

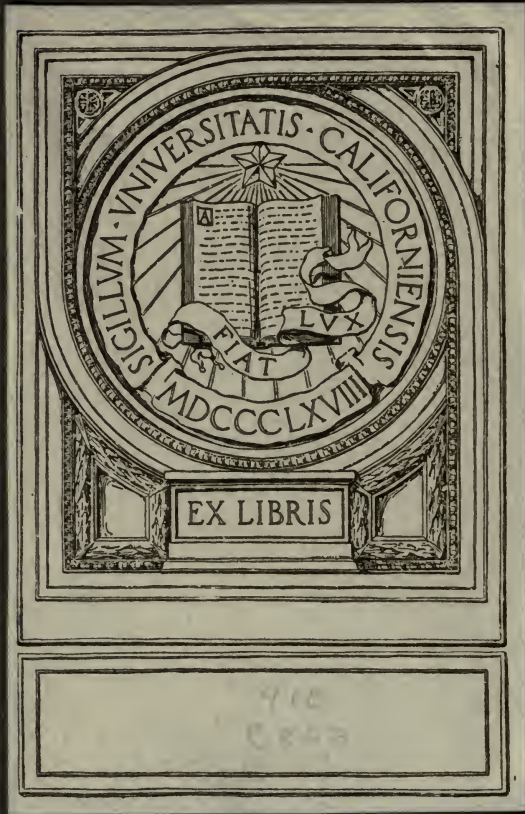
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WARTON LECTURE ON ENGLISH POETRY  
II

The Connexion between Ancient  
and Modern Romance

By

W. J. Courthope, C.B.

Fellow of the Academy

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II

THE CONNEXION BETWEEN ANCIENT  
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By W. J. COURTHOPE, C.B.

FELLOW OF THE ACADEMY

*Read* October 25, 1911.

THE besetting sin of the Classical Renaissance was the sacrifice of the spirit of imaginative matter to the mechanism of literary form. It was reasonable that the Humanists, in their enthusiasm for the rediscovered masterpieces of Greek and Roman literature, should recoil from the barbarous diction of the late Mediaeval Schoolmen. But, when they prescribed the revived classic forms as the only legitimate moulds of expression for all kinds of modern thought, they forgot, on the one hand, that the great monuments of ancient literature were the product of a spirit which, having passed away from the world, could never reappear exactly in its former body, and, on the other, that the despised mediaeval forms, however lifeless they might now seem, were once instinct with vital meaning. The external Classical Form was to them an idol of style, initiating, as Mr. Ker told us in his inaugural lecture, a movement of Culture which tended to become stilted and artificial, while it also encouraged the Humanist critic to regard his own perceptions as the final and absolute standard of judgement. Hence such arrogant pronouncements as that cited by Mr. Ker from Lowell on the Poetry of the Provençals, and the comprehensive sneer of M. Taine at mediaeval literature as a whole, noticed in the Preface to my *History of English Poetry*.

Thomas Warton deserves all the praise that has been awarded to him as a pioneer of the reaction against this literary intolerance. The generous recognition extended by him to the work of the older English poets was of the greatest value in widening the area of

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national taste, and his industry in collecting the remains of mediaeval antiquity did much to counteract the tendency of his age to proscribe all the productions of European imagination before the Classical Revival. The only thing wanting to make him stand forth as a bright example of the beneficial results arising from an alliance between literary and antiquarian criticism was historic appreciation of mediaeval form as well as of mediaeval matter. Unfortunately, as his correspondence with Gray shows, he restricted his historical aim to antiquarian collection, and, though he was an excellent Humanist critic, he was only a second-rate antiquary. A typical scholar of the Renaissance, he was inclined to judge every characteristic work of the Middle Ages, from a superior point of view, as the product of a barbarous author. 'We,' he says, speaking of *The Divine Comedy*, 'are surprised that a poet should write one hundred cantos on hell, paradise, and purgatory.'<sup>1</sup> And the apology he offers to the reader for Dante's procedure is instinct with the condescension of the Classical Humanist: 'This prolixity is partly owing to the want of art and method, and is common to all early compositions, in which everything is related circumstantially without rejection, and not in the general terms which are used by modern writers.'<sup>1</sup> Had Warton regarded *The Divine Comedy*, not simply as an antiquarian curiosity, but with historic sympathy, he must have seen that, so far from the mode of its composition being 'surprising', the marvel would have been if such an artist as Dante had treated his materials otherwise than he did; the Humanist critic would, in fact, have found the form of the poem, from a historical point of view, not less worthy of his study than the matter.

