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INTRODUCTION

The ambiguity of the general title of this collection of papers is intentional. It refers both, objectively, to how idealism shapes character and, subjectively, to how idealisms are given shape in medieval texts. My main interest is in medieval romances and in modern romance-type fantasies. The core chapters are nos. 4 and 10. Occasional excursions have, however, been made to religious texts (nos. 8 and 9), because these show alternative forms of shaping idealism connected with the romances.

My general method is ‘medievalist’ in Jacques Derrida’s sense, which is, strictly speaking, the application of modern literary-critical theories to medieval texts in order to analyse their “subtextual premisses” and their “unspoken political interests” (Derrida, 1984:115). Stephen Nichols maintains that the New Medievalism “differs from a cognate rubric like the New Historicism in not predicating a specific methodology, designating instead a predisposition to interrogate and reformulate assumptions about the discipline of medieval studies broadly conceived” (Nichols, 1991:1). My chosen methodologies are mainly those of symbolism, narratology and structuralism throughout, and post-structuralism where useful. I accept Stephen Nichols’ claim that post-structuralism freed medieval studies “to consider the nature of medieval discourses as a manifestation of a culture to be reconstructed afresh”, allowing “a close look at the works” to reveal their “dynamics of cultural expression” (Nichols, 1991:2). In my case that would be those of shaping idealisms. The result has been that my essays are preliminary analyses of the kind that should precede full interpretation, in my consideration.

In my essays on nineteenth- and twentieth-century ‘Medieval Revival’- texts I have basically followed the same approach mentioned in the previous paragraph. Of the two options for medievalist angles of approach distinguished by John Simons, namely studying “the ways in which the idea of the Middle Ages has been used as a cultural token or as a cultural heritage” (Simons, 1992:1), I have largely not attempted to pursue medievalism “as a key to understanding the culture of those periods in which it is pursued” (Simons: same page), but stuck with the idea of cultural heritage. In the essays on Tennyson (nos. 11 and 15) and William Morris (in no. 10) I have concentrated on the texts as ‘translatio’ (i.e. transfer to another place and time) of original medieval texts, looking back on the originals with hindsight. In the essays on works by Tolkien, C.S. Lewis and Lodge (nos 12, 13, 14), much more loosely based on medieval originals, if at all, I have approached the texts from the point of view of the history of the genre of romance. In either case the embedding of the genre in the historical context and contemporary concerns of the works has been touched upon, but the primary interest is to see how much of the medieval sense of romance is still to be found in them. In other words, if they differ, my interest is not in the ‘why’, but in the ‘how’.

If I started with a psychological angle of approach in the earlier essays (nos. 2 and 4), under the influence of John Stevens (Stevens, 1973) and Derek Brewer (Brewer, 1980), I never considered the romances as ‘mimetic’. I was looking for analytical models that might be fruitfully applied, specifically Freud’s and Jung’s models of dream-analysis. Eventually I have found symbolism, narratology and (post-)structuralism more satisfactory. I have moved gradually towards Bakhtin’s formalism, forerunning Derrida’s “logocentric illusions”, so arriving at structuralism and narratology. These three have meant for me: letting the ‘facts’ of the specific text speak for themselves, before interfering with explicit theoretical assumptions. The texts are, therefore, treated as autonomous for the occasion, with intertextual or historical references only where helpful to determine the range of connotations of particular details. Since I did not always include my particular indebtedness in the various essays at the time, I should acknowledge here the influence of Piero Boitani (1982), A.C. Spearing (1987), Howard Bloch (1991) and Ad Putter (1996 and 2000: the Introduction and ch. 7).

By ‘letting the facts speak for themselves’ I mean specific observational data, which, according to Karl Popper, are verifiable. Such verifications lead to assumptions of regular patterns, in other words to empirical hypotheses, alias ‘theory’ (summary of Popper’s *Logik der Forschung* – Vienna, 1935 – in Magee, 1975: chapter 2). That is usually as far as I get. Falsifications (à la Popper) are rare, but may be found in my discussions of medieval texts in nos. 3, 4 and 8. Obviously, the articles on nineteenth- and twentieth-century texts are naturally ‘falsifications’ of romance-theory, but I see them rather as tentative analyses or hypotheses concerning selected autonomous items of the Medieval Revival, disconnected so far from any theory of that revival. I should like to leave it to such obvious misconstructions as Richard Wagner’s *Der Ring des Nibelungen* and/or Dan Brown’s *The Da Vinci Code* to provide the falsifications to any such medievalist theory.

