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Romance and other genres

In the opening lines of *Guillaume de Dole* (*c.* 1209–1228), Jean Renart claims that his text is both a *romans* (lines 1 and 11) and "une novele chose" ("a new thing") because he interpolates lyric stanzas into his narrative (13–14).[1] He thereby simultaneously signals continuity and change. He writes a romance, but self-consciously produces something different from previous romances. He plays on the parameters of two textual traditions (romance and lyric), but in incorporating one type of text into another he troubles these parameters as he evokes them: he gives the stasis with which lyric frames desire a forwards (narrative) movement and he injects a startling formal and temporal rupture into his romance since the lyrics necessarily halt the action temporarily. *Guillaume de Dole* is thus a romance that contests the generic framework to which it belongs. Furthermore, even the term Jean uses to designate the genre he seeks to change – *romans* – is problematic. *Roman* derives from the expression *metre en roman*, "to translate into the vernacular," and initially means simply a narrative translated from Latin. If some writers use the term in a manner that suggests a distinct category of text that we call romance,[2] *roman* is not infrequently used to describe texts that we think of as belonging to other genres, while some 'romances' are called *contes* by authors or rubricators.[3] Thus if the genre is unstable, so is the terminology used to designate it.

Precise generic terminology usually derives from critical discourse and it is therefore hardly surprising that generic labels are not used with any consistency in Old French. But the opening of *Guillaume de Dole* does make it clear that Jean expected his audience to have a sense of what a romance was and therefore to be attuned to what modern critics would call genre, that is the categorization of texts into types: otherwise how could it appreciate the extent to which the interpolated lyrics made his romance a "novele chose"? The purpose of this chapter is to examine the interaction of romance with other genres and to suggest thereby that dialogue with other genres was a major factor in the evolution of romance and in the formation of its own generic specificity. However, as my brief examination of the opening of *Guillaume de Dole* demonstrates, such an inquiry

raises a number of complex theoretical and literary-historical questions. What are literary genres and how are they defined? What is romance? And what has led critics to assume so unanimously a generic coherence in a corpus of texts that is also clearly so disparate?

One of the most influential theorists of genre in recent years is Fredric Jameson.[4] Seeking to move beyond a simple typology of texts, he argues that our sense of genre derives from a particular association of form and content: thus neither form nor content is adequate in itself to define a genre. This leads to two important points. Firstly, the distinction between form and content is not a clear one in that the association of content and form in a genre means that form in itself signals content; we can talk therefore of the *content of form*.[5] Secondly, genres are inherently ideological constructs; the formal and structural features of a text do not produce aesthetic effects that can be divorced from content and thereby from ideology, but on the contrary they signal participation in a discursive framework that implies a world-view with a heavy ideological investment.[6]

However, as Jean Renart's use of interpolated lyrics in a romance suggests, a genre is never an immutable, static object and the boundaries between genres are neither fixed nor impenetrable. If, when we read, we often have recourse to what Hans-Robert Jauss calls a *horizon of expectations* for the type of text we think we are reading – a horizon of expectation that would encompass a particular ideologically charged configuration of form and content – these expectations may be confirmed, but they may also be toyed with or foiled.[7] Readers and writers may value continuity in a genre, resist change and demand that a winning formula be repeated; alternatively they may value variation, experimentation, and innovation. A genre is thus constantly transformed through textual production as new texts add new features and thereby new expectations; similarly a text can play on more than one horizon of expectations, sometimes to bring two sets of generic paradigms into conflict, sometimes to produce a new genre. This perpetual dialogism means that a genre is always in the process of becoming something different Thus, as far as medieval romance is concerned, any attempt to identify an archetypal romance to which critics can turn to discover what romance *is* will inevitably fail to account for the richness and diversity of the genre.

What then is romance? Cesare Segre remarks that "the link between love and chivalric exploits involves a true 'constitutive model' for most medieval romances."[8] This brief formulation is an apposite starting point for an analysis of early Old French romance: written in octosyllabic rhyming couplets, the earliest surviving texts date from around 1150 and tell stories set in a distant, often Classical or Arthurian past. Segre further argues for the centrality to romance of what he calls "the author – character dialectic" (p. 29): an author-narrator may seek to identify with his characters, but he may also mark a critical distance from

them. In other words, there is often a plurality of perspectives in romance which explains why so many critics see irony as an important feature of the genre. The ubiquitous irony of romance is undoubtedly informed by the opposition between *chevalerie* and *clergie* that underscores many texts: a clerical narrator offers an ironic perspective on his chivalric hero. This points to two more important features of romance. Firstly, the plurality of perspectives, enabled by an oscillation between narration and direct or indirect discourse, leads to an interest in individual psychology and identity: thus romances frequently narrate an individual's quest for his "true" identity through love and chivalric exploits.[9] Secondly, the chivalric hero's negotiation of his position in society – whether through marriage, conquest, or inheritance – are dominant themes of early romance, albeit viewed from the ironic perspective of clerical narrators.