Precisely the same defect may be noted in the criticism of the mediaeval Romances by the leading literary historians at the close of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries. All of these critics were men of taste and refinement; but, as they did not take the trouble to realize historically the spirit of the Romance-writers, they neglected the lesson to be learned from the form of their compositions, and so contrived to convey to the reader a wrong impression about the subject-matter.

Thomas Warton, for instance, says of the origin of Romantic Fiction:—

'*That peculiar and arbitrary species of Fiction, which we commonly call Romantic, was entirely unknown to the writers of Greece and Rome. It appears to have been imported into Europe by a people*

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Warton on Dante. Cited by Mr. Ker, in his Inaugural Warton Lecture, November 16, 1910.

whose modes of thinking and habits of invention are not natural to that country. It is generally supposed to have been borrowed from the Arabians.<sup>1</sup>

Thomas Percy, who had treated the subject of the Romances before Warton, took an entirely different view of their origin, but, like him, thought of Romance as a 'peculiar and arbitrary species of Fiction'.<sup>2</sup> John Colin Dunlop, in his *History of Fiction*, recognized that the origin of Romance was far more complex than had been supposed by either Percy or Warton, but agreed with them in thinking that the term essentially involved what he called 'those wild and improbable fictions, those supernatural ornaments which form the machinery of Romance and which alone should be termed Romantic Fiction'.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, he classed as 'Romantic Fiction' the Greek Novels, the machinery of which is scarcely at all dependent on the presence of 'supernatural ornaments'. And, though his enumeration of the works of 'that peculiar and arbitrary species of Fiction, which we call Romantic', was far more elaborate and exhaustive than what was attempted by his predecessors, Dunlop arranged his materials without any reference to their sequence in order of time, thus ignoring the gradual modifications which successive generations of mediaeval Romance-writers introduced into their compositions. He gives the following reason for making his account of the Romances as exhaustive as possible:—

'Even the dulness of the fictions of Chivalry is, in some degree, instructive, as acquainting us with the monotonous mode of life which prevailed during the periods that gave them birth, while at the same time, by a comparison of the intellectual powers exhibited in romance with the exertions of the same age in law, theology, and other pursuits, we are enabled to form an estimate of the employment of genius in those distant periods, and to behold in what arts and sciences it was most successfully displayed.'<sup>4</sup>

The 'dulness of the fictions of Chivalry' was in fact regarded by the Humanist critic as a sufficient excuse for his omission to examine their literary form, and Dunlop makes no attempt to account for the difference of spirit displayed respectively in the *Roman de Brut* and the Romance of *Amadis of Gaul*. Yet the difference is fundamental.

The term 'Roman' in the beginning, so far from implying conscious fiction, signified *history* orally recited in the Romance language,

<sup>1</sup> Dissertation 1 in Warton's *History of English Poetry*.

<sup>2</sup> Percy, *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, vol. iii, p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> Dunlop, *History of Fiction* (1838), vol. i, p. 116.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. i, p. 351.

as opposed to history written in Latin. The *Roman de Brut* and the *Roman de Troie* were new versions, in the vulgar tongue, of the *Historia Regum Britanniae* of Geoffrey of Monmouth and the *De Excidio Trojae Historia* of Dares Phrygius. Wace and Benoît de Ste. More added the metrical style of the Norman minstrel to the supposed history of the ecclesiastical chronicler and the pseudo-Trojan forger. Their history was indeed of a very different kind from the narrative of a Thucydides, a Livy, or a Tacitus; but, carrying with it the authority of a Latin original, it offered a sufficient warrant to unsophisticated audiences that they were not wasting their time in listening to idle fictions, but were improving their minds with solid knowledge. On the other hand, the Norman 'trouvère' naturally imported into the new and authoritative historical matter the free spirit and manner of the minstrel, so that, in the earliest 'romans', fabulous genealogy and national legend form, as they did in the 'Chansons de Geste', leading features of the composition.

But about the middle and end of the twelfth century, and midway into the thirteenth, the 'romans' of Chrestien de Troyes, followed, as they were, by tales like *Flore et Blanchefleur* and the lays of Marie de France, exhibit a radical change of form. They resemble indeed the 'romans' of Wace and Benoît de Ste. More in their octosyllabic verse and in their continued claim to be the vehicles of true history. As regards the latter point, Chrestien de Troyes says, in the beginning of his *Roman de Cliget*: 'This history I found written in one of the books of the library of Monsignor Paul at Beauvais, which is witness to the truth of the history and makes it worthy of belief.'<sup>1</sup> Marie of France, in one of her 'lays', says that she had at first intended to make a good history, and translate it from Latin into Romance. But, finding this path too much trodden, she resolved to make a new departure in the language of Romance from the Breton lays, which she, or at least her audience, regarded as historical, and she declared that the fidelity of her reproduction might be verified by reference to MSS. preserved in a Monastery at Caerleon.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, her poems and the tales of Chrestien, instead of being histories like those of Wace—that is to say, narratives of battles between rival races and opposing chieftains—relate the adventures of individuals, which depend for their main interest on complications caused by love. *l'*

How are we to account for this remarkable revolution in romantic form? The antiquarian critic replies at once: 'By the influence of the Celtic element in the composition'; and he naturally applies all

<sup>1</sup> *Histoire littéraire de France*, vol. xv, 'Chrestien de Troyes.'