My search is strictly not for ‘what does a text mean?’, but for ‘how does the text mean?’, or ‘what does the text do?’. John D. Niles’ discussion of ‘ritualized discourse’ (Foucault’s term) in his chapter on *Beowulf* describes it very well in his definition of ritual (Niles, 1999). Ritual is, he says, a “rule-governed activity of a symbolic character which draws the attention of its participants to objects of thought and feeling which they hold to be of special significance.” He specifies that symbolic character as: A. always implying continuity with the past; B. being felt by the participants to be something out of the ordinary; C. being affected by claims of status and power. “Serious play”, he calls it, serving as a means by which a culture defines itself, validates itself, and maintains its equilibrium during normal times and during periods of social stress. The story, according to Niles, reflects not actual history, but a view of the past as people would have wanted it to be, so that it becomes their own glorified past. That, to me, puts the idea of ‘serious play’ in a nutshell worth cracking.

The following describes the basic ideas underlying the articles in more detail.

Idealism

In narratological terms narratives are distinguished as being either ‘realistic’ or ‘idealistic’. Both have, naturally, many subforms, but in general the two kinds differ in what motivates the plot. ‘Realistic’ fiction is characterized by plots motivated or dominated by ‘characters’ who act out their characters, causing a complex social pattern of interrelations in the narrative. The setting has to be familiar, or at least recognisable, to the audiences. ‘Idealistic’ fiction is characterized by plots motivated or dominated by an idea or ideal, with characters merely as ‘actants’. The setting is essentially symbolic, whether recognisable or fantastic. This distinction is valuable for analytical purposes, but it feels somewhat empty. Perhaps Francis Bacon’s description of 1605 A.D. gives a better view of what we understand by idealistic narratives:

The use of ... feigned history hath been to give some shadow of satisfaction to the mind of man in those points wherein the nature of things doth deny it, the world being in proportion inferior to the soul; by reason whereof there is, agreeable to the spirit of man, a more ample greatness, a more exact goodness, and a more absolute variety, than can be found in the nature of things. Therefore, because the acts or events of true history have not that magnitude which satisfieth the mind of man, poesy feigneth acts and events greater and more heroical. Because true history propoundeth the successes of actions not so agreeable to the merits of virtue and vice, therefore poesy feigns them more just in retribution, and more according to revealed providence. Because true history representeth actions and events more ordinary and less interchanged, therefore poesy endueth them with more rareness, and more unexpected and alternative variations. So as it appeareth that poesy serveth and conferreth to magnanimity, morality, and to delectation. And therefore it was ever thought to have some participation of divineness, because it doeth raise and erect the mind, by submitting the shows of things to the desires of the mind; whereas reason doeth buckle and bow the mind unto the nature of things.

(Bacon, 1960:96-97)

Read ‘idealistic narrative’ instead of ‘poesy’ (which was seen as morally instructive in the early Renaissance), and we have the main characteristics mapped out in a concisely argued way. To simply say that romances show virtue in action seems rather feeble in comparison.

There are, however, a number of complications to be considered for the medieval romances. The first is that maintaining that the virtues shown in action in them are the perennial Christian ones and those of the new courtesy and courtliness, is an unhelpful generalization. Especially in Britain practically all the writers of romances were not

themselves aristocrats. Most of them were minstrels of some kind, and also the clerkly writers, even if they were courtiers or court-officials, did not belong to the aristocracy. They were not intimately familiar as insiders with the aristocratic self-image, and are therefore likely to have presented the ideals in a distorted way. Moreover, they had their own agenda's anyway and, very probably, often a much wider audience in mind than the aristocracy only, if at all. The idealism of the English romances is greatly influenced by the values of the peripheral lower nobility and landed gentry, as also, later on, by those of the common people and the rising urban middle class. The idealistic narratives of the Middle English romances are very much what Bakhtin termed 'dialogic texts' (Bakhtin, 1998:32-44). One is aware of the voices of the courtly ideals, the author, gentry and commons, and the antagonists, each with their own ideals and views of personal and social virtues.

