

ROMANCE

Defining literary genres is a task more like lexicography than taxonomy: a description of historically variable vernacular usage, rather than the scientific formulation of a synchronic order. The distinction between novel and romance is peculiar to English. Other European languages, and languages of cultures in which the novel has represented a Westernizing development, tend to designate extended works of prose fiction by a single name derived from the French *roman*: *il romanzo* (Italian), *der Roman* (German), *Roman* (Russian), *roman* (Turkish), etc. (*Nouvelle* and its analogues signify a shorter form, as in the English *novella*.) Accordingly, this essay will concentrate on the anglophone fortunes of romance as a category posed in differential relation to (and within) the novel.

In English, romance has carried a wide range of meanings, including the following: a chivalric poem of the later Middle Ages; a Renaissance court fiction in prose or verse; any work of fiction; four of the late plays of Shakespeare; the 19th-century tradition of American novels; contemporary, highly conventionalized mass-market novels read by women; a love affair or story; a fanciful, erotic, or sentimental enhancement of any situation or event; a supergenre containing all fictional forms and figures corresponding with the human imagination. The principal meaning of romance in the lexicon of modern criticism---a departure from the normative conventions of narrative realism---records a disjunction in British cultural history. Following the political revolutions of the 17th century, romance came to signify those cultural elements from which the new hegemony---Whig, Protestant, middle class, masculine---progressively strove to differentiate itself. From the mid-18th century, romance thus denoted a variable (and unstable) antithetical category: the discredited stories of the "other," beginning with the *ancien régime* and its continental avatars, but soon including women, adolescents, aliens, the colonized, and the common people. Attempts to stabilize romance with a positive definition as a genre or (more loosely) "mode" have led to much critical confusion, usually by the fixation on some contingent formal or thematic feature: improbable or marvelous events; a preference for action over character; a "poetic" or "atmospheric" emphasis; a plot defined by a wandering, quest, homecoming, or discovery of lost or secret origins; an ethos determined by desire, wish-fulfillment, or escapism; a feminine predominance; conservatism; individualism; and so on. Conversely, the function of romance as the sign of imaginative forms and energies excluded from the official culture of modernity has made it a creative resource for poets and novelists, as advertised in a series of titles: *The Romance of the Forest* (Ann Radcliffe), *Ivanhoe: A Romance* (Sir Walter Scott), *The Blithedale Romance* (Nathaniel Hawthorne), *The Moonstone: A Romance* (Wilkie Collins), *A Romance of Two Worlds* (Marie Corelli), *Green Mansions: A Romance of the Tropical Forest* (W.H. Hudson), *Romance: A Novel* (Joseph Conrad and Ford Madox Ford), *A Glastonbury Romance* (J.C. Powys), and *Possession: A Romance* (A.S. Byatt).

Romance, as its etymology tells us, originally referred to the Latin-derived vernacular languages of Europe after the fall of the Roman Empire, and subsequently to heroic metrical narratives composed and circulated in those languages, especially in France. By the advent of printing (which encouraged the diffusion of long prose forms) romance meant any extended fiction in the vernacular, in prose or verse, that might occupy a book: medieval chivalric poems and their more recent revisions and imitations (*Amadis de Gaul*, *Orlando Furioso*); reedited ancient Greek novels (the *Æthiopica*, *Daphnis and Chloe*); and modern court or *côterie* fictions drawing on both of those along with other sources (*Arcadia*, *Artamènes*). The categorical abstraction of romance to mean "a fiction antithetical to historical reality" was rehearsed within some of these Renaissance romances through an internal movement of self-critique and ironical apologia, notably in works by Ariosto and Miguel de Cervantes. Cervantes' *Don Quixote* (1605-15), especially, prepared the modern way of the novel as a romance form attached to the Aristotelian canons of probability that increasingly came to define the epistemological regime of truth. The two parts of *Don Quixote* make sophisticated dialectical play with the categories of truth, fiction, and illusion, rather than crudely debunking fiction as such, to produce a modern romance that licenses itself through the recognition of its own fictiveness.

