

The poet is immediately granted a vision of "paradise": a fertile, green meadow complete with running stream and beautiful ladies (Ercilla 1993: 18.66–7). But as he is about to launch into his "amorous song," a welcome respite from "rough bloody wars" (Ercilla 1993: 18.72), he wakes to shouts of battle. In Ercilla, interlace becomes a technique for coping with unspeakable violence. Over and over again, the poet truncates his text "in order to defeat narrative incorporation of a violence that exceeds explanatory or ideological structure" (Quint 1993: 164).

Romance also provides an important conduit for sympathy. Several episodes focus on the Araucanian women and their fierce love for their men. A particularly striking instance casts the unfortunate Glaura as a damsel in distress, suffering through the ravages of war and constant assaults on her virginity (Ercilla 1993: 28). The story culminates with the revelation that her lost husband and protector, Cariolán, is none other than the *yanacoma*, or captive Indian, whom Ercilla has saved from death at hands of the Spaniards, and who returns the favor by warning him of an Indian ambush. The negotiation of power and commiseration here is complex: the price of romance empathy seems to be the taming of Cariolán, "domesticated, where he had once been indomitable" (Ercilla 1993: 28.52). Yet in the heat of the new battle Ercilla unceremoniously grants both Cariolán and Glaura their freedom, commending them to God, itself a peculiar resolution when the struggle against the Araucanians is far from over.

Despite its overall epic form, *La Araucana*'s resolution is undone by romance. Ercilla's narrative wanders far and wide, in marvelous scenes of prophecy complete with crystal ball and native soothsayer. Yet while the "geographical impulse" often serves to chart Spain's greatness as a universal empire, it takes the narrator away from the pressing problems of the Chilean revolt that he relates as a contemporary event. And the uncertainty of Spain's position in Chile is never resolved: the narrator leaves the Araucanians in the midst of their war council, "filled with new rage and greater ire" (Ercilla 1993: 34.35), determined to choose a new leader

and continue their resistance. Then, in a complex sequence of interlace, Ercilla takes us on a marvelous expedition into southern Chile, an odd mixture of pastoral enchantment and hazardous voyage, and relates his subsequent experiences in the New World (Ercilla 1993: 35, 36). Eventually, he berates himself for having abandoned his story of Arauco (Ercilla 1993: 36.42), and promises to continue. But as soon as he has finished clearing his throat, so to speak, he again leaves Chile behind to relate Philip II's conquest of Portugal, which is a more straightforward, and definitive, victory (Ercilla 1993: 36.44 and following). The entire last canto is devoted to this Portuguese material, and thus the story of Arauco remains inconclusive and unresolved, as the narrator replaces epic finality with open-endedness. Both formally and thematically, then, romance complicates the verities of imperial epic, foregrounding sympathy, wandering, and inconclusiveness over the finality of conquest.

#### MAD FOR CHIVALRY

With Miguel de Cervantes' *Don Quijote* (1605, 1615), the deflation of romance becomes as notable and important a literary strategy as romance itself. Almost immediately reprised in the English comedy by Francis Beaumont *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (1607), and quickly translated into a variety of languages, *Don Quijote* addresses many of the controversies over romance in its pages, even as it evinces its enduring popularity. In the first age of print, the difference between the world of books, particularly chivalric romance, and a real world of war, scarcity, and madness yields some of Cervantes' most inspired satirical scenes. *Don Quijote* deliberately follows the conventions of romance to construct himself as a knight: he chooses an idealized beloved, Dulcinea of Toboso (actually the swineherd Aldonza Lorenzo), has himself dubbed knight (by a lowly innkeeper), and sets off to fight giants (which look remarkably like windmills to everyone else). The fond satire allows us to reconstruct the hallmarks of chivalric romance and also its immense popularity. In *Don Quijote*, the romance marvelous that so vexed Tasso is nicely contained in the protagonist's imagination. *Don Quijote* is the besotted romance reader *par excellence*, so convinced of the paramount truth of the books that he constantly struggles to fit reality within their parameters. When the world around him diverges, and the windmills resolutely remain windmills, he

ascribes the difference to malevolent enchanters, thereby reinscribing his reality into the world of the texts (Foucault 1973: 47). Don Quijote's isolation in his madness ironizes the solitary knight's quest. Once he finds a companion in the squire Sancho Panza, however, their exchanges provide a dialogic perspective on their condition, with the squire challenging the would-be knight's constant idealization of what surrounds him.