The second complication is that a too large emphasis on Christian virtues in the romances obscures the fact that the romances essentially reflect what anthropologists call a shame-culture. The concept of honour is much more normative than religious concepts of virtues. Malory's ubiquitous use of "worshipfulness" as the essential ideal of chivalry testifies to this. As B.J. Malina argues, honour is "a claim to worth along with the social acknowledgment of worth" (Malina, 2001:30-31). This claim to worth is clearly found in the hegemonic culture of 'courtoisie' to which the romances subscribe, however critical the social acknowledgment appears to be. The Christian element seems to me to be secondary in the courtly and chivalrous ideals.

A third, concomitant, complication is the concept of evil in the romances. Romances are not really about Good versus Evil in the moral sense. In the terms generally adopted by post-structuralism from Michel Foucault (Foucault, 1979 and 1980) they are about Us versus Other. When we call romances idealistic, we should realize that the ideals shown in them are of a social or group-ethical kind, not a matter of private morality. Whether the antagonists are truly morally evil or simply subscribe to different ethics, it is their otherness from the ethical hegemony of a specific 'courtly' idealism that is operative. In each text in hand the antagonists need to be analysed as different from the ideal in order to determine the precise idealism of the hegemony-group that the protagonist represents. Perhaps the term 'virtue', so often used in analyses, should be replaced by 'social desirability'. This would clarify many a chance encounter on the hero's quest. The need to analyse evils in each text specifically also applies to such social crimes as disloyalty, betrayal and the dispossession of another's land. Their functions in each narrative can be quite different in different texts, even different in various renderings of the same story.

The abduction or maltreatment of ladies, or the illicit affairs so much celebrated in 'courtly love'-romances, is another case in point. About this most celebrated 'ideal' or virtue of 'courtly love' (in fact rather rare in romances in England) I should like to remark that it is found in its proper place in lyrical verse and the dream

allegories, and is only one of many guests in the romances. I agree with Erich Auerbach's view of the role of love in the romances as a noble substitute for other motivations, a narrative image of the metonymic kind (Auerbach, 1953:chapter 6). The dominant position and roles of ladies in the romances justify this view, not in spite of, but precisely because of the limited interest shown in the finer points of love. This view follows closely in the footsteps of Huizinga's theory that the romances adopted an idealized form of love as a main interest in order to justify the courtly culture, which was in essence worldly. It was the parallel of chivalrous love ('amor') with divine love and 'caritas', he argued, that should save the court-culture from accusations of lack of *contemptus mundi* (contempt of worldly concerns) (Huizinga, 1919/1924:chapter 8). This is not only an interesting theory, but one that helps to see why 'fin amors' was treated in an ironical manner, or even ridiculed downright, in the romances all the way from Chrétien de Troyes (1170-82) to Alain Chartier's *La Belle Dame sans Mercy* (1424).

Like the folktales, from which the romance writers have borrowed so much, the romances have a penchant for symbolism rather than for metaphor/allegory. In the romances the ladies are seen mainly for their symbolic connection with land. The wisdom with which they inspire the heroes is the wisdom of the people. The ladies embody the people's needs: what the people require from the ruling class (cf. nos. 6, 7, 10).

Symbolism

Contrary to Angus Fletcher's inductive theory, in which allegory and symbol belong to the same category because both "say one thing and mean another" (Fletcher, 1964:2), I should like to maintain that in medieval literature the two should be seen as significantly different. Allegory is based on metaphor and symbolism on metonymy, and it is precisely this distinction that makes the two modes so distinct in the Middle Ages. In the following I shall attempt to argue the point.