<sup>2</sup> *Poésies de Marie de France* (Roquefort), vol. i, p. 543.



his industry to discover the existence of the original authorities referred to by Chrestien and Marie de France. His answer is, I think, obviously inadequate. I fully believe, indeed, that many of the materials employed by these poets were derived from Celtic sources. Chrestien and his successors doubtless found in existence, in Celtic folk-lore, some kind of embryonic legends of the 'chanson de geste' order, which provided them with a foundation for their tales about the Round Table: the names of the knights, for example, and the magical episodes which enliven their narratives, have an evidently Celtic character. But no connected story of adventure, whether of love or war, has yet been discovered among the really ancient remains of Celtic poetry. On the other hand, many of the complications in the 'romans' arise out of conditions which are peculiar to the feudal society contemporaneous with the appearance of the poem in the Romance tongue, and have little significance in the society of the primitive Celtic age. The refined casuistry of love, which provides so much of the machinery in the romances of the Round Table, speaks of itself to the influence of the 'Cours d'Amour'; and the relations of Tristram and Lancelot to the wives of their sovereigns are illustrations of particular offences, *lèse-majesté* and *lèse-féodalité*, involved in the law of feudalism, as it existed in the twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth centuries.

The natural inference from these facts is, I think, that, from whatever source the materials in the new class of 'roman' may be derived, the free handling of them is due to the invention of the 'trouvère', and their general character to the taste of the contemporaneous Anglo-Norman or French Society. When Chrestien de Troyes and Marie de France speak as if they were reproducing in the Romance language some historical tale which may be found written in Latin or Celtic, we may conclude that they are merely employing a device similar to the fiction of Chaucer in a later age, who pretends that his story of *Troilus and Criseyde* is based on the authority of a Latin historian named Lollius, though we know that whatever in the poem was not of his own invention was mostly derived from Boccaccio's *Filostrato*. In other words, through all the metrical 'romans' of the second period, the inventive spirit of the Northern minstrel is seen to be prevailing over the professed matter of fact of the ecclesiastical historian.

This accounts for the character of the second class of 'roman' on the *historical* side, but it leaves the revolution in *poetical* form still unexplained. So abrupt a change from the style of the old 'chanson de geste' as appears in the Romances of Chrestien and

Marie de France could hardly have been achieved without a suggestion at least from some pre-existing model. Warton supposes that the poetical ornaments of the romances were borrowed ready-made from the Arabians, and thinks that the features they present have no analogy to any form of fiction known to the Greeks and Romans. But the supernatural machinery of Romance in its final development—giants, enchanters, and the like—scarcely enters into the structure of Chrestien's 'romans'. Nor are the most marked features in some of his tales—the adventures of a pair of faithful but unfortunate lovers—specially characteristic of Arabian fiction. On the other hand, such adventures constitute the essence of the interest in the tales of the Greek Novelists.

The Greek novel was still being produced for the entertainment of the Eastern world, while the Crusades were attracting the chivalry of the West. Eustathius' story, *Hysminias and Hysmine*, for instance, is believed to have been written in the twelfth century, during the reign of the Emperor Manuel Comnenus.<sup>1</sup> Why then should the errant 'trouvères' of the Crusades have shown less enterprise in learning enough Greek to provide them with hints for the plots of their 'romans' than the modern British playwright shows in borrowing ideas for his dramas from the French? Chrestien himself—a retainer of Philip, Count of Flanders, killed at the siege of Acre in 1191—in seeking fresh suggestions for his minstrelsy, would have had before him such tales as the *Habrocomas and Anthia* of Xenophon of Ephesus; the *Ethiopica* of Heliodorus, sometimes called *Theagenes and Chariclea*; the *Cleitophon and Leucippe* of Achilles Tatius; and the *Daphnis and Chloe*, usually assigned to a writer called Longus. These prose fictions are the last stage in the decadence of Greek literature. They are the remote and degenerate offspring of the Attic drama, after dramatic interest had passed from the moral didacticism of the Chorus to the mechanical evolution of the plot; and the attention paid by the novelists to the imaginative surprises involved in the adventures of the *dramatis personae*—in *ἀναγνώρισις* (or recognition) for example, and in *περιπέτεια* (or reversal of Fortune)—shows that the taste of the Greek reader, even at this late period, was determined by the same kind of critical principles as we find declared in the *Poetics* of Aristotle in regard to Tragedy and Epic Poetry. All of the stories are full of those 'moving accidents by flood and field' which entranced the imagination of Desdemona, and especially of misfortunes showing that 'the course of true love never did run smooth'.