Although he parodies the besotted readers of romance, Cervantes also pokes fun at their critics, in a series of episodes that read like a *summa* of sixteenth-century literary debates. In the early mock-Inquisition of Don Quijote's library, the barber and the priest, self-appointed guardians of Don Quijote, burn most of his romances of chivalry, though they make pointed exceptions for, among others, *Amadis* and the Catalan Arthurian romance *Tirant lo Blanc* (Cervantes 1995: I.6). The credulity of Don Quijote's housekeeper, who advocates the burning yet worries that the books' enchanters may take revenge, easily matches his own. Elsewhere, Cervantes underscores the wide appeal of the books, as the Innkeeper describes the communal enjoyment of romances, read aloud at harvest time for an audience of delighted laborers (Cervantes 1995: I.32). Regardless of its debatable historical accuracy, this episode suggests Cervantes' appreciation of the pleasure that the romances provide.

A more explicit discussion of the chivalric romances' literary value takes place between the priest and the Canon of Toledo, at the end of Part I. The Canon trots out all the familiar objections to the books: their indistinctness, the empty pleasure they provide, their lack of verisimilitude or of unity:

Truly, your reverence, I myself hold these so-called books of chivalry to be a danger to our country, and though I have read at least the first pages of almost all that have been published, impelled by an idle and treacherous whim, I've never been able to read a single one from beginning to end, for they seem to me – some more, some less – pretty much all of a piece, one just like the other, and there's nothing more to this one than that one. So this sort of writing seems to me to belong to the genre of tales and fables they call Milesian, which are wildly nonsensical stories seeking only to give pleasure, and not to teach anything – exactly the opposite of moral fables, which both delight and teach at the same time. And since the chief purpose of such books is to

give pleasure, I don't understand how they can possibly do that, filled as they are with so much wild nonsense . . . For what beauty, what harmony of one part with the whole, and the whole with all its parts, can there be in a book or a tale in which a sixteen year old boy can cut a giant as tall as a tower right in half, with one blow, and as easily as if the giant were made of sugar paste? . . . And to anyone who answers by saying that people who write such books are creating fictions [*cosas de mentira*, lying things] and therefore aren't obliged to worry about fine points or truth, I say to them that the best lies are those that most closely resemble truth, and what gives the most pleasure is what seems most probable or possible . . . I've yet to see a single book of chivalry which truly holds together, with the middle matching the beginning, and the end corresponding to both the beginning and the middle; instead they're composed in so many scattered pieces that they seem to be meant as puzzles or monstrosities rather than balanced entities.

(Cervantes 1995: I.47)

Despite his protestations, the Canon is clearly an avid reader of romances, intimately familiar with their failings, from beginning to end. In fact, as he then confesses, he has even attempted to write one himself, although he abandons the attempt when he realizes, by examining the contemporary stage, that popular taste is not guided by Aristotelian prescriptions (Cervantes 1995: I.48). Through this implicit comparison to the enormously successful *comedias* of the Spanish playwright Lope de Vega (1562–1635), themselves often full of romance motifs, Cervantes underscores the romances' efficacy in transcending the parameters of sixteenth-century theory.

In fact, Don Quijote himself launches into an impassioned defense of the romances. He begins by claiming the truth of a romance heroism that is indistinguishable from historical feats: "all the many, many glorious deeds performed by Christian knights from this and other countries, every one of them authenticated and truthful" (Cervantes 1995: I.49), and thus reminds us of the essential connections between chivalric romance and fanciful national historiographies. He soon moves, however, to a passionate defense of readerly pleasure, creating his own archetypal romance for his listener's delectation:

Could there be anything more satisfying than to see, as it were, right in front of our eyes, an immense lake of bubbling, boiling pitch, crawling with hordes of wriggling serpents, and snakes, and lizards, and all sorts of fierce and terrifying animals – and then, right out of the middle of that lake, there comes a doleful voice, saying: “You, knight, whoever you may be, staring out at this fearful lake, if you yearn for the treasure hidden under these black waters, show the strength of your brave heart and hurl yourself into the middle of this black and burning tide . . .”

The valorous knight of course dives right in, only to find below the waters the pastoral and erotic plenitude with which romance rewards courage:

The sky in that place shines clearer, and the sun glows with a new brightness, and the knight sees spread out in front of him a peaceful forest, trees so luxuriantly green that just seeing them is sheer delight. Here there’s a small stream, whose cool fresh waters flow like liquid crystal over the fine sand and polished white stones, looking for all the world like powdered gold and the purest of pearls, and there is a fountain beautifully crafted in multi-colored jasper and smooth marble, and over there yet another fountain, more crudely fashioned, on which are clustered tiny mussel shells and the spiralled white and yellow dwellings that snails carry on their backs, all set so wildly and profusely, and so intermixed with bits of gleaming crystal and imitation emeralds that it forms a shape of such wild elaboration that art, in the process of imitating nature, seems to have overwhelmed it . . . And after seeing all this, what could be better than to find a crowd of lovely maidens coming through the gates? so charmingly and beautifully dressed that, were I now to describe them as they are described in these books, there would be no end to what I might say.