In his description of secular romantic love in medieval English literature, Derek Brewer points out that the gothic view of the world is based on the archaic concept of the living nature of all objects. Objects are, he explains, not purely objective, but the whole world – animate and inanimate – is a vibrant web of beings, qualities and relationships. Symbolism, then, is a way of seeing different and apparently incompatible aspects of the same thing, a richness of ambivalence, of meanings connected by association. In other words, it works through metonymy. (Brewer, 1983¹:33-35).

Piero Boitani makes the same point when he is discussing the lack of interest in spatial depth or character development in 'the world of romance': "The imagination

that governs the narrations and descriptions is devoid of metaphorical élan: it is ruled, above all, by metonymy – that is, by contiguity and association (Boitani, 1982:59). The context of this statement is something like: in the age when the *Roman de la Rose* and the tradition of love- or dream allegories combine the finest evocative poetry with the most explicit didacticism, the romances make do with such unadorned verse and such rambling and unadorned adventures that they must be closer to a folkloristic un-poetic (certainly un-lyrical) art, in which metonymy (symbolism) takes the part of metaphor (allegory). The traces of the oral tradition of narrative verse are clearly discernible: such stylistic phenomena as repetition, hyperbole, sententiae, and conventional ideas, point to a minstrel art (Brewer, 1983²:77-78). I should hasten to add that this art is not necessarily unsophisticated.

Apart from Derek Brewer's archaic concept and Piero Boitani's folkloristic roots mentioned above, a third influence on romance-symbolism should be considered: that of the patristic tradition of interpretation of Holy Scripture. William Cook and Ronald Herzman point to St Augustine's theory of Biblical interpretation as highly influential on later literary theory and aesthetics. St Augustine had argued that words must not be seen as things in themselves, but as signs pointing to something else. In Holy Scripture, he stated, language leads from the visible to the spiritual meaning, so making the spiritual truth come out clearer than in plain statement. The aesthetics of the language are not there for the arousal of emotions, but for discovering truths behind the symbolic configuration. This configuration is the substance (Cook & Herzman, 2004:63-79).

So, Roman Jakobson's distinction between paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations has a venerable history as well as an impressive following in theorizing the distinction between metaphor and metonymy, or, in our case, between allegory and symbolism.

The two idealistic modes of the Middle Ages, romance and allegory, appear to have been more clearly distinct from one another than they are in modern times. On the linguistic level, allegory tends to personify abstract nouns. The action of these personifications is not specific to character, but enacts doctrine, whether religious or political or amatory. The doctrine must be shared *a priori* by author and audience. Typological allegory has this basis in received doctrine in common with the personification-allegory. Romances, on the other hand, tend to personify, or rather typify, collective nouns (the powerful, the commons, women). The actions of these personifications or types are class-specific. They explore the clashes and conflicts between the different strata of society, though naturally reflecting medieval authoritarian society.

Modern, post-Jakobson, theory of genres or 'modes' has refined the distinction between metaphor and metonymy with the help of linguistics and semantics, stressing more and more, however, that the distinction is not a matter of polar opposition, but

one of dominance. In modern literature the metonymic text is also always available for metaphorical interpretation (Lodge, 1977:111). According to David Lodge in his section “Metaphor and Metonymy” (Lodge, 1977:73-124), the essence of the distinction is clear enough, because metaphor and metonymy belong to different spheres of thought. Metaphor (including simile) is a principle of substitution of things perceived as similar, but with a felt disparity. Metonymy (including synecdoche) is a principle of association of ideas perceived as contiguous. For instance, in writing ‘the deep’ for the sea, ‘deep’ is not similar to ‘sea’, but contiguous to it: it is an attribute of ‘sea’. Similarly, symbols are metonymic if they are at the same time a natural attribute, so that there is a natural contiguity. For instance, in the case of the sword-bridge as in, for instance, Chrétien de Troyes’ *Le Chevalier de la Charrette*, but see also *Roman van Walewein* (no. 6), there is a real chasm of sorts, therefore the need of a real bridge, which is, at the same time, symbolic of how the separation between lover and beloved is to be overcome by self-sacrifice, through the specificity of the image. The symbolism of the medieval romances may seem artificial to us, but in the idealistic setting of the romances the symbolic elements are matter-of-fact. The world of romance is entirely symbolic, whether the details are historically realistic or entirely fantastic. That is what the medieval notion of ‘idealistic’ implies or necessitates.