The interplay of form and content helps to explain why, in the thirteenth century, romance can change so radically and yet retain a sense of generic cohesion. Thus the ideological resonance of Arthurian subject matter is so strong that thirteenth-century prose narratives remain romances, despite the abandonment of the octosyllabic rhyming couplet. Similarly, the setting of some thirteenth-century romances in the historical present, rather than in the distant past, is an innovation that romance absorbs easily because the link between love and chivalry persists. And yet, as we shall see, such innovations inevitably entail dissonance as well as continuity: the interplay between form and content means that if either changes, the rereading and transformation of older generic paradigms leads to ideological reorientation.

What then are the prevalent ideologies of early romance? I have already drawn attention to the centrality of the chivalric hero and clerical narrator: the ideological investments of these two figures need, however, to be seen in the context of the milieu they inhabited, which is also the milieu for which romances were produced: the secular court.

The characters of romance are the characters of the secular court: the king or lord, his wife, their sons and daughters, knights in his service, his seneschal, constable and retainers, his clerks, and more lowly servants. 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.[10] As far as we can tell texts (including romances) were usually read aloud to a group by a physically embodied narrator.[11] Who would have been present at such readings? We can only assume that any one of sufficient rank to participate in a court's leisure activities would have had the opportunity to listen to romances in a court where they were available, to wit high-ranking noblemen, possibly an occasional king, knights, court officials and noblewomen. The array of perspectives in romance

no doubt mirrors the array of perspectives of its public. Thus, for example, as Roberta Krueger has argued,[12] early romances anticipate and engage with the responses of women readers, even if the knight remains the central protagonist and the dominant perspective that of the clerical narrator.

Romances are ideologically complex because they engage with the interests and fantasies of a group of people who were heterogeneous despite their being bound together by belonging to, or being in the orbit of, the courts of the French, Anglo-Norman and Occitan aristocracy. If the reading of a romance could create what some scholars call a *textual community* (a group of people whose group-identity derives from a shared reading experience),[13] this textual community had schisms within it. Furthermore, courts differed depending on where they were, their size, and importance. This variation clearly has an impact on literary reception and production. For example, Susan Crane has argued for the specificity of Anglo-Norman romance, suggesting that it was more questioning of courtly convention than Old French romance: the courts depicted in romance, she maintains, are fictional projections of French courts, and bear little relation to the more stable and peaceful courts of Anglo-Norman England, hence the difference in outlook.[14]

Romances, therefore, are truly 'courtly' in that they stem from and belong in the court. But they were by no means the only type of literary text that courtly audiences read and enjoyed. The modern canon of Old French literature – as reflected in criticism and in university curricula – is dominated by romance, possibly because it is the most accessible type of medieval text for modern readers. But in privileging romance critics create a skewed, even erroneous view of medieval literary culture. If quantities of surviving manuscripts are an index of popularity, then *chansons de geste* (tales of heroic deeds from the age of Charlemagne, usually composed in decasyllabic stanzas of unequal length that were either rhymed or, more often, assonanced) and hagiography (tales of the lives, and often lengthy deaths, of saints, usually written in octosyllabic rhyming couplets) were at least as popular as romances in the thirteenth century. Traditional literary history depicts the second half of the twelfth century as a period when *chansons de geste* were in decline and romance in the ascendant, but in fact over 100 *chansons de geste* survive in over 300 manuscripts and most of these poems were composed after 1150. Sarah Kay's recent work shows the extent to which the *chanson de geste* is a dynamic genre flourishing concurrently with romance in the later twelfth and early thirteenth centuries; she also illustrates how the two genres engage in a dialectic with each other, thereby requiring us to rethink received views about the specificity and ascendance of romance.[15] Although it is likely that some early *chansons de geste* were transmitted orally and addressed to a broad non-courtly audience, many surviving texts are preserved in luxurious compilations that were clearly commissioned for a

wealthy lay audience. In other words, their likely public was the same courtly audience that listened to romances and indeed sometimes *chansons de geste* and romances are preserved in the same compilations. The same is true of hagiography, where form, style, and transmission suggest a courtly audience for many texts. But it would again be wrong to assume that romance is the dominant genre: it is salutary to compare the survival of Chrétien's *Charrette*, a seminal text for modern readers, in just eight manuscripts, to that of only one version of the nowadays largely ignored *Vie de Sainte Marguerite* in over 100.