(Cervantes 1995: 1.50)

Don Quijote is hardly a suspicious reader. Engrossed in his own pleasure, and fully identifying with the rewarded knight, he fails to recognize this landscape with maidens as the threatening Bower of Bliss that so exercises Tasso and Spenser. Instead he relishes the relentless idealization of romance. Despite, or perhaps because of, those faults emphasized by Vives and other humanist moralists, such as exaggeration,

lack of verisimilitude, and sensuality, Don Quijote’s romance provides him with great satisfaction. His creation is also a rebuke of sorts to the severe strictures of classicism: the two unmatched fountains, whose “wild elaboration” goes beyond respectful imitation to “overwhelm” nature suggest a different set of aesthetic parameters altogether. Assessing romance according to Aristotelian rules will therefore never yield a full appreciation; only the proper consideration of variety, inspiring idealization, and readerly pleasure will ensure that the romances receive their due.

Don Quijote’s own failed adventures constantly undercut his claims for the viability, and essential reality, of the romances. The fantasy of his romance creation is immediately undercut when he claims that, although he is currently “shut up in a crate like a madman,” he expects his valor will soon result in his becoming an emperor, with sufficient riches to “exhibit the graciousness and generosity held here in my heart” (Cervantes 1995: 1.50). The material and the real continuously trump the idealization of romance, despite Don Quijote’s conscious attempt to distance himself from the everyday. When the would-be knight claims that he cannot pay the innkeeper because he does not carry money, for example, his host quickly points out the limitations of the romance world-view: “The innkeeper told him that on this matter he was quite mistaken, because although it was true that the stories omitted such details – for it seemed to their authors unnecessary to write about plain and essential subjects like money and clean shirts – this was no reason to think knight errants didn’t need money” (Cervantes 1995: 1.3). The innkeeper also mocks chivalric adventure by comparing it to his own picaresque wanderings, structurally analogous if very different in their material concerns and unflinching realism:

He told Don Quijote that he himself, in his youth, had given himself up to the same honorable profession, travelling to different parts of the world, seeking adventures, including such notable spots as the Fish Market at Málaga, the Laughing Islands, the Crossroads in Seville, the Marketplace in Segovia, the Olive Warehouse in Valencia, the Bandstand in Granada, the beach at San Lúcar, the horsetrack in Córdoba, the bars in Toledo, and all kinds of other places, where he’d had lots of practice being light on his feet, quick with his hands, perpetrating injustice, wooing widows, seducing virgins, cheating schoolboys and,



to make a long story short, making a name for himself in who knows how many courts and tribunals virtually everywhere in all of Spain.

(Cervantes 1995: 1.3)

The picaresque landscape limned by the innkeeper challenges the idealized geographies of romance, replacing valor with guile and knightly deeds with petty crime, and problematizing the way romance imagines heroism in terms of the individual. Such passages represent a new literary mode, anticipated by Ariosto: the tension between romance and realism, between idealization and the mundane everyday.

A key instance of this struggle in the text is Don Quijote's stubborn insistence that an ordinary barber's bowl is the enchanted golden helmet of Mambrino, from Boiardo and Ariosto (Cervantes 1995: I.25). Don Quijote tellingly picks up on the almost fetishistic value of objects in chivalric romance: magic rings, armor, and so forth, but chooses a laughable example. While Don Quijote insists on the authenticity of his trophy, for this is one of his few successful adventures, Sancho compromises, deeming the receptacle a *baciyelmo*, or basin-helmet (Cervantes 1995: I.45). The compromise marks the perspectivism of the text (Spitzer 1948: 59–60), and its constant negotiation between the textual authority of the romance precedents and the hard reality of Don Quijote's world.

For if Don Quijote is an uncritical reader of Ariosto, Cervantes reads him very carefully: like his predecessor, he points out both the anachronism of chivalric ideology and its contradictions, and plays constantly with narrative authority. The romance motif of pseudo-historicity is parodied in the narrator's claim to have found the second (and longest) part of *Don Quijote* among scrap papers for sale in the Toledo market. The Arabic manuscript, by a certain Cide Hamete Benengeli, was translated by a disenfranchised *morisco*, a Moor forcibly converted to Christianity, in exchange for two bushels of raisins. This lowly textual transaction replaces the *translatio studii* of Chrétien's prologue, or Ariosto's constant dialogue with his classical models. The Benengeli pre-text suggests how even the most clichéd motifs of romance may be imbued with ideological force and political currency: for Cervantes to ascribe his text to a disenfranchised people, and to claim an original in a proscribed language, is a forceful gesture of inclusiveness and tolerance. *Don Quijote* claims an original, and a textual transmission not in the classical languages of Greece or Rome,

or in the triumphant European vernaculars that emulate their authority, but in the language of the defeated Moors, those habitual romance enemies who in this case, paradoxically, produce and disseminate the text.