Dream-symbolism is an instance in which the fact that the opposition between metaphor and metonymy is not a polar opposition can be clearly seen. In real dreams the symbolism is metaphorical: a matter of anxieties and desires displaced in a logical manner, Lodge argues (pp. 79-81 and *passim*). But dreams in literary texts are metonymic, in that their symbols are to be traced by a line of contiguities, non-logical but traceable by free association. Metonymic symbolism, as argued by Lodge, elicits a commentary that is a witness to the text’s truthfulness or representativeness, to its consistency and its contribution to human knowledge and wisdom. This claim, or instruction for the interpreter, which St Augustine has also made, is basically the same as those of Piero Boitani and Derek Brewer.

The case of the sword-bridge and the underwater-bridge in Chrétien’s *Le Chevalier de la Charrette* brings out the practical implications of the foregoing. The drift of metonymy and symbolism may be seen as parabolic, both in the sense of a parabola cutting the linear axis, and in the sense of being like a parable. The purpose of the metonymic drift is not to suggest that Sir Gawain attempting to penetrate the land of Gorre by means of the underwater bridge must be read as if sexual assault is a *translation* of what the story as story is saying. E.M. Forster’s distinction between ‘story’ and ‘plot’ is still relevant, where he says that the story is the “narrative of events arranged in their time sequence” and the plot is the “narrative of events, the emphasis falling on causality” (Forster, 1962:93). The romance-mode, however, has no causalities. One might argue with good reason that in the romances symbolism takes the place of causality. The story tells itself by its linear sequence, but the symbolism of

the two bridges introduces an extra layer of experience, as if tangentially, three-dimensionally, the story suggests a parable: Gawain is like the man who thinks of love as penetration, and gets stuck, whereas Lancelot shows that love as devotion overcomes the sexual (sword bridge) by great sacrifice and damage to himself. Whether seen as tangential third dimension or as multi-layered image of a complex experience, the symbols create the real space of the narrative dealing with the choices of the two knights on top of the two-dimensional story-line. Both the characters of the two protagonists and the ideal of chivalry are explored by this symbolic item of setting. And even if the story-line is not linear, but cyclic, or consists of concentric circles, that is symbolic, too, as we shall see under the next item.

Structure

Structuralist theory, based on the theories of Roland Barthes (1975: *passim*), likes to claim that, while the story-line tells the story, it is the structure of the narrative that determines the signification, to put it succinctly. Signification is how one arrives at the 'meaning' of the narrative, or rather at a responsible interpretation. Another starting-point for structuralism is found in the works of the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, who argued that 'things' (story-elements) have no meaning *an sich*. It is their mutual relations and contrasts that gives them power of expression; that is how their signification is created. He illustrated this point by stating that, when man is connected with the sun, or woman with the moon, that does not signify that man is like the sun or woman like the moon, but that the relationship between man and woman is to be seen in the same way as that between the sun and the moon. So he is, apparently, thinking in terms of metonymic connections rather than metaphoric ones. (Lévi-Strauss, 1962).

A similar point about signification being created by configuration had also been made by the art-historian Erwin Panofsky. What he has to say about Gothic design seems to me applicable as well to the structure of romance narrative. Cook & Herzman summarize his argument as: "In Gothic, clear principles of subordination are always present, so that each figure, statue or story must not be seen simply in itself, but in terms of its placement, and thence as it is related to the comprehensive sculptural arrangement in the cathedral as a whole." Each single statue or figure, they summarize, is invariably part of a larger group, and its identity is determined by its placement in this group. The placement is "a clearly articulated design". (Cook and Herzman, 2004:224-25).

The general idea of the strictly relative significance of items in a Gothic whole determined by their relative placement has informed my structuralist-cum-narratological approach to idealist texts. Instead of analysing characters and events *an sich*, I believe that, for that reason, one should look at the other characters and events, opponents, associates and helpers, to discover what idealism is embodied in the

protagonist, and how that is achieved, by analysing the contrasts and variations and different settings. In romances ideals are not simply embodied by the characters, as in allegory, but they are enacted. In allegory the ideals are embodied *a priori* in the characters; their action shows the results of the interaction between specific virtues and specific vices familiar to the audience. In the romances the protagonist is only fully defined by the nature and pattern of his actions on the one hand, and by the parallels and contrasts with the ‘other’ characters on the other. That is how the path from pride and arrogance to social desirability is shown – in the action of overcoming the particular checks and obstacles in the way of the specific ideal(ism).