<sup>1</sup> Dunlop, *History of Fiction*, vol. i, p. 77.

Poor as their art was, it was much in advance of any method of story-telling known to the 'trouvère'; and the influence of the Greek example begins to show itself even in the superficial structural features of the 'romans' of the twelfth century. The alteration of the titles of the tales from the *Roman de Troie* or *Roman de Brut* to *Enid and Eric*, *Ywain and Gawain*, *Flore et Blanchefleur*, &c., indicates in itself an imitation of *Theagenes and Chariclea*, *Cleitophon and Leucippe*, *Habrocomas and Anthia*, marking the transition from the ethnic 'chansons de geste' to the 'romance' of individual knights and lovers.

But we have many more direct proofs of the acquaintance of the 'trouvères' with the Greek Novels. The early metrical tale of *Flore et Blanchefleur* shows plain traces in its structure of the study of *Theagenes and Chariclea*; while *Habrocomas and Anthia* provided Chrestien de Troyes with several suggestions for the plot of his *Roman de Cliget*. The last-named 'roman' furnishes perhaps the best example of the results produced by the 'trouvère's' study of Greek fiction. We find that one of its most striking episodes is borrowed directly from the *Habrocomas and Anthia* of Xenophon. In that story the heroine, Anthia, to save herself from a marriage with Perilaus, governor of Cilicia, and to preserve her troth-plight to Habrocomas, procures from a travelling physician a soporific draught which produces the appearance of death and causes her to be buried alive.<sup>1</sup> Like Juliet, she revives in the tomb, but, unlike her, is at last happily restored to her lover. The same thing, *mutatis mutandis*, happens to Fenice, the heroine of the *Roman de Cliget*. Being in love with Cliget, but married against her will to the Emperor of the East, she procures a delay in the consummation of the marriage, and is afterwards buried alive in a tomb, animation being suspended by a sleeping draught.<sup>2</sup> An imitation of this kind tells its own story, and the source of the invention is revealed still more clearly by the identity of the leading motive in the minds of the Greek and French authors, namely, the preservation of fidelity to each other by two lovers separated by a thousand trials and misfortunes. When Anthia is finally restored to Habrocomas, she addresses him as follows:—

'My dear lord and husband, I have recovered you at last after long wanderings by land and sea, and, having escaped the threats of robbers, the treachery of pirates, the injuries of chains, tombs, poisons, and sepulchres, I return to you, my soul's life, my Habrocomas, just as I was when I left you at Tyre to be carried off into Syria. . .

<sup>1</sup> Xenophon, *Ephesiacorum* lib. iii.

<sup>2</sup> *Histoire littéraire de France*, vol. xv, 'Chrestien de Troyes.'

I have invented all the arts that modesty allows in order to preserve my fidelity unimpaired for you. And you, my Habrocomas, have you kept the same honest counsel? Has any one seemed to you fairer than myself? Has no one sought to make you forget me and your plighted faith?'<sup>1</sup>

Precisely the same question is put by Fenice to Cliget when she has related to him the arts by which she had escaped the consummation of her marriage with the Emperor.<sup>2</sup> But, though Chrestien is indebted for many of his inventions to Greek predecessors, he shows himself to be no servile imitator. He feels rightly that the characters, manners, and sentiments of his Greek model are of an effeminate kind, quite unfitted to gratify the taste of his warlike western audience, and he is careful to invest his story in these respects with an atmosphere suited to feudal circumstances. No 'roman'-writer of the twelfth or thirteenth centuries seems to have tried to imitate *Daphnis and Chloe*; nor is this surprising in a rough and uncivilized age, not yet prepared to appreciate the pastoral sentimentalism which appealed so strongly to the sophisticated taste of later and more lettered epochs. Whether the passion of Love be used for the purpose of complicating adventurous action, as in the *Romance of Tristram*, or for enforcing ascetic doctrine, as in *The Quest of the Holy Grail*, the treatment of it by the mediaeval romance-writer necessarily differs profoundly from its treatment by the Greek novelist.