Beyond the parody of textual origins, Cervantes carefully distances his protagonist from the marvelous heroics of the *Furioso*:

As a mere hidalgo, a nobleman of the lowest possible rank, Don Quijote lacks social and economic position. His separation from the aristocratic and courtly world is foregrounded by geography. While Ariosto's knights travel the world and even go to the moon, Don Quijote searches for adventure in the dry and prosaic plains of La Mancha. His one celestial voyage is a hoax, and Clavileño a purposely wooden imitation of Ariosto's hippogryph.

(De Armas 2002: 43)

In a sense, *Don Quijote* chronicles the marginalization of chivalry, from military action to courtly conduct (Cascardi 2002: 70). By Part II, an increasingly disillusioned Don Quijote mourns the loss of true chivalry:

Our depraved age does not deserve that blessing, as former ages did, when knights errant shouldered and took on themselves the defense of kings, the protection of damsels, the succoring of orphans and wards of court, the punishment of the proud, and the rewarding of the humble. With most of our knights, today, it's the damasks, brocades, and other rich fabrics they wear that rustle as they go, rather than any coats of armor; knights no longer sleep out in the fields, open to all the rigors of the heavens, lying there, armed and armored head to foot; no longer do they try to snatch forty winks, as it's called, without pulling their feet out of the stirrups, but only leaning on their lances, as the knights of old used to do. No longer do they sweep out of a wood, here, and up a mountain, there, and then tramp along a barren, deserted seashore, usually in stormy, angry weather, and then find themselves, right at the water's edge, a tiny boat without oars or a sail or a mast or any rigging or tackle whatever, but with intrepid hearts launch themselves out onto the waves, abandoning themselves to the implacable waves that break across the bottomless sea, on which, one moment, they are borne up toward the sky, and, the next, are pulled deep into the abyss; and setting

Cervantes, and the English “pleasant histories” neglected by centuries of criticism are popular forms that literary history has paradoxically marginalized precisely because of their great success with readers, particularly those marked by their gender and class.

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### POST-RENAISSANCE TRANSFORMATIONS

The trajectory of romance after the Renaissance is complex and often paradoxical. While Greek and chivalric romance, in particular, continued to prove hugely popular with readers, critical predilection for new kinds of narrative fiction led from an initial embrace of French “heroic” romance in the seventeenth century to the gradual marginalization of romance as a “low” genre in subsequent periods. In this final chapter, I trace the apotheosis and broad popularity of romance in its “heroic,” “passionate,” and “Gothic” incarnations, and the neoclassical condemnations of its excesses. Despite its vicissitudes, romance survived marked changes in literary fashion. As in the Renaissance, ancient romances continued to be published side by side with new fiction. Longus’ *Daphnis and Chloe*, for example, was published more often in the eighteenth than in the sixteenth century (McMurran 2002: 55). In part, this popularity reflects how romance manages to adapt to the new fashion for “natural” or “orderly” narrative: some new editions of older romances abridge them, summarily rearrange them for the sake of clarity (Johnston 1964: 29–30), or even excise marvelous elements. Thus a helpful edition of *Ethiopica* from the early eighteenth century reorders the narrative to match the order in which



the events had occurred (Kern 1968: 522). Romance also endures as children's literature: fantasies deemed appropriate for tender intellects, to be given over on reaching mature judgment (Johnston 1964: 27–30). Both as narrative strategy and in specific generic allusions, romance survives also in the very forms of fiction that are most often contrasted to romance: the “truthful” novella, or the realist novel. This ostensible opposition masks the frequent reliance of newer forms of realism on older romance structures. Finally, romance comes to animate a broad swath of popular literature and film, a development that both confirms its enduring appeal and seals its critical fate as a “low” form.

This chapter attempts to explain why, with some highly self-conscious exceptions, most critics no longer refer to narrative fiction as romance except to denigrate it. In the opposition between novel and romance, for example, the former is always the privileged term, and the latter slightly suspect. Yet despite recurrent efforts somehow to leave it behind, modernity continues to engage with romance, alternately embracing and rejecting it as a privileged mode of access to an idealized past, a vehicle for nostalgia, magic, and the imagination. Romance continues to be a powerful cultural force, even if its very strengths, such as its adaptability, iterability, and popularity, eventually banish it to the realm of “genre literature” and hence to mass paperbacks purchased in drugstores and supermarkets.

### PASTORAL RETREAT, HEROIC EXCESS, PASSIONATE PLEASURE

There is no marked interruption in the fascination with various kinds of romance in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century France. Perhaps the best way to describe the transformation of romance in the latter period is by reference to its remarkable role within aristocratic culture. In the wake of translations of Longus and Heliodorus, the late sixteenth century sees a wave of French imitations of pastoral and Greek romances. In the seventeenth century these are developed into much longer narratives that attempt to convey a refined aesthetics of *bien-séance* (decorum) and *vraisemblance* (verisimilitude), which is used to distinguish them from the perceived improbabilities of chivalric romance. Simultaneously, they reflect an ethical preoccupation with Neoplatonism and *préciosité*, the term used to describe the elaborate code of refinement developed in the

aristocratic literary *salons* with which the romances are associated. Although the texts present the same framework as the Greek romances, and involve lovers separated by circumstance who must undergo endless perils and tribulations until they can finally achieve union, the characters' speech and behavior are often far more artificial and self-conscious than in the classical predecessors. At the same time, the texts become longer and more complex, with the typical romance running to several volumes and thousands of pages, its narrative continuously interrupted and lengthened by interpolated stories.