If romance was not necessarily the prevalent genre for courtly readers, manuscript compilations often confirm not only that transmitters of medieval texts and contemporary readers had a sense of genre, but also that they read a variety of genres concurrently and that these genres interacted in fruitful and meaningful ways. Thus if for many manuscripts genre is the organizing principle in that they contain only texts belonging to one genre arranged for sequential reading, many others contain a variety of genres. Romances are found in compilations with *chansons de geste*, with hagiography, with didactic texts, with lais (short narratives supposedly of Breton origin), with fabliaux (short comic texts, often bawdy), with *branches* of the *Roman de Renart* (parodic beast fables and epics), and with lyrics. The compilation of romances with texts from other genres surely encourages the dialectical reading of the romances in question against the horizon of expectations of the genre(s) alongside which they are placed; multi-genre compilations surely therefore call into question the boundaries between genres that single-genre manuscripts would seem to establish. For example, Sandra Hindman has recently demonstrated how reading Chrétien's *Erec* in the context of Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, fonds français 24403 (*c.* 1300), which sandwiches it between two *chansons de geste* (*Garin de Monglane* and the *Ogier le Danois*), suggests an interpretation centered on the value of chivalric exploits rather than on love:[16] in the context of this manuscript, romance ideology by no means holds sway, on the contrary it is contained, colonized and, redirected by epic ideology. Similarly, reading the romances compiled in the thirteenth-century Chantilly 472 in the context of this manuscript casts light on how they might have been read dialectically against the other genre in the compilation, in this case beast epic: this important collection of Gauvain romances and of romances in which Gauvain is an important figure concludes with an extract from the *Perlesvaus* concerning Gauvain followed by nine *branches* of the *Roman de Renart*. The repetitive antics of the animals in the *Renart* mimic, echo and subvert those of Gauvain. The compilation as a whole therefore suggests an essentially comic vision of romance. An alternative, more high-minded, model of romance is offered by manuscripts that interweave romances with didactic texts: thus, in a manuscript like Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, fonds français 24301, which contains didactic texts and romances by Robert de Blois and which

may well represent an authorial compilation, romances become *exempla* within a didactic frame.[17] Significantly, even manuscript compilations that contain only romances can play on competing horizons of expectations. To give a famous example, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, fonds français 1450 arranges a series of romances into a continuous narrative sequence, interpolating Chrétien's five Arthurian romances into Wace's *Brut*, so as to suggest a history and genealogy of the kings of England:[18] romance here veers markedly towards vernacular history, showing that if, as Gabrielle Spiegel has argued, courtly romance influenced the writing of history in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, historical writing also influenced romance.[19]

However, evidence from manuscript compilations concerning romance's relations with other genres tells us how texts were transmitted and read in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries and not necessarily about how twelfth- and early thirteenth-century romances related to other genres in their production, or in the context of their original reception by contemporaries of their authors. There is, nonetheless, ample evidence in the texts themselves to confirm that early romances engage dialectically with texts in other genres and that the process of intertextual transformation I outlined earlier operates across as well as within genres.

Intertextuality between genres can be thought about in terms of influence. Thus the influence of romance on hagiographic texts (particularly in relation to descriptions of women saints) or on *chansons de geste* that have love stories, such as the *Prise d'Orange* or *Girart de Roussillon*, has drawn sustained critical comment.[20] However, the notion of influence, stressing as it does imitation and similarity, posits the priority of one genre over the other, a relation in other words of cause and effect. The notion of influence can blind us therefore to difference, dissonance, and contestation. For example, the majority of women saints, unlike romance heroines, acquire status through their refusal of marriage. Similarly, the love plots of the *Prise* and *Girart* have a relation with, but are ultimately subordinate to, the dominant themes of conquest and conflict, while the premise that the presence of a love plot in a *chanson de geste* is in itself a mark of romance "influence" is questionable since love is an integral part of several *chansons de geste* that either predate the earliest surviving romances, or at the very least are contemporary to them. Romance horizons of expectations may be evoked in these texts, but they are also contested. I prefer to consider the relation between romance and other genres in terms of contestation, rather than influence, because we can thereby see what contemporary readers found problematic in romance, rather than simply what they liked (which is all too apparent in any case). Furthermore, if texts in other genres contest the values of romance and if the contestation of the values of other genres is also clearly a feature of romance, it is equally apparent, as I will argue, that romance ideologies are questioned

from within romance through play on the horizons of expectation of other genres.