To reduce such metrical tales of love and chivalry to prose was an obvious improvement, which seemed to make them approach more closely at once to the vividness of Greek fiction and to the gravity of Latin history. Such is evidently the motive of the prose 'romans' of the Round Table, produced, from the end of the twelfth to the beginning of the fourteenth century, by Helie and Robert de Borron, Walter Map, Lucas de Gast, and Rusticien of Pisa.<sup>3</sup> In these compositions the element of poetic fiction becomes gross and palpable. Nevertheless, the strength of the historic tradition manifests itself in the constant reiteration, by the authors, of the fable that they are translating from Latin originals. Thus, in the opening of *Gyron le Courtois*, the writer, addressing his readers, says:—

'Know you truly that this book was translated from the book of

<sup>1</sup> Xenophon, *Ephesiacorum* lib. v.

<sup>2</sup> *Histoire littéraire de France*, vol. xv, 'Chrestien de Troyes.'

<sup>3</sup> I am aware that some scholars believe the earlier romances in prose to have been composed before those in metre, but, in the absence of all positive evidence on the subject, I do not think that the view I have put forward need be affected by a theory which is in itself improbable.

Monsignor Edward, king of England, at that time when he passed beyond the sea, in the service of our Lord, to gain possession of the Holy Sepulchre. And master Rusticien of Pisa compiled this Romaunt, for from that book of King Edward of England he translated all the marvellous adventures that are in this book.’<sup>1</sup>

After a narrative full of the most extravagant descriptions and incidents, Rusticien leaves his heroes and heroines in sorry plight, but with the alleviating announcement:—

‘How they were delivered I make no mention, inasmuch as the Latin book ends their adventures at this point; but the Romaunt of King Meliadus of Lyonesse tells the manner in which they were delivered and by whom.’<sup>2</sup>

So long as a ‘Latin Book’ could be cited, no limits needed to be set to the invention of the prose romance-writer. The Greater *Romance of the Grail*, for example, was a recast of an earlier and shorter ‘roman’ with the same title, in which apparently the ‘trouvère’ was thought not to have availed himself sufficiently of his opportunities for introducing supernatural incident; and as there was authority for many of the episodes in the apocryphal *Gospel of Nicodemus*, the revised and longer fairy-tale was received with general satisfaction.<sup>3</sup> Sometimes, indeed, the Latin text of the Chronicle itself provided the required matter of marvel and mystery. The Chronicle ascribed to Charlemagne’s contemporary, Turpin, Archbishop of Rheims—a work in reality of some monastic writer in the twelfth century—furnished the veracious authority for those daemonic and angelic agencies in the adventures of the Emperor and his peers which so greatly delighted the humour of the Italian poets of the Renaissance.<sup>4</sup> As late as the age of Caxton, the record of the wonderful feats of Arthur and his knights was regarded as mainly worthy of perusal, because the prose romances of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries were held by Society to be true history.<sup>5</sup>

By insensible stages we thus arrive at the last class of ‘roman’ which answers completely to the description of Warton and Dunlop, namely, an ‘arbitrary species of fiction’, consisting mainly of stories about ‘giants, dragons, and enchanted castles, which form the seasoning of the adventures of chivalry’. These are the romances which turned the brain of Don Quixote and excited the wrath of

<sup>1</sup> Dunlop, *History of Fiction*, vol. i, p. 233.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. i, p. 237.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. i, pp. 159–72 (1888. Addition by Mr. Henry Wilson, the Editor).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* (1888), vol. i, pp. 274–5.

<sup>5</sup> Caxton’s Preface to Malory’s *King Arthur*.

Cervantes. They were mostly produced, or at least found the most appreciative readers, in the Spanish peninsula during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and all of them proceed on the method of composition initiated by *Amadis of Gaul*. The element of fiction in them entirely overpowers the element of history and the imitation of contemporary manners. No profession is made that the events related are recorded even in the legends of the country. The characters are purely ideal. The knight-heroes, as a rule, are illegitimate, and have been exposed at their birth. Their names—Felixmarte, Esplandian, and the like—are plainly the invention of the authors; the countries through which they wander are often unrecognized by geography; the enemies whom they encounter are giants, dragons, and magicians; and the ladies who fall in love with them are Eastern princesses, fairies, and enchantresses. Tribal genealogies disappear from the story; but, by way of compensation, the family descent of the fictitious heroes is traced through an endless series of generations, so that the family of Amadis or Palmerin never seems to fail in producing a hero capable of fascinating the world with his impossible perfections. In fact, the invention of the oral minstrel—the direct product of tribal tradition—has given place to the art of the professional novelist—the literary purveyor for the amusement of civil society—and, while the characters presented to the reader show an ideal consistency much in advance of the Romances of the Round Table, only a boundless credulity can accept them as images of men and women who have once moved on the earth's surface. Yet even in these 'arbitrary fictions' the titles maintain a faint pretence of history, which indicates the metrical 'roman' as the remote source of their being. One famous Romance destroyed by the Barber and Curate, Don Quixote's rationalizing friends, was called *The Chronicle of the famous Knight Lisuarte of Greece, son of Esplandian, and of Perion, son of Amadis of Gaul*. The alternative title of the Tenth Book of *Amadis of Gaul* is *The Chronicle of Don Florisel de Niquea, son of Amadis of Greece*.