One central example of the “apotheosis” of romance in the early seventeenth century is Honoré d'Urfé's pastoral romance *Astrée*, published in five parts from 1607 to 1628. D'Urfé never finished it, leaving unachieved the deferred erotic consummation that animates so many hundreds of pages. Although *Astrée* is hardly an original text, revisiting the conventions of Jorge de Montemayor's *Diana*, Sidney's *Arcadia*, Cervantes' *Galatea*, and other sixteenth-century pastoral romances, and including other familiar genres in its interpolated narratives, it occupies a much more influential place within its culture. As critics have suggested, its vision of aristocrats who choose the life of shepherds, privileging virtue over wealth and repose over political influence creates a new, illusory sense of purpose for a disenfranchised aristocracy. Whereas Cervantes chooses to parody the irrelevance of the chivalric knight in the modern world, D'Urfé's romance, nearly contemporary with *Don Quijote*, constructs “for aristocratic readers a parochial and fictionalized historical vision of their chivalric feudal past by appropriating and modifying the conventions of romance” (Di Piero 1992: 49). In the words of another critic, “Loss of social and economic privilege is transmuted into a world-weary flight from the world” (Harth 1983: 47). As Erica Harth suggests, lack of political power is reconfigured as a gain in civility. And while wealth and influence are largely irrelevant in the pastoral world, origins are not: a recognition scene revealing a noble birth always resolves the seeming flouting of hierarchy when two people of unequal status fall in love.

One of the concomitant features of this romance sublimation of powerlessness into refinement is the genre's increasing association with a feminine and feminized urban aristocratic culture. Some of the most important figures in literary salons at the time, both as authors and as patrons, were women, notably Madame de Rambouillet and Madame de

These poked fun at the conventions of the heroic romance, and exploited the often hilarious distance between an emerging middle class of readers and the improbable aristocratic characters that inspired them (McDermott 1989: 127).

While the heroic romance proved as popular in England as in France, in numerous translations as well as in texts written in English, by the turn of the eighteenth century the reaction against this literary fashion was sometimes couched in terms of national difference. The popular writer Delarivier Manley celebrated a new, shorter kind of fiction for her compatriots: "These little pieces which have banish'd Romances are much more agreeable to the Brisk and Impetuous Humour of the English, who have naturally no Taste for long-winded Performances, for they have no sooner begun a Book but they desire to see the End of it" (cited in Williams 1970: 33). The "little pieces" Manley described are variously referred to by modern critics as passionate romances or amatory novellas, in which, after many prurient near-escapes, the heroine's virtue is violently overcome by the predatory hero. In fact, these narratives represent neither a complete departure from French models nor a fundamental shift from the mechanics of romance narrative. John Richetti explains the popular amatory novella as "a simplification or vulgarization" rather than a substantive departure: "The great majority of the amorous novellas written in English before 1740 merely condensed the excesses of the heroic romance, substituted a debased and inflated but simplified heroic rant for the involved *préciosité* of the romances, and used that style to deliver stories of some external complication but of extreme moral and emotional simplicity" (Richetti 1969: 172–3). He notes the appeal of their "rich opportunities for pathetic and erotic involvement" for a broad audience unable to identify with the more exotic aspects of the heroic romances or to command the infinite leisure necessary to peruse them (173).

Richetti's account, although commendably interested in the popularization of narrative, nonetheless introduces both the hierarchies and chronologies typical of so much criticism on the novel: developments in fiction are measured as "healthy" (173) when they contribute to the "birth" of the novel in the 1740s; the contributions of popular narrative and of female authors, while acknowledged, are largely distinguished from serious fiction. Although more recent criticism, particularly by feminist scholars, has done much to dismantle these hierarchies, and brought new attention

to bear on Manley, Eliza Haywood and other popular writers of sentimental fiction, the story of the birth of the novel has proved singularly resilient. In what follows, I will attempt to show how complicated it is to trace a clear separation between romance and novel, or a triumphant emergence of the latter that does not, in fact, rely heavily on the mechanics of the former.

