

### The Basic Elements and Characteristics of English Chivalric Romances

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#### ABSTRACT

*Chivalric romance is a type of prose or verse narrative that was popular in the aristocratic circles of High Medieval and Early Modern Europe. They typically describe the adventures of quest-seeking, legendary knights who are portrayed as having heroic qualities. Chivalric romances celebrate an idealized code of civilized behavior that combines loyalty, honor, and courtly love. Chivalric romance is an important genre of literature because of the depth of storytelling it contains, the genre changes it represents, and how it reflects the contemporary culture it was written in.*

#### Introduction.

As a literary genre, the chivalric romance is a type of prose and verse narrative that was popular in the noble courts of High Medieval and Early Modern Europe. The turn of the fifteenth century heralded the true beginning of the democratization of reading with the rise of the so-called "romances of chivalry," which were the first popular literature to demonstrate the commercial possibilities of the recently invented printing press. Taking its strongest hold in Spain soon after the discovery of America, this literary fashion spread like a contagion into the neighboring countries of Europe and, presently, crossed the ocean to the New World. Everywhere the appeal of this fiction proved overpowering and the literate elements of all social classes succumbed to it. And long before this enthusiasm subsided completely these fantastic tales had left their imprint on contemporary customs and manners, had fired the imaginations of adventurers in Europe and America, and had inspired the greatest masterpiece in Spanish literature.

They were fantastic stories about marvel-filled adventures, often of a chivalric knight-errant portrayed as having heroic qualities, who goes on a quest. It developed further from the epics as time went on; in particular, "the emphasis on love and courtly manners distinguishes it from the chanson de geste and other kinds of epic, in which masculine military heroism predominates." [5;163]

#### Discussion and results.

These novels were usually long accounts of the impossible exploits of knightly heroes in strange and enchanted lands inhabited by monsters and extraordinary creatures, and they presented a

highly imaginative, idealized concept of life in which strength, virtue, and passion were all of a transcendent and unnatural character. These prolix narratives were, indeed, the melodrama of their age, and readers, unrestrained by any knowledge of what are today the most elementary scientific facts, accepted avidly and uncritically the wildest extravagances that the authors generously offered them. As the public clamored for more of these romances, it identified itself completely with the world of these fictional knights. Like the motion pictures of a later day, these romantic novels exerted a profound influence on contemporary conduct, morality and thought patterns, and they furthered the acceptance of artificial standards of value and false attitudes toward reality. These books provided a pleasant escape from the harsh monotony of an essentially primitive existence, and they brought a touch of color to the drab lives of their readers. The latter, despite the denunciations of moralists against these "lying histories," continued to find in them authentic portrayals' of life from which they derived not only patterns of behavior as well as ideas of a larger reality but incitement to greater endeavors.

The popularity of these romances in the sixteenth century was, in reality, a more democratic revival in the Spanish Peninsula of a medieval passion for the literature of chivalry. The folk ballads, which belonged to the whole people and still retained the affection of the less cultivated at the time of the Conquest, contained some of the same fanciful and idealistic elements, but rivaling them in appeal among the more aristocratic classes were the newer forms of chronicles purporting to give historical accounts of the past.

Chivalric Romance is a genre of literature and culture popular during the Medieval and Early Modern periods in Europe from the 12th century.

The genre included stories of knights, damsels in distress, magic, and more. These stories often took their elements from prior folkloric tales and fairy stories. As time progresses, chivalric romances, which were first written in verse, changed and took on prose as their main form. These stories were filled with adventure and traditional roles of hero and villain.

*Folklore and folktales.* The earliest medieval romances dealt heavily with themes from folklore, which diminished over time, though remaining a presence. Many early tales had the knight, such as Sir Launfal, meet with fairy ladies, and Huon of Bordeaux is aided by King Oberon, but these fairy characters were transformed, more and more often, into wizards and enchantresses.[17;106] Morgan le Fay never loses her name, but in *Le Morte d'Arthur*, she studies magic rather than being inherently magical. Similarly, knights lose magical abilities. Still, fairies never completely vanished from the tradition. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is a late tale, but the Green Knight himself is an otherworldly being.[20;97]

Early persecuted heroines were often driven from their husbands' homes by the persecutions of their mothers-in-law, whose motives are seldom delineated, and whose accusations are of the heroines' having borne monstrous children, committed infanticide, or practiced witchcraft — all of which appear in such fairy tales as *The Girl Without Hands* and many others. As time progressed, a new persecutor appeared: a courtier who was rejected by the woman or whose ambition requires her removal, and who accuses her of adultery or high treason, motifs not duplicated in fairy tales. While he never eliminates the mother-in-law, many romances such as *Valentine and Orson* have later variants that change from the mother-in-law to the courtier, whereas a more recent version never goes back.[5;264]

In Italy there is the story called *Il Bel Gherardino*. It is the most ancient prototype of an Italian singing fairy tale by an anonymous Tuscan author. It tells the story of a young Italian knight, depleted for his "magnanimity", who wins the love of a fairy. When he loses this love because he does not comply with her conditions, Gherardino reconquers his lady after a series of labours, including the prison where he is rescued by another woman and a tournament that he wins. Other examples of Italian (Tuscan) poetry tales are Antonio Pucci's literature: *Gismirante*, *Il Brutto di Bretagna* or *Brito di Bretagna* ("The ugly knight of Britain") and *Madonna Lionessa* ("Lioness

Lady"). Another work of a second anonymous Italian author that is worth mentioning is *Istoria di Tre Giovani Disperati e di Tre Fate* ("Story of three desperate boys and three fairies").[6;264]

*Religious practices.* The Arthurian cycle as a Medieval work has also been noted to contain many magical or supernatural references. Drawing from many different sources, some notable allusions include elements of Christianity (an example being the multiple references to the Holy Grail) as well as elements of Celtic legends.[17;285]

*Medieval epic.* The Medieval romance developed out of the medieval epic, in particular the Matter of France developing out of such tales as the *Chanson de Geste*, with intermediate forms where the feudal bonds of loyalty had giants, or a magical horn, added to the plot. The epics of Charlemagne, unlike such ones as *Beowulf*, already had feudalism rather than the tribal loyalties; this was to continue in romances.

## Conclusion.

In conclusion we can describe Chivalric romance like this: Chivalric romance is a type of prose or verse narrative that was popular in the aristocratic circles of High Medieval and Early Modern Europe. They typically describe the adventures of quest-seeking, legendary knights who are portrayed as having heroic qualities. Chivalric romances celebrate an idealized code of civilized behavior that combines loyalty, honor, and courtly love.

Our theoretical and practical investigation shows that Chivalry in the medieval period was centered around life at court; it was practiced by kings, knights, squires, and other courtiers. It can be defined as "an ideal, a behaviour, a vocation, an ethical code for knights, an institution, a social status or noble habitus, even a shared mentality or worldview", or as a model of societal ideals, expectations, and aspirations". Chivalric behavior could also be used to strengthen group identities. A knight distinguished himself from others by being aware of chivalric behavior and by executing it correctly. Not adhering to the rules that came with the position of a knight could bring great shame onto him. In the context of medieval literature, chivalric elements such as fine clothes, shiny weaponry, and the noble steed that would carry the knight were used to lend a poetic quality to a narrative.

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