To sum up what has been said—If the method of classification I have employed be correct, it follows that Warton's view of the origin of Romantic Fiction is wrong in three points—(1) in describing Mediaeval Romance as an 'arbitrary species of fiction'; (2) in supposing this species of fiction to have been imported ready-made into Europe by the Arabians; (3) in assuming the form of the Romances to have been free of all influence from Greek and Roman literature. In point of fact, Mediaeval Romance was the result of a gradual process of evolution, being an imitation, from age to age, of the contemporary

manners of feudal society, veiled under the garb of supposed history. It was, at the outset, the work partly of the Norman or French minstrel, partly of the monkish chronicler, the latter of whom furnished in Latin the historical matter which the former moulded into such poetical form as the Romance language of the time admitted. Very soon the poetical genius of the 'trouvère' prevailed over the chronicler's profession of historical truth, and the 'roman' assumed many of those features of the Greek fictions which excited the admiration of the minstrel. The historical element continued to decay, the fictitious to increase, until at last what was once generally regarded as a species of veracious history came to be recognized as a mere imaginative entertainment, and Ancient Romance in its original sense expired.

Modern Romance proceeds in an ascending scale from a base exactly opposite to the old 'Roman'—in other words, whereas mediaeval Romance presupposes certain real objects and events, the outlines of which gradually dissolve into conscious fiction, modern Romance employs conscious fiction to decorate or disguise the outlines of real objects. It is inseparably connected with mediaeval Romance; but the stream of connexion, like a river which has disappeared underground, can be identified only by comparing the essential qualities of the new fiction, at the point of reappearance, with those of the old 'roman'. Mediaeval Romance died from the effects of two sets of causes, one social, the other technical. The social cause was the disappearance of the Feudal system, partly through its own internal decay, partly through its transformation by the reviving influence of Roman civil and municipal law, which produced a new life and order in society, but left no external object of imitation so pleasing to the imagination as the old institutions of chivalry. The technical cause was the replacement of the minstrel's song by the written or printed book. Being in immediate touch with his audience, the imaginative success of the oral minstrel depended on the life-like imitation of external objects as familiar to the body of his hearers as to himself; whereas the book, being the product of, and appealing to, solitary meditation, reflects only the individual perceptions of the author's mind. Hence ancient Romance embodied in an ideal form the manners and sentiments of mediaeval society at large, while modern Romance tends rather to reflect the ideas of Nature and Man formed by a multiplicity of differing imaginations.

The adjective 'romantic' may be used in three different senses. It may be applied either to that imaginative temper which is

readily credulous of the marvels and improbabilities of fiction; or to that class of fiction which deals with the mysterious and supernatural as opposed to novels imitating actual life and manners; or, lastly, to a set of artistic principles which form the natural antithesis to the principles usually described by the term 'classic'. In each case the word 'romantic' possesses some analogy to that 'arbitrary species of fiction' described by Warton and Dunlop as peculiar to the tales of chivalry; but just as the character of the mediæval 'romans' was constantly modified to suit the altering conditions of feudal ages, so has modern Romance adapted itself to the changes of spirit which transform the structure of civil society.

1. The best illustration of historic change in 'romantic' temper is perhaps to be found in a comparison of Cervantes' account of the character of Don Quixote with Walter Scott's representation of the romanticism of the hero of *Waverley*. Don Quixote's 'fancy', says Cervantes, 'grew full of what he used to read about in his books, enchantments, battles, challenges, wounds, wooings, loves, agonies, and all sorts of impossible nonsense; and it so possessed his mind that the whole fabric of invention and fancy he read of was true that to him no history in the world had more reality in it.'<sup>1</sup> Edward Waverley's character is also represented as being formed by his imaginative reading; but in his case the rationalizing spirit of the Renaissance has intervened; civil institutions have been established; the belief in the supernatural has waned; and Waverley's quixotic conduct is explained by the miscellaneous confusion of his literary studies, unchecked by knowledge of the actual world. 'My intention,' says Scott, 'is not to follow the steps of the inimitable Cervantes in describing such total perversion of intellect as misconstrues the objects actually presented to the senses, but that more common aberration from sound judgment, which apprehends occurrences indeed in their reality, but communicates to them a tincture of its own romantic tone and colouring.'