## ROMANCE VERSUS NOVEL

I am afraid thy brains are a little disordered with Romances and Novels.  
Steele, *Spectator* 254, 1711

I focus here on English literature to assess the strange hierarchy introduced by juxtaposition of *novel* and *romance*, two terms used, at times interchangeably, for longer narrative fiction. As critics have observed, the very distinction does not exist in other European languages. For English literary history of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, however, the emergence of the novel, in its modern sense and as distinct from the shorter *novella*, and its separation from the romance are of central concern. More often than not, however, the distinction breaks down, with the terms used analogously, as in the quote above, or with critics' recognition that the traits considered exclusive to each kind of text actually appear in the other. The categories turn out to be remarkably flexible, to the point that part of what determines the characterization of a given text is its a priori valuation by critics. Thus an important aspect of romance as critical idiom in this period is its increasing marginalization as the less-favored category, associated with fantasy and the past instead of the realism increasingly valued by critical taste.

As I have noted above, in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, the fashion for French romances was in full swing in England. Although retrospectively the weakness for romances is attributed primarily to women, they were extremely popular with both male and female audiences, all consumed by the prevailing fashion. In Alexander Pope's satirical epic, *The Rape of the Lock* (1712), the young Baron "to Love an Altar built,/Of twelve vast *French* Romances, neatly gilt" (Pope 1940: II.37–8). Pope's satire targets not only the glorification and idealization of love ("neatly gilt") in the French romances but also their astounding

girth: twelve of them might well provide a hundred volumes to use as construction materials.

The doubling of the terms for longer narrative fiction serves in part to claim a new beginning in England. This move, cannily identified by Doody, erases all those predecessors in realism, such as *Don Quijote*, the picaresque, domestic drama, recent French antecedents, as well as older narrative fiction, to claim eighteenth-century England as the birthplace of the novel and the locus of romance's long-overdue humbling. This strategy for promoting a national, modern production animated a series of extraordinarily rich exchanges in the burgeoning literary magazines of the period, and it continued to carry weight well into the twentieth century. *The Rise of the Novel*, Ian Watt's extraordinarily influential 1957 study, presents Daniel Defoe, Samuel Richardson, and Henry Fielding as the originators of a triumphant new literary form. Although he is far more interested in antecedents, Michael McKeon, in his *The Origins of the English Novel 1600–1740*, also concludes, somewhat paradoxically, with a "climax" of the origins in Richardson and Fielding (McKeon 1987: 410). As Richetti points out, "The history of the novel has thus been handed down to us as the triumph of an enlightened realism over reactionary romance, the development or evolution of a superior literary instrument" (Richetti 1969: 2). This history also erases the connections between earlier narrative fiction and the "new" writing, both of which, Richetti observes, participate in the emergence of "mass art," providing pleasurable identification for a broad audience (Richetti 1969: 5).

A survey of literary criticism from the period reveals that both authors and critics recognized the close similarities between romance and novel. In fact, for decades the terminology remained indistinct. Even though William Congreve, writing in 1691, already established a distinction between the "miraculous," "impossible" romance and the "familiar" novel (cited in Williams 1970: 27), the categories were still in flux in the middle of the eighteenth century. In fact, critics have argued that Congreve himself cannot be thinking of "novel" in the modern sense, but instead contrasts romance and *novella*. On the one hand, the OED cites several uses of *novel* for an extended narrative (distinct from a *novella*) long before the "new" writing of Richardson and Fielding. On the other hand, even at mid-century, Samuel Johnson, writing in the *Rambler*, still considers the popular fiction that others call the novel a type of romance:

The works of fiction with which the present generation seems more particularly delighted, are such as exhibit life in its true state, diversified only by accidents that daily happen in the world, and influenced by passions and qualities which are really to be found in conversing with mankind.

This kind of writing may be termed not improperly the comedy of romance, and is to be conducted nearly by the rules of comic poetry. Its province is to bring about natural events by easy means, and to keep up curiosity without the help of wonder; it is therefore precluded from the machines and expedients of the heroic romance, and can neither employ giants to snatch away a lady from the nuptial rites, nor knights to bring her back from captivity; it can neither bewilder its personages in deserts, nor lodge them in imaginary castles.

(cited in Williams 1970: 142–3)

Johnson values the new writing for its proximity to lived experience, yet emphasizes continuity over any rupture with tradition. Thus in the new comic fiction "an adventurer is levelled with the rest of the world, and acts in such scenes of the universal drama, as may be the lot of any other man" (cited in Williams 1970: 144), but Johnson still recognizes him as an adventurer, analogous to the hero of earlier, heroic, romance.