Conflict between genres can be particularly important when a new genre is emerging. As Jauss argues new genres necessarily evolve from old genres.[21] For a new genre to emerge, new conditions of production, new needs and drives leading to new ideologies, must exist. For a new genre to be recognized as such, readers must be able to distinguish it from dominant contemporary genres. The process whereby a new mode of writing emerges from previous modes can be the result of a deliberate strategy on the part of authors. The formative years for Anglo-Norman and French romance were – as far as we can tell – the decades following 1150. The dominant vernacular genres at this time – again as far as we can tell – were the *chansons de geste* and hagiography, although it is likely that the production of written texts was limited and that dissemination was largely oral. There was also, at this time, an emergent lyric tradition in Occitan, though it was restricted to just a few courts. Several texts from this early formative period of romance appear to engage with the ideology of other genres deliberately to produce something different.

One of the earliest surviving texts that modern critics think of as romance is *Floire et Blancheflor* (*c.* 1150). It is the story of two children who resemble each other strikingly although they are not related: Floire is the son of a pagan king and Blancheflor the daughter of a captive Christian woman. After trials and tribulations, they marry and Floire converts to Christianity. In the prologue the couple are placed in an epic genealogy: they are Charlemagne's grandparents (6–12). The text is thus situated in relation to the *chansons de geste*, but from the outset its parameters are different: we are told that the story will be edifying for lovers (1–5), no mention is made of heroic deeds and the text is composed in octosyllabic rhyming couplets rather than the decasyllabic laisses (stanzas of unequal length with assonanced ten-syllable lines) that characterize *chansons de geste*. Now to call *Floire* a romance begs a number of questions, for it is by no means certain that a concept of "romance" existed as early as the 1150s, while the Byzantine setting distinguishes the tale from near-contemporary *romans antiques* and early Arthurian romances. And yet the text is implicitly recognized as a romance by later transmitters. For example, it is included in an important late thirteenth-century compilation of romances (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, fonds français 375), whereas at least one later version of the twelfth-century text is rubricated as a *roman* (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, fonds français 19152, fol. 193a). Significantly, *Floire* has what seems to be a second prologue in which a narrator claims to have heard the tale while dallying with two noble maidens in a luxurious bedchamber; they heard it from a clerk, who got it from a book (33–56).[22] In shifting the source of the tale from Carolingian legends to learned clerks telling women tales from books, the poet shifts the generic parameters of

the tale away from those of the *chansons de geste*. Since *Floire* goes on to relate how a male individual's identity is formed through a love affair, rather than heroic deeds, with hindsight we can see that the text has entered the world of romance, a world it perhaps has a hand in creating. But in order for this to happen, it would seem that the world of the *chansons de geste* needs to be evoked only to be discarded.[23]

The period *c.* 1150–*c.* 1170 seems to have been crucial to the development of a horizon of expectations for romance. Chrétien de Troyes, writing in the decade immediately after this, did not so much invent romance as guide it firmly in a direction that it had already taken. The link between love and chivalry, the "author – character dialectic", and the play on a plurality of perspectives are already present, for example, in a text like the *Eneas*. However, Chrétien does innovate in that love becomes not only the source of the hero's new social identity (as it is for example in *Floire*, in which love makes Floire convert to Christianity, or in the *Eneas*, where Eneas becomes a king through his marriage), but also an experience that leads to spiritual progress. These elements, crucial to the success of the new genre, may derive from romance's interaction with two other genres: the troubadour *canso* and hagiography.

The ennobling and improving qualities of love are frequently evoked in the work of troubadours like Bernart de Ventadorn which Chrétien probably knew and drew upon in his analysis of the psychology of love.[24] However, if Chrétien presents love as a source of spiritual improvement, he simultaneously undercuts this idealization of love with irony and humor, rather like many of the troubadours he imitates.[25] He therefore follows in the footsteps of the troubadours, even if his ironic gaze is a little more piercing.

Chrétien's play on the horizon of expectations of vernacular hagiography is perhaps more complex. For example, many features of Lancelot's career in the *Charrette* are redolent with religious symbolism: when he climbs onto the cart, Lancelot shows that he understands the value of humility when in pursuit of a higher goal; he then becomes a messiah figure to the captives in the land of Gorre; and during the course of his deliverance of them his body is wounded in a manner that is tinged with Christological imagery (see 3112).[26] Lancelot is a secular saint, offering an image of asceticism that is in some ways similar to that of the heroes or heroines of hagiographic texts; when he steps into the cart, like many saints in contemporary texts, he rejects the path expected of him and instead makes himself into an outcast who derives strength from an inner faith in the value of an abject course of action, reviled by those around him, but implicitly valued by the text's readership. The eroticism of the *Charrette* further marks a link with hagiography since in many saints lives the union of the saint with Christ is figured through erotic metaphors. And yet this eroticism also marks the conflict between romance ideology and hagiography for Lancelot is a

saint in the religion of love rather than in the true religion. When he steps into the cart it is Love (for a woman), rather than love of God, that pushes him into this act of humility (375–77); similarly, when he crosses the sword bridge, it is Love, not God, that "drives and leads him" (3114). If Chrétien invites us to think of Lancelot as a secular saint, he also implicitly invites us to think about how problematic this notion is: he worships the queen, we are told, with more ardor than he does any holy relic (4650–53). The horizon of expectations of another genre is evoked and absorbed here to contest the values of romance from within rather than the values of the other genre.