'Waverley'—so his character is described—'had read, and stored in a memory of uncommon tenacity, much curious though ill-arranged and miscellaneous information. In English literature he was master of Shakespeare and Milton; of our earlier dramatic authors; of many picturesque and interesting passages from our old historical chronicles; and was particularly well acquainted with Spenser, Drayton, and other poets who have exercised themselves on romantic fiction, of all themes the most fascinating to a youthful imagination before the passions have roused themselves, and demand poetry of a more sentimental description. In this respect his acquaintance with Italian opened him yet

<sup>1</sup> *Don Quixote* (Ormsby's translation), Part I, chap. i.



a wider range. He had perused the numerous poems which from the days of Pulci have been a favourite exercise for the wits of Italy; and had sought gratification in the numerous collections of "nouvelle", which were brought forth by the genius of that elegant though luxurious nation in emulation of the *Decameron*. In classical literature Waverley had made the usual progress, and read the usual authors; and the French had afforded him an almost exhaustless collection of memoirs scarcely more faithful than romances, and of romances so well written as hardly to be distinguished from memoirs. The splendid pages of Froissart, with his heart-stirring and eye-dazzling descriptions of war and tournaments, were among his chief favourites; and from those of Brantome and De la Noue he learned to compare the wild and loose yet superstitious character of the Nobles of the League with the stern, rigid, and sometimes turbulent disposition of the Huguenot party. The Spanish had contributed to his stock of chivalrous and romantic lore. The earlier literature of the northern nations did not escape the study of one who read rather to awaken the imagination than to benefit the understanding. And yet, knowing much that is known but to few, Edward Waverley might justly be considered as ignorant, since he knew little of what adds dignity to man and qualifies him to support and adorn an elevated position in society.<sup>1</sup>

2. As the internal change in the constitution of European society transformed from age to age the romantic temper of the individual imagination, so did it gradually modify the form of the fictions by which that imagination was gratified. Though the institutions of chivalry decayed in every nation, the memory of them was still preserved at every Court; but their fictitious image was deprived of the incredible attributes with which it had been invested in the stories of Amadis or Palmerin. In Sidney's *Arcadia* there is no supernatural machinery: the void is filled with pastoral imagery. Pastoralism too is adopted, a generation later, as a device for decorating Court manners, in the *Astrée* of D'Urfé; and for this purpose the *Daphnis and Chloe* of Longus is frequently referred to as a model. As time goes on the style of romantic fiction becomes in France increasingly literary, and by the Scudérys Greek history is ransacked to find parallels for the aristocratic heroes of the Fronde. The French Heroic Romance is in fashion at the same time as the English Heroic Play, and furnishes suggestions for the composition of *Parthenissa* and *Oroonoko* to the Earl of Orrery and Mrs. Aphra Behn. Then, as the flood of romanticism bursts the barriers of the Court, and overflows middle-class society, the figures of knights and shepherds are replaced in the English romances of the eighteenth century by gentlemen of impeccable perfection, like Sir Charles

<sup>1</sup> *Waverley*, chap. iii.

Grandison, or cottagers of stainless virtue, like Pamela Andrews. These are the direct and lineal descendants of the Amadis and Orianas of Chivalrous Romance; but, at the same time, the influence of the Renaissance is seen in the popularity of the 'picaresque' novel, the remote offspring of the mediæval 'fabliau'. *Gil Blas*, *Tom Jones*, and *Roderick Random*, in their imitation of actual manners and character, form the natural counterpoise to the romanticism of Richardson. The diversified imagination of society, in fact, demands both forms of fiction, and especially craves to be transported beyond the limits of its own experience; at length, after many vain attempts by different authors to create an imaginative illusion, Scott discovers how to enlarge the bounds of 'probability' in fiction, by uniting the principle of the 'roman' with that of the 'fabliau'.