Conversely, in an influential essay on the "new species of writing" that appeared shortly after Johnson's piece, romance and novel are lumped together as the "old" writing, while the new, for the most part, goes nameless (the author occasionally refers to it as "biography" or "history"):

Sometime before this new Species of Writing appear'd, the World had been pester'd with Volumes, commonly known by the Name of Romances, or Novels, Tales, &c. fill'd with any thing which the wildest imagination could suggest. In all these Works, Probability was not required: The more extravagant the Thought, the more exquisite the Entertainment. Diamond Palaces, flying Horses, brazen Towers, &c. were here look'd upon as proper, and in Taste. In short, the most finish'd Piece of this kind, was nothing but Chaos and Incoherency. France first gave Birth to this strange Monster, and England was proud to import it among the rest of her Neighbour's Follies. A Deluge of Impossibility overflow'd the Press. Nothing was receiv'd with any kind of Applause, that did not appear under the Title of a Romance, or Novel; and Common

privileging of reason, order, and proportion. The gradual construction of a "Gothic" tradition to counter the classical legacy of Greece and Rome involved a rediscovery of the literary heritage of the Middle Ages and Renaissance, which had largely been neglected in favor of the classics. In the narrow sense, "Gothic" referred primarily to the production of ancient Northern Europeans, the Goths or barbarians who had opposed Rome with their own traditions of liberty and social organization. More broadly, the Gothic designated everything that was not classical: both the vernacular works of the Middle Ages, and those Renaissance texts that eschewed the "rediscovered" classical heritage in favor of "native" traditions. Given the deep engagement of medieval romance with its classical antecedents, and the mixed allegiances of Ariosto, Tasso, and Spenser, this kind of distinction seems to us deeply problematic. Yet for eighteenth-century critics such as Richard Hurd, Thomas Percy, and Thomas Warton, neglected romance, broadly construed to include everything from ballads to chivalric tales, presented an alternative to the classical and a rich source for a native literary tradition.

For Hurd, the rehabilitation of the Gothic required proving that chivalric romance, in particular, reflected the reality of an age, and presented its own kind of logic. In his *Letters on Chivalry and Romance* (1762), Hurd provides an extended comparison between "Greek and Gothic times" (Hurd 1963: 26–38 and *passim*). Although comparing the ostracized culture to the gold standard of Greece seems to undermine Hurd's claims to relativism, the exercise is an attempt to prove that the productions of a chivalric age are as heroic, and thus as worthy, as Greek epic poetry. Hurd revisits the old Italian quarrels over Ariosto and Tasso, reminding his readers that although the Italians themselves now value their tradition, the fashion for French neoclassicism has led to its neglect elsewhere (79–81). More importantly, in an English context the French fashion has deprived Spenser of his rightful place, and exalted truth over fancy: "What we have gotten by this revolution, you will say, is a great deal of good sense. What we have lost, is a world of fine fabling" (120).

But Hurd's project goes beyond antiquarianism and the recovery of the past. He also prescribes a new set of rules to replace Aristotelian neoclassicism. Not all poetry, he insists, must obey "the trite maxim of *following nature*" (93, emphasis in original). While realism has its place in poetry on "men and manners," the more "sublime and creative poetry

... addressing itself solely or principally to the Imagination," need not observe the same "cautious rules of credibility" (94–5). Instead, Hurd exalts "fancies . . . not only more gallant, but, on a change of the scene, more sublime, more terrible, more alarming, than those of the classic fablers" (54–5). Thus, not only is the Gothic recuperated, it surpasses the classical in its direct address to the imagination, becoming the poetic wellspring *par excellence*.

Two important developments in the history of romance follow the Gothic revival that Hurd advocates, although in both cases the causal connections are far from straightforward, and (as usual) the terminology is vexing. First, the last decades of the eighteenth century see the introduction of a distinct new genre that quickly achieves great popularity: the Gothic romance, which self-consciously revives "medieval" motifs in often sensational tales. Second, the privileging of the imagination over reason, and thus the revindication of romance forms, becomes one of the hallmarks of the movement we now know as Romanticism. As both the Gothic and Romanticism are explored in separate volumes in this series, I will not give an extended account of either here, but will simply position them *vis-à-vis* the larger problem of romance.

## GOTHIC AS GENRE

From its beginnings, the Gothic romance, or novel, is explicitly presented as a mixture of new and old. The genre is self-consciously inaugurated by Horace Walpole, with *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), a fantastically popular tale that has appeared in over 100 editions since its first publication. Sir Walter Scott, in his introduction to the Edinburgh edition of 1811, praises it as "the first modern attempt to found a tale of amusing fiction upon the basis of the ancient romances of chivalry" (cited in Walpole 1964: viii). *Otranto* establishes some of the most enduring conventions of the genre: ancient castles complete with secret vaults and passageways; family secrets; obscure prophecies; ghosts and apparitions; hidden identities. More importantly, it exacerbates the narrative tension attendant on what Richetti calls "persecuted innocence," a constant among various forms of popular narrative in the eighteenth century, which in this case involves an innocent princess pursued by the lascivious and immoral father of the prince she was to wed.

But whereas early novels such as *Pamela* owe an unacknowledged debt to romance, the Gothic self-consciously looks back, combining modern skepticism with an appreciation of the emotional and aesthetic effects of the marvelous. Walpole's two prefaces are characterized by their knowingness about literary fashion. The preface to the first edition, in which he pretends to be the translator of an obscure text – a venerable strategy since Chrétien and Cervantes – sets the tone for the Gothic as dark and medieval, yet nonetheless refined:

The following work was found in the library of an ancient catholic family in the north of England. It was printed at Naples, in the black letter, in the year 1529. How much sooner it was written does not appear. The principal incidents are such as were believed in the darkest ages of christianity; but the language and conduct have nothing that favours of barbarism. The style is the purest Italian.