Play on other genres in romance generates debate about the values of past as well as contemporary literary traditions. A striking example of this is the delightful Occitan romance *Flamenca* (*c.* 1272), which narrates the adulterous love of Flamenca and Guilhem de Nevers, who conduct their liaison in a manner that conforms perfectly to blue-prints deriving from twelfth-century courtly *cansos*.[27] Thus, Guilhem falls in love with Flamenca without seeing her and needs to adopt elaborate strategies to talk to her since she is guarded closely by her jealous husband. Hilariously, he disguises himself as a clerk, bribes the local priest and thereby manages to talk to Flamenca for a few seconds at the altar rail each week. Syllable by syllable they slowly build up a dialogue that bears a striking resemblance to a *canso* by Peire Rogier, a troubadour whose poetic activity predates *Flamenca* by some 100 years, and they thereby contrive to meet to consummate their passion. Flamenca and Guilhem's behavior is portrayed as verging on the blasphemous: the narrator comments that as a clerk Guilhem serves God only because of his lady and when re-enacting one element in the exchange at the altar Flamenca and her ladies-in-waiting substitute a romance for Guilhem's Psalter (that of *Floire*, see *Flamenca*, 3817–18, 4477–86). The implication is again that courtly literature, in elevating love to a religion, treads on questionable moral ground. And yet the author of *Flamenca* clearly revels in the courtly antics he describes and his critique of the lost world of the twelfth-century troubadour *canso* is tinged with nostalgia. As with so many authors of romance, the clerk who wrote *Flamenca* was torn between disapproval and enjoyment of courtly culture, a conflict that reflects the position clerks occupied in courts, to which they belonged, but as outsiders.

Interaction with other genres contributes to romance's dynamism. It fuels romance's proclivity for debate and dialogue not just about the values of other genres, but also about the ideological parameters of romance itself. As I have already noted, attention to this intertextual engagement between genres offers modern students of romance an insight into contemporary reception and above all into what medieval readers of romance found problematic. Furthermore, when romances absorb elements from other genres to operate a critique from within, this often mirrors a critique that is already taking place in the genres

from which they borrow. I should like to conclude with two examples of this phenomenon: the Anglo-Norman *Ipomedon* (*c.* 1180) by Hue de Rotelande and fabliaux, then *La Queste del Saint Graal* (*c.* 1225) and hagiography.

Ipomedon is an overtly comic romance in which the hero repeatedly disguises himself, alternately feigning worthlessness and proving his prowess, as a response to a vow made by the appropriately nick-named La Fiere ("the proud one") to love only the most worthy knight in the world.[28] The three main women characters (La Fiere, her lady-in-waiting Ismene, and the Queen of Sicily) fall in love with Ipomedon as a foppish courtier and even as a repulsive fool; La Fiere also falls in love with him in a series of heroic guises, fearing she will never again see the effete young man with whom she originally, much to her consternation and shame, became infatuated. The motif of disguise or incognito is by no means unusual in romance, witness the Tristan romances. But the relentless repetition of Ipomedon's adoption of a sequence of disguises is gratuitous (despite the humor), unless of course the intention is to show La Fiere in the worst possible light by satirizing her fickleness. Thus in the concluding episode, having already abandoned La Fiere twice and having proved his worth fighting incognito in tournaments and elsewhere many times over, Ipomedon, again incognito, defeats Leonin, a hideous Indian prince who is attempting to take La Fiere by force, only then inexplicably to disguise himself as Leonin and claim victory, which has the effect of putting La Fiere to flight (9909–76). Significantly, Ipomedon's antics are brought to an end not by La Fiere recognizing him, but by his being recognized by a long-lost brother who comes to her aid (10231–88). When subsequently reunited with La Fiere, Ipomedon claims to have always acted for her sake ("pur vus", see 10386–91), but his purpose seems to have been to teach her a lesson rather than to undertake acts of chivalric prowess for her sake. Since the text is punctuated with obscene and misogynous asides,[29] *Ipomedon* offers an extensive critique of the way some romances seem to elevate haughty women to a position of power over men. The subordination of a man to a woman is of course problematized elsewhere in romance, for example in Chrétien's *Charrette*, but *Ipomedon* is nonetheless remarkable because of its overt humor and obscenity, its repetition, and its use of the disguise motif as a means to deceive, all of which strongly recall the fabliaux.