Accepting Jacques Lacan’s admonition that we must “set out from the conception of the Other as the locus of the signifier. Any statement of authority has no other guarantee than its very enunciation, and it is pointless for us to seek it in another signifier, which could not appear outside this locus in any way.” (Lacan, 1966:813), one implication of that injunction is that the ‘other’ characters in specific romances can only be analysed in their connection with the protagonist, and not in their own right or connection with each other. They only have a function as contrasts or parallels to the protagonists, who are the proper carriers of the hegemony-ideal which the text in hand is showing in action. This restricted analysis makes it necessary to treat the texts as autonomous. The functions of characters, even well-known ones, are different in different narratives, or even in different renderings of the same story.

Since, in each text, the ‘actants’ have only functions, and no character of their own, the use of schemata such as Freud’s ‘ego, super-ego, id’, or Jung’s ‘persona, anima, animus, shadow’ are more justifiable for the analysis of romances than monograph studies of characters in isolation. Vladimir Propp’s list of functions – hero, villain, donor, helper, sought-for person, dispatcher, false hero, or any other narratological schema – is also useful in its own way (Propp, 1968:25-65 and *passim*).

Apart from the structuralist interest in repetitions, parallels, echoes, contrasts, oppositions, and mirror-images, the patterning of the story appears to me as particularly worth studying. Story-lines can be linear or circular or take the form of concentric circles. The structuralist and narratological approaches require an analysis of what the functions of the various story-lines entail. A certain amount of generalization seems possible, but there do not seem to be hard and fast rules. The heroic epics, from Homer and Virgil into the early Middle Ages, are mainly linear in plot, often combining glorious deeds with a tragic ending. But also the romances employ linear plots, without the tragedy, to show, for instance, development from pride and arrogance to social acceptability and/or humility. Or in the quest of a young knight-bachelor leading to full knighthood through marriage, or to some form of kingship. The episodic romances of the Arthurian cycle, on the other hand, tend to show a story-line from departure to return, a return to the status quo. These cyclic plots express hopefulness, in different ways. *Sir Orfeo* celebrates the status quo after the

successful return, whereas *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* shows a return that casts doubts on the status quo without changing it. *Sir Launfal*, to mention another one, turns the returned knight into a challenger of the old order. In the last two cases, at least one knight has achieved an idealistic position, which is still hopeful. The self-regenerating power of the ideal, implied in the cyclic story-line, is hopeful, because it suggests the possibility of a new start on a higher level, a new chance for the ideal. The emphasis on the New Year in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (cf. no. 4), or the setting in harvest time in *Pearl* plus its steps to the New Jerusalem as an upwards-moving spiral (cf. no. 8) are examples. This cyclic structure appears to stress the humanity of the protagonists, emphasizing that human effort is never perfect enough to achieve the goal in a linear way. The linear Grail-romances show their different idealism because they lack this view. Finally, the romances structured as concentric circles generally show a plot in which initial undesirable situations or initial shortcomings in acting according to the ideal are set right, in reverse order, after a crucial central experience. If the linear and cyclic texts show how the ideal is achieved by the protagonist in action, the concentric-circles romances show most clearly how it is the influence of the ideal that forms the character of the protagonist; there is even more emphasis on the underlying ideal.

Translatio

The revival of interest in medieval heroic literature from the nineteenth century onwards has led to numerous new creative works, mainly of the romance-type. I like to see these new revival-creations as ‘translatio’, in the medieval sense of a transfer to new surroundings. However frivolous it may seem, I am thinking of the ‘translatio’-ritual of the medieval confirmation of sainthood, when the corpse is dug up, the skeleton thoroughly cleaned, then displayed on the altar and, finally, re-interred with great pomp (Jongen, 2005:13).

