

**CHIVALRIC ROMANCES AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF
WORLD LITERATURE**

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Abstract

This article examines the chivalric romance as a key phenomenon of Western European medieval literature and a crucial stage in the formation of the novel as a genre within the global literary tradition. It analyzes the historical and cultural preconditions for the emergence of the genre, its thematic and poetic features, as well as its system of images and values. Particular attention is paid to the transformation of chivalric motifs during the Renaissance, the Early Modern period, and in nineteenth–twenty-first-century literature. The study concludes that the chivalric romance shaped a new model of the hero, contributed to the development of psychological depth and narrative individualization, and exerted a significant influence on the rise of both the realist and the fantasy novel.

Keywords: chivalric romance, medieval literature, courtly culture, Arthurian cycle, heroic ideal, chronotope, Romanticism, Realism, fantasy, world literature.

Introduction

The chivalric romance occupies a distinctive place in the history of world literature. Emerging in the twelfth century in the countries of Western Europe, it became an artistic expression of a new system of values formed under the conditions of mature feudalism. Unlike the heroic epic of the early Middle Ages, in which the collective feat held a central position, the chivalric romance focused on the individual destiny of the hero, his inner world, moral choice, and personal responsibility.

The formation of the genre is closely connected with the development of knighthood as a military, social, and cultural elite, as well as with the spread of courtly culture. During this period, a new behavioral ideal took shape, combining martial valor, loyalty to one's suzerain, nobility, and devotion to the Lady. Literature became a space for reflecting upon and articulating these values.

The chivalric romance rapidly spread across Europe, influencing French, English, German, Spanish, and Italian literatures. Over time, its traditions underwent significant transformations; however, they did not disappear, but rather evolved into new artistic forms.

1. Historical and Cultural Preconditions for the Formation of the Genre

The emergence of the chivalric romance is associated with the flourishing of courtly culture in twelfth-century France. It was here that a circle of authors developed who drew upon Celtic and Breton narrative material. One of the founders of the genre is considered to be Chrétien de Troyes, who created works about the Knights of the Round Table. In his romances, the principal features of the genre were definitively established: an adventure-based structure, a love intrigue, and the moral testing of the hero.

The central figure of the cycle is King Arthur, the legendary ruler of Britain, at whose court the finest knights gather. The image of Arthur symbolizes an ideal state founded upon the principles of justice and equality.

Courtly love constitutes one of the most important components of the genre. In the relationship between Lancelot and Guinevere, a new type of sensibility is revealed, grounded in

exalted devotion and inner suffering. Love becomes a spiritual trial that shapes the hero's personality.

In contrast to the epic hero, who acts as a representative of a clan or a people, the hero of the chivalric romance is marked by individuality. His actions are motivated by personal convictions, while his inner doubts and emotional experiences receive detailed artistic expression.

2. The Poetics of the Chivalric Romance

The structural foundation of the chivalric romance is the motif of the quest. The hero sets out on a journey to prove his valor, restore justice, or attain spiritual knowledge. Each trial becomes a stage in his moral development.

In the romance of Perceval, the quest for the Holy Grail symbolizes the aspiration toward ultimate truth. The hero's inability to ask the proper question signifies his spiritual immaturity. Thus, the external adventure acquires an inner, philosophical meaning.

The poetics of the genre combine elements of the real and the marvelous. The narrative includes magical objects, fantastic creatures, and supernatural events. Yet the miraculous does not undermine plausibility; rather, it functions as a metaphor for moral trials.

An important role is played by the chronotope of the road—a space in which the hero leaves the familiar world and encounters the unknown. This motif would later become one of the key structural principles of the European novelistic tradition.

3. Reinterpretation of the Genre in the Renaissance and the Early Modern Period

With the advent of the Renaissance, the chivalric romance underwent critical reassessment. Humanist culture sought a rational understanding of reality, leading to shifts in artistic emphasis.

In the poem *Orlando Furioso*, Ludovico Ariosto combines the traditions of the medieval romance with a Renaissance worldview. The work is distinguished by its complex composition, irony, and multiplicity of narrative lines.

The most radical reinterpretation of the genre was achieved in the novel *Don Quixote* by Miguel de Cervantes. Inspired by chivalric books, Don Quixote attempts to realize their ideals in real life. However, his confrontation with reality produces a comic effect. The novel simultaneously mocks outdated forms and preserves the humanistic pathos of faith in the ideal.

Don Quixote is regarded as one of the first European novels of a new type. It develops a complex system of characters, advances psychological analysis, and intensifies attention to the social environment. Thus, having passed through the stage of parodic reinterpretation, the chivalric romance became the foundation for the development of realist prose.

4. Influence on Nineteenth-Century Literature

In the nineteenth century, interest in the Middle Ages was revived within the framework of Romanticism. Writers turned to the historical past as a source of national identity and poetic inspiration.

The novel *Ivanhoe* by Walter Scott represents a synthesis of chivalric tradition and historical authenticity. The author seeks to reconstruct the atmosphere of the epoch while simultaneously reflecting upon social contradictions.

Chivalric motifs also appear in Romantic poetry, where the image of the noble hero is contrasted with the prosaic nature of contemporary life. The idealization of the past becomes a means of criticizing the present.

5. The Chivalric Tradition in Twentieth- and Twenty-First-Century Literature

In the twentieth century, elements of the chivalric romance were actively developed within the genre of fantasy. In the epic *The Lord of the Rings* by J. R. R. Tolkien, motifs of spiritual quest, fellowship, and journey receive a new artistic embodiment.

Tolkien draws upon medieval myths and epic traditions, creating a modern variation of the chivalric ideal. The heroes of his works undergo trials that demand not only physical strength but also moral resilience.

Contemporary popular literature and cinema likewise employ the archetype of the knight as a defender of justice and the weak. Although this image undergoes transformation, it retains its essential features: fidelity to an ideal, readiness for self-sacrifice, and a striving for justice.

Conclusion

The chivalric romance constituted a crucial stage in the development of world literature. It established a new model of the hero based on individual responsibility and moral choice. The genre contributed to the growth of psychological depth, the complication of narrative structure, and the expansion of thematic range in literary representation.

Reinterpreted during the Renaissance, reshaped in the realist prose of the Early Modern period, and revived in Romantic and fantasy literature, the chivalric romance continues to influence artistic culture. Its tradition demonstrates resilience and adaptability, testifying to the fundamental significance of the genre for world literature.

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