As Kathryn Gravdal has argued, *Ipomedon*, a parodic romance in itself, has structural similarities to *Trubert*, a thirteenth-century fabliau which clearly parodies romance.[30] In *Trubert*, as in *Ipomedon*, the hero disguises himself over and over again to humiliate repeatedly and gratuitously a hapless local aristocrat. If the victim in *Trubert* is a man rather than a woman, the misogyny of *Ipomedon* resonates strongly with other fabliaux that parody romance such as *Le Chevalier qui fist parler les cons*,[31] in which a questing knight is given the power to make a woman's vagina and anus answer questions and thereby reveal her duplicity,

desire, or fickleness. *Le Chevalier*'s hero uses his gift ruthlessly, though to comic effect, at court. If the tone of *Le Chevalier* is different from that of *Ipomedon* the willingness to expose women's ostensible fickleness makes Ipomedon comparable to the fabliau knight. The implications of the fabliau are that women are unworthy objects of veneration, enslaved as they are to their sexuality, and since the text flags itself as a parody of romance, *Le Chevalier* is a critique of the elevation of women in romance and of romance's mystification of women's nature (as the *fableor* sees it). But comparison with *Ipomedon* reveals that this critique is already undertaken within romance itself and romance thus shows itself to be adept at accommodating debate and dissent. The treatment of women in romance is controversial even for writers and readers of romance, and the "link between love and chivalric exploits," although it may be a "constitutive model" for the genre, is hotly debated and contested. Ipomedon's chivalric exploits are hardly inspired by a woman, while the value of the link between love and chivalry is undermined by his actions. But if *Ipomedon*'s fabliaux-like qualities contribute to its questioning of romance ideology, as with all parodies it also reproduces what it subverts. The text's very engagement with the problematics of romance signals a commitment to the genre.

A similar process of simultaneous subversion and reproduction takes place in *La Queste del Saint Graal*.[32] In the *Queste*, the traditional heroes of Arthurian romance – Arthur himself, Gauvain, but particularly Lancelot – are gradually marginalized as the chosen knight, Galahad, moves towards the Grail and union with God. It is obvious that the *Queste* attempts to reorientate romance away from secular towards spiritual concerns. Riddled as it is with allusion to the Scriptures and with exegetical allegory, its most important intertext outside romance is the Bible rather than any vernacular genre, while Galahad himself is explicitly compared to Christ.[33] However, the *Queste* was composed to be read as part of the cyclical prose *Lancelot* and only four out of forty-three manuscripts transmit it independently of the cycle. If it contests the values of romance, the *Queste* does so from within the framework of romance. This may – as we will see – compromise the force of its attack, but it is striking that the horizon of expectations of another vernacular genre – hagiography – is called into play to enhance the critique of romance. I am thinking here less of the portrayal of Galaad, who like many saints obviously imitates Christ, than of the portrayal of Lancelot as anti-hero and of how he represents precisely the opposite of a medieval saint.

Lancelot's position in the *Queste* is equivocal. If the romance is read in isolation, Galahad is undoubtedly the hero. However, if the *Queste* is read in the context of the prose cycle to which it belongs, it becomes part of a longer narrative, the hero of which is Lancelot, in many respects the incarnation of the romance ideal because of the link in his career between love and chivalric exploits. Thus the *Queste*'s marginalization of Lancelot in favor of Galahad is

an assault on romance ideology, but what is the reason for the opprobrium with which Lancelot is liberally and consistently treated in the *Queste*? The answer is simple: his steamy affair with Guenevere. As Lancelot himself confesses: "il est einsi que je sui morz de pechié d'une moie dame que je ai amee toute ma vie, et ce est Guenievre, la fame le roi Artus" ("it is the case that I have committed a mortal sin with a lady of mine, whom I have loved all my life, I mean Guenevere, King Arthur's wife," p. 66). This renders explicit the criticism of Lancelot that some critics have thought implicit in Chrétien's *Charrette*. But whereas Chrétien draws our attention to Lancelot's betrayal of Arthur[34] and to his devotion to Guenevere rather than to God, the *Queste* dwells repeatedly on the fact that Lancelot is tainted by sins of the flesh. Critics have expressed surprise that in enumerating the virtues that Lancelot once possessed, virginity comes first, ranked above humility, patient endurance, rectitude and charity (pp. 123–25).[35] And yet the *Queste* is so obsessively insistent on the importance of virginity that the strange hierarchy of virtues it proposes has to be accepted at face value and assumed to be deliberate. The value of virginity is repeatedly extolled. Thus Perceval laments: "Las! Chetif! tant ai esté vilx et mauvés, qui ai si tost esté menez au point de perdre ce ou nus ne puet recouvrer, ce est virginitez, qui ne puet estre recovrée que ele est perdue une foiz" ("Alas! Miserable wretch that I am. I have been so vile and wicked that I have been quickly led to the verge of losing that which no man can ever recover, his virginity, which can never be recovered once it has been lost," p. 111). The text makes a distinction between *pucelages* and *virginitez* (p. 213), the former being a mere physical state, the latter a spiritual virtue depending on the virgin having never had a corrupt thought, and in this the *Queste* echoes patristic thinking on virginity.[36] Finally, the first reason cited for Galahad's election as Grail-knight is his virginity (for example p. 263) while all those who are unchaste are excluded from the quest altogether.