I have not attempted to study in general why the revival of medieval romance took place, but have only looked at a few specific cases. The ‘why’ may be found as early as 1765 in Thomas Percy’s essay “On the Ancient Metrical Romances, &c.” (Percy, 1966: Vol.III, Appendix II, 329-376), which signals the start of the Romantic interest in ‘gothic’ pre-Classicism romances, ballads and folktales. This essay launched the antiquarian collections that were the basis for the revival in the sense of new creative productions. These new literary productions have bloomed into covering the whole gamut of translations, retellings, modern adaptations from a variety of different angles, use of ‘gothic’ plots and elements in poetry, novels, films and fantasies for all kinds of different agenda’s, even adaptations of the genre itself, characteristics filled with completely contemporary material, or medieval material in totally different genres and media.

As I said at the beginning of this introduction, my interest in the revival is of a limited medievalist kind: how close to the medieval romances as genre are these texts? I am interested in, for instance, how nineteenth- and twentieth-century texts provide a historical perspective through hindsight on the medieval romances themselves. William Morris's and Matthew Arnold's and Alfred, Lord Tennyson's retellings of romances are clear examples of how, through their nineteenth-century angles of approach, they sharpen our views about issues that remained unspecified in the medieval texts. These 'translations' suggest interpretations which may occasionally deepen our insight in the medieval texts, through the wisdom of hindsight. But they also show how the new texts manipulate the old stories to suit their contemporary cultural context. Matthew Arnold's *Tristram and Iseult* and Algernon Swinburne's Arthurian poems would be cases in point.

Fantasy literature – not based on medieval sources, but still essentially romances – is of interest for the history and development of the genre of romance. Fantasy has the make-believe world in common with the romances, the basic idea of a world that is larger than everyday experience, or that is, at least, outside the probabilities of the usual. The result is a heightened sense of adventure, such as the romances have. I am not suggesting that the romances alone provided the model for that; centuries of travel-literature have obviously also left their stamp on the fantasy narratives. Ignoring the many fantasy-stories that only play the market of improbable adventures and unnatural sexual relations, there is a great deal of fantasy literature providing serious quests for general truths for our time or for ideals old and new. Science-fiction is no exception to this serious option. Romances and fantasies have in common that the heroes depart from their own social settings, with their ideals already intact, ready to be challenged (but not overcome) in worlds of 'others' (aliens) where other passions and values reign. The otherworld or future-projecting passions and values of science-fiction may be more speculative or more outrageous, but the general idea is the same as that of the romances. Fantasy without parallels to our own world, however, is not possible, simply because such writing would not communicate with the audience (cf. Jackson, 1981:27, quoting Dostoyevsky; also Hume, 1984:164-167).

More clearly, perhaps, than in medieval literature, the idealisms in the Medieval Revival literature are paradigmatic. This is possibly so because the paradigms reflect the individual author's connection of his own paradigm of the ideal with various other paradigms of his own time and place. The fact that a simplified idealist paradigm, or a too conventional one, deadens the idealistic view can already be seen in Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur*. Especially in the Medieval Revival texts analysis of the author's attitude towards his idealist paradigm is called for, because the attitude determines his handling of the narrative material. This is, of course, largely true of the medieval texts as well. Three attitudes of different degree can be recognized. The most elevated one is

when the paradigm is treated with sacramental awe. In that case the ideal is projected as a true vision, whether inspired by love or by the wisdom of an ancient adviser. Almost as stimulating is when the paradigm is celebrated. The ideal then is affirmed after a glorious example. The least inspiring of these attitudes is when the paradigm is remembered with nostalgia. Nostalgic admiration may be used as a rallying back to ideals that ‘worked’ in the past, but the tenor is either pessimism about the present or, in some cases, downright nationalist propaganda.

Revival literature is a matter of reflecting past idealisms in a variety of different mirrors. Theoretically this situation should make a classification of these narratives possible. I am, however, not sure that classification is a helpful tool, because it makes for poor readings, in my experience. For me, an awareness of the different mirrors is no more than a way of limiting the different angles from which the question of how idealism is given shape can be approached.

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