(Walpole 1964: 3)

The “translator” then attempts to situate the text in a Counter-Reformation context, as an example of ancient superstitions cynically promoted:

Letters were then in their most flourishing state in Italy, and contributed to dispel the empire of superstition, at that time so forcibly attacked by the reformers. It is not unlikely that an artful priest might endeavour to turn their own arms on the innovators; and might avail himself of his abilities as an author to confirm the populace in their ancient errors of superstitions.

(3)

This hypothetical priest, then, uses the narrative to “enslave a hundred vulgar minds.” Yet in the reader's own day such strategies are clearly obsolete. Instead, the translator claims, the text “can only be laid before the public at present as a matter of entertainment” (4), and apologetically at that:

Even as such, some apology for it is necessary. Miracles, visions, necromancy, dreams, and other preternatural events, are exploded now even from romances . . . Belief in every kind of prodigy was so established in those dark ages, that an author would not be faithful to

the *manners* of the times who should omit all mention of them. He is not bound to believe them himself, but he must represent his actors as believing them.

(4, emphasis in original)

The preface recontextualizes the romance marvelous as historically appropriate, and no longer a dangerous fraud. The modern reader, like the author, will not be taken in by it, but should nonetheless appreciate its accuracy. Beyond this “*air of the miraculous*” (4, emphasis in original), the “translator” insists, the text is perfectly natural: “Allow the possibility of the facts, and all the actors comport themselves as persons would do in their situation” (4). In the preface to the second edition, where Walpole drops his pretense of translation, he is explicit about his “attempt to blend the two kinds of romance, the ancient and the modern”:

In the former, all was imagination and improbability: in the latter, nature is always intended to be, and sometimes has been, copied with success. Invention has not been wanting; but the great resources of fancy have been damned up, by a strict adherence to common life . . . The author of the following pages thought it possible to reconcile the two kinds. Desirous of leaving the powers of fancy at liberty to expatiate through the boundless realms of invention, and thence of creating more interesting situations, he wished to conduct the mortal agents in his drama according to the rules of probability; in short, to make them think, speak, and act, as it might be supposed mere men and women would do in extraordinary positions.

(7–8)

Yet despite Walpole's emphasis on nature, and the rationality attributed to his contemporary audience, what makes the Gothic so popular is precisely its gallery of marvelous and otherworldly topoi. In fact, although early imitators of Walpole, such as Clara Reeve, repeat his proclaimed goal of combining “the most attractive and interesting circumstances of the ancient romance and modern novel” (Reeve, *The Old English Baron* [1778], cited in Walpole 1964: vii), the genre soon becomes associated with the most fantastical elements of the romance tradition.

These “well-wrought scenes of artificial terror which are formed by a sublime and vigorous imagination,” critics conjectured, provided a

Hollywood film. Individual works often take up romance topoi, but beyond the topical connections there are important similarities in the way of telling a story. The elements that some critics find so depressingly predictable, such as the gloss, the happy ending, the limited depiction of a world where wealth itself is idealized, suggest how visual representations, too, can favor a formulaic idealization. Of course, film can also reflect on this dynamic: in Neil La Bute's *Nurse Betty* (2000), a young woman escapes unspeakable violence by retreating into a fantasy soap-opera universe. Her quest takes her from Kansas to Los Angeles, to seek out the "doctor" she admires in her favorite hospital melodrama. Though reality fails to conform to her expectations, she perseveres in her quixotic attempts to seek refuge in the idealized on-screen world manufactured by the studios, with often hilarious results.

Perhaps, then, the attempt to circumscribe romance to popular or to "high" forms is fundamentally misguided. In its broadest, most abstract form, romance functions as a cluster of narrative strategies that can be employed with greater or lesser degrees of self-consciousness to produce genre-effects in both high and low narratives. Although we can identify certain recurrent traits – such as delay and deferral, the pleasure of the reader, a fascination with female vulnerability, an emphasis on the marvelous over the quotidian, a focus on the travails of the individual, a nostalgia for other times and places – the flexibility of romance suggests that it will continue to appear in new forms, rendering any definition necessarily provisional. One might even argue that romance as strategy exceeds the bounds of literary or artistic creation, to animate, say, political narratives of idealization and deferral. What seems certain is that romance is hardly superseded by the novel; indeed, the teleological model of the progress of narrative appears, from this perspective, all too simplistic. Instead, despite its frequent demotion in literary hierarchies, romance remains an essential critical idiom, an indispensable tool for understanding the power of narrative to captivate and enchant.

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