The obsession with sexuality in the *Queste* evokes the horizon of expectations of vernacular hagiography, where the value of virginity is obsessively reiterated.[37] Indeed, Lancelot's flawed chivalric heroism in the *Queste* is in some ways analogous to that of Saint Gregory in Old French versions of his life. As I have argued elsewhere *La Vie de Saint Grégoire* presents Gregory as quite deliberately choosing to model himself on a romance hero.[38] The child of brother/sister incest, he rejects the life of a monk to be a knight and, like the Bel Inconnu, embarks on a quest to discover the identity of his father, as a result of which marries his mother. Gregory's sin (like Lancelot's) is sexual and it is explicitly attributed to his pursuit of *chevalerie* rather than *clergie*, the former being portrayed as inherently sinful (version A1, 1206–10). *La Vie de Saint Grégoire* therefore mounts a devastating attack on romance in that a romance hero can never be anything other than a sinner, unless of course he repents of chivalric ambitions and atones for them. Reading Lancelot against Gregory shows the extent to which the qualities that make him the archetypal romance hero oppose him to all that is saintly and exclude him from the Grail quest.

It is striking, however, that with the *Queste* we once again see that a critique of romance redolent of another genre is present in romance. Critics have recently argued that the religious valence of the *Queste* has been overstressed and that it should be read first and foremost as romance: thus the religious symbolism could be read as a valorization rather than a negation of romance values since the Round Table is overtly interpreted as the successor to the table of the last supper and the table of the Holy Grail (pp. 74–78), while the allegorical interpretations of knightly exploits merely pit one mode of storytelling against another.[39] Above all it should be borne in mind that the *Queste* always was and remains part of a secular romance cycle and that as such it is not the end of the story. It is quite literally contained by other romances and if its author sought to appropriate romance for a religious agenda, his text was subsequently reappropriated for the genre he sought to hijack, by the author of *La Mort le roi Artu*, its sequel, and by the compilers of the cyclical manuscripts of the prose *Lancelot*. Lancelot is reinstated as the hero of the Arthurian world once the *Queste* is over. If there is an invasion of romance in the *Queste*, romance is versatile enough to accommodate the intruder and to be enriched by the intrusion.

If romance is not the dominant narrative form of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, it is perhaps its proclivity for absorbing paradigms from other genres to enable ideological debate within its own highly flexible generic parameters that leads to its undoubted triumph over rival genres such as the *chansons de geste* in the later Middle Ages, although the growing hegemony of prose probably also served to elide differences between longer narrative texts and therefore to reduce the specificity of romance.[40] But romance in the earlier period is all the richer for its contact with other genres. Indeed, I would argue that it owes much of its success to this contact.

NOTES

1 See Jean Renart, *Le Roman de la Rose ou de Guillaume de Dole*, ed. F. Lecoy, CFMA 91 (Paris: Champion, 1979).

2 See, for example, Chrétien de Troyes, *Le Chevalier de la Charrette*, 1–2 and 7101 and Renaud de Beaujeu, *Le Bel Inconnu*, 6247.

3 For example the *chanson de geste Daurel et Beton* is rubricated as "lo romans de Daurel et Beto," while *Floire et Blancheflor* is called a *conte*; see *Daurel et Beton*, ed. Charmaine Lee (Parma: Pratiche Editrice, 1991), 41, and *Floire et Blancheflor*, 3341.

4 See *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as Socially Symbolic Act* (London: Methuen, 1981), 103–50.

5 *Ibid.*, 99.

6 See also Tzvetan Todorov, "The Origin of Genre," *New Literary History*, 8 (1976), 159–70 and for a more detailed elaboration my *Gender and Genre*, 3–10.