3. Extended into a yet larger sphere of art, and exhibited in a more complex form, the same conflict of imaginative principles appears in the opposition of the two schools of criticism known as 'Classic' and 'Romantic'. Madame de Staël was, I think, the first to popularize the use of these terms in her book *De l'Allemagne*, descriptive of life and character in Germany. 'The word "classic",' she says, 'is sometimes used as synonymous with perfection. I use it here in a different sense, and regard classic poetry as that of the ancients, and romantic poetry as that which in some way is connected with the traditions of chivalry. This division relates equally to two eras of the world; that which preceded the establishment of Christianity, and that which followed it.'<sup>1</sup> Madame de Staël's account of the two schools consists substantially of a contrast between the French school of poetry, as representing the classic principle, and the German, as the type of the romantic. Her method of judgement is sound, for, as she says, France, 'the most cultivated of the Latin nations, inclines to the classic form, imitated from the Greeks and Romans,'<sup>2</sup> while Germany has preserved in her institutions more of the mediæval spirit than any other nation in Europe. Madame de Staël regards the opposite features of the classic and romantic styles as springing mainly from contrasted qualities in the French and German races; but I think the whole question may be treated at once more universally and more precisely, if the classic form be considered as mainly the product of the modern Revival of Letters, and the romantic of mediæval Feudalism. For both those two great social movements operated, not only in France and Germany, but in

<sup>1</sup> *De l'Allemagne* (Madame de Staël), chap. xi.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, chap. xi.

every country of Europe which came into any kind of relation with the Empire of Charlemagne, or which was affected by its institutions and their decline.

Romanticism is in effect a self-conscious temper in the European imagination, produced by that ancient conflict between the principles of Paganism and Christianity which has resulted in the decay of the mediaeval and the establishment of the modern civil order. From the eighteenth to the middle of the nineteenth centuries, in the two countries where the conflict prevailed with the greatest acuteness, France and Germany, a kind of inward and spiritual warfare distracted men's minds, from the perception in France that Absolutism was crushing all freedom of individual thought, and in Germany that the multiplicity of free individual thought was destroying all capacity for national action. The French genius expressed its agony in works like Rousseau's *Confessions* and *Nouvelle Héloïse*; the German, sometimes in plays like *The Robbers* of Schiller or the *Goetz von Berlichingen* of Goethe, sometimes in novels like *The Sorrows of Young Werther*. Goethe, in his *Wahrheit und Dichtung*, expresses vividly the distracted feeling produced in the imaginative German mind by the sense of its incapacity to create objectively, so long as society, torn asunder by the strife between these two extreme principles, wanted an outlet of political action. 'I learned,' he says, 'to value more and more the importance of subject-matter and conciseness of treatment; without, however, being able to make it clear to myself where the former was to be looked for or the latter attained. For what with the great narrowness of my situation, what with the indifference of my companions, the reserve of the professors, the exclusiveness of cultivated society, and the perfect insignificance of all natural objects, I was compelled to seek for everything within myself.'<sup>1</sup> Under such a *régime*, while many Germans tried to escape from the dilemma by surrendering their liberties to the Absolutist order, as established by the French both in politics and art, many others rushed into the opposite extreme, and, in pursuit of individual liberty, revolted from the restraint of every kind of rule. Protesting against the existing civil order of things, and reviving in their imaginations the idea of a past Golden Feudal Age, they found themselves in a situation somewhat resembling that of Don Quixote, and, as the motives of Love, Liberty, and Adventure, which they advocated, were the leading features in the latest development of mediaeval 'romans', they naturally assumed the name of 'Romantics' in opposition

<sup>1</sup> Goethe, *Wahrheit und Dichtung*, Book VII.

to antagonists representing the 'pig-tail' school (as they called it) which upheld the principles of French classicalism.

It is far from my intention to enter into the merits of the quarrel between these rival schools. The purpose of my lecture has rather been to show that, from first to last, there has been a continuous stream of thought flowing through the imaginative literature of Christian Europe. The progress of ancient romance was from the chronicling of supposed reality to the invention of extravagant fiction; the tendency of modern fiction is to invest the romantic conceptions of the individual mind with an air of reality. I desire to support Mr. Ker's appeal to the student that all literary antagonisms may be examined historically. Beside the linguistic studies recommended by Mr. Ker, it appears to me that nothing is to-day more desirable than a scientific investigation (as far as that is possible) of the spirit animating the great authors of poetry and fiction who have left a permanent inheritance to their countrymen and to the human race. If the early Humanists and their followers were too narrow and exclusive in the spirit of their criticism, we have to guard against an equally dangerous tendency in our own times of considering by-gone ages from a merely archaeological point of view. The noblest kind of Humanism, in my opinion, is that which is animated by the spirit of Erasmus and Sir Thomas More, who regarded what they considered best in the past 'as contributing to the meaning and value of the day'.<sup>1</sup> We cannot sever our life from the life of our ancestors, and the more clearly we understand the temper in which they viewed the intellectual and social difficulties that are the lot of humanity, the more practical will be the remedies we ourselves may be able to offer for the spiritual diseases from which we suffer.

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Ker in his Inaugural Lecture.



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