7 *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. Timothy Bahti (Minneapolis and Brighton: Harvester, 1982), 88.
8 "What Bakhtin Left Unsaid", 36.
9 See Hanning, *Individual in Twelfth-Century Romance*.
10 On secular courts see Linda M. Paterson, *The World of the Troubadours: Medieval Occitan Society c.1100–1300* (Cambridge University Press, 1993), 90–119.
11 Several texts depict romances being read aloud to a group; a famous example is Chrétien de Troyes: *Yvain*, 5362–72. Sandra Hindman argues that the material state of Chrétien manuscripts suggests they were used frequently; see *Sealed in Parchment*, 3–9.
12 See *Women Readers*.
13 See Brian Stock, *The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Princeton University Press, 1983), 88–240.
14 *Insular Romance*, particularly pp. 134–45. The cultural specificity of Occitan, northern French, and continental Plantagenet courts also merits attention.
15 See *Chansons de Geste in the Age of Romance*.
16 *Sealed in Parchment*, 129–62.
17 See Krueger, *Women Readers*, 156–82 on this compilation.
18 On this manuscript, see Huot, *From Song to Book*, 27–34.
19 See *Romancing the Past: The Rise of Vernacular Prose Historiography in Thirteenth-Century France* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1993).
20 On hagiography and romance see Brigitte Cazelles, *The Lady as Saint: A Collection of French Hagiographic Romances of the Thirteenth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), 16–18; on the *Prise* and romance see Claude Lachet, *La Prise d'Orange ou la parodie courtoise d'une épopée* (Paris: Champion, 1986); on *Girart* and romance see *Girart de Roussillon*, ed. and trans. Gérard Gouiran and Micheline de Combarieu du Grés (Paris: Livre de Poche, 1993), 15–18.
21 *Toward an Aesthetic*, 23.
22 On the prologue(s) to *Floire*, see Krueger, *Women Readers*, 7–9 and Gaunt, *Gender*, 85–87.
23 *Floire*'s most recent editor, Leclanche, believes that the two prologues are thirteenth-century additions. But both prologues are in all surviving manuscripts that contain this portion of the text and it is not clear why he believes them to be later additions. I have argued elsewhere that epic values are similarly evoked and marginalized in the *Eneas* (*c.* 1156), see *Gender and Genre*, 75–85.
24 See Leslie T. Topsfield, *Chrétien de Troyes: A Study of the Arthurian Romances* (Cambridge University Press, 1981), particularly 50–52 and 165–71.
25 See Tony Hunt, *Chrétien de Troyes: Yvain* (London: Grant and Cutler, 1986), 52–66, and Lucie Polak, *Chrétien de Troyes: Cligés* (London: Grant and Cutler, 1982), 36–49.
26 See Topsfield, *Chrétien*, 143. See also Sarah Kay's essay in this volume.
27 See *Flamenca: Roman Occitan du XIII^e siècle*, ed. Jean-Charles Huchet (Paris: 10/18, 1988). On *Flamenca* and the *canso* see Kay, *Subjectivity in Troubadour Poetry*, 198–211.
28 See *Ipomedon*, ed. Holden. See Crane, *Insular Romance*, 158–73, on *Ipomedon*'s humor; Hanning, *Individual in Twelfth-Century Romance*, 123–35 on identity.
29 On which see Krueger, *Women Readers*, 73–82.
30 *Vilain and Courtois*, 121–30. For the text of *Trubert*, see *Fabliaux érotiques*, ed. Luciano Rossi and Richard Straub (Paris: Livre de Poche, 1992), 345–529.

31 Rossi and Straub, eds., *Fabliaux érotiques*, 197–39; on the generic signals of the text see pp. 36–41.
32 See *La Queste del Saint Graal*, ed. Pauphilet.
33 See particularly Matarasso, *Redemption of Chivalry*.
34 See Gaunt, *Gender and Genre*, 97–99.
35 See Matarasso, *Redemption of Chivalry*, 145 and 153.
36 On which see R. Howard Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western Romantic Love* (Chicago University Press, 1991), 106–09.
37 See Gaunt, *Gender and Genre*, 185–97.
38 See *Ibid.*, 200–12; for parallel editions of all the Old French versions see *La Vie du Pape Saint Grégoire*, ed. Hendrik B. Sol (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1977).
39 See Nancy Freeman-Regalado, "*La Chevalerie celestiel*: Spiritual Transformations of Secular Romance in *La Queste del Saint Graal*," in *Romance: Generic Transformation from Chrétien de Troyes to Cervantes*, ed. Kevin Brownlee and Marina Scordilis Brownlee (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1985), 91–113, and E. Jane Burns, *Arthurian Fictions: Rereading the Vulgate Cycle* (Columbus: Ohio State Press, 1985), 55–77.
40 See Michel Zink, "Le Roman," in *La Littérature française aux XIV^e et XV^e siècles*, ed. Daniel Poirion (Heidelberg: Winter, 1988), Grundriss der romanischen Literaturen des Mittelalters, VIII/1, pp. 197–218 (esp. pp. 203–5).

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

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