As mentioned earlier, the continental development of the novel through these and other narratives was not marked by the terminological discontinuity that has troubled the historiography of fiction in English. In 17th-century England a generic distinction emerged, and began to stabilize, between romance and history, in company with the new discourses of empiricism (see McKeon, 1987). Romance became the stigma of a writing adrift from religious truth and scientific fact alike; in the age of an expanding reading public and the proliferation of religious and political dissent, the term acquired a disciplinary, censorious charge. To be culturally acceptable, fiction would have to assume another title. The "rise of the novel" in England between 1660 and 1750 has become the field of productive debate in recent literary scholarship. According to the traditional account (Watt, 1957), the novel established itself as the emergent form of modern culture by developing a new mimetic technology of "formal realism" committed to the ideology of Protestant individualism, an innovation that entailed a clean break with the past and with the obsolete conventions of romance. It seems clear that this account (perpetuating the ideological commitment it describes) has exaggerated the discontinuities between the novel and its premodern traditions and affiliations, as well as the novel's own investment in the rhetoric of fiction---in deviations from a strictly mimetic imperative.

An 18th-century English rhetoric of "antiromance," taking its cue from Don Quixote, burlesqued in particular the so-called romans héroïques or romans à longue haleine produced by the salons of the précieuses, the coteries of women writers and readers attached to the court of Louis XIV. Ostensibly aimed at a French, Catholic, Royalist culture of fiction addicted to extravagance and idolatry, the satire by mid-century involved the domestic ascendancy of the new form, the novel itself, associated with an expansion of the reading public to include the lower classes and, especially, women---who, like the précieuses, also happened to be the authors of many of these books. Henry Fielding repudiated the title of romance in order to claim a suitably masculine generic dignity for his own fictional practice ("comic epic poem in prose," "heroic, historical, prosaic poem") in *Joseph Andrews* (1742) and *Tom Jones* (1749). Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote* (1752) invokes the French salon romances as vessels of a feminine countertradition of desire and heroism in a patriarchal culture: in a last-minute conversion, the heroine must submit to correction by the official sentences of reason, morality, and historical truth. If the female Quixote's most celebrated avatar is the heroine of Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* (1817), the figure, and the association of women with romance, has recurred throughout the history of the novel (see Langbauer, 1990).

These and other works rehearsed a convention that would recur in apologies for fiction for the next century and a half. The novel claimed the legitimacy of a formal realism bound to the representation of truth and morality by rejecting a disreputable prior fiction called romance. Romance thus meant two things: a failure of representation (a deficiency of realism, a straying from truth and morality) that reduces it to nothing but fiction; and the representation of other, illegitimate cultural energies.

Antiromance sought to conflate these two categories, so that the heroic values of a feudal monarchy, or representations of female autonomy and pleasure, are cast as illusions with no basis in experience or reason. But the seeds of a reversal, and a reevaluation of romance, are already sown: the recognition of other cultural styles and values as such (rather than as defections from a norm) would license fiction as a means of evoking alternative structures of reality, forms of desire and fantasy that turn against the received story of the way things are. This turn is already latent in the shift of romance to denominate different sites of cultural otherness, from the absolutist court, to female literacy, to a host of ideological regimes of the other, such as popular communities and primitive societies. The positive reevaluation of romance gets under way with the miscellaneous cultural movement of the second half of the 18th century called the "romance revival," devoted to the antiquarian reconstruction and poetic imitation of premodern, native, and nonclassical literary forms. Driven by broadly nationalist as well as commercial motives, romance revival comprised modern editions and dissertations upon elite and popular older literature (Edmund Spenser, William Shakespeare, English and Scottish ballads), and ancestral and exotic inventions, from James Macpherson's Ossian epics to a vogue for Oriental tales. The movement expanded via 19th-century colonialism to

accommodate an anthropological interest in the collection and synthesis of all cultural forms, including the preliterate forms of myth and subliterate forms of manners and customs, into a timeless universal order---a department of what one critic has called "the imperial archive" (see Richards, 1993).

By the end of the century, the premodern and nonclassical forms of cultural expression, along with the consolidation of the novel as an ascendant literary genre, framed the appearance of novels confident enough to claim "romance" as a title of distinction. These were the so-called Gothic romances, a category covering miscellaneous ideological claims and formal experiments rather than a unified tradition. More militantly than romance, the term Gothic would signify a cultural identity set in problematical opposition to a classical-based modernity. It might bear barbarous, outrageous energies of sex and power, as in Matthew Lewis' *The Monk, a Romance* (1796), or native, ancestral virtues of liberty and endurance, as in the novels of Anne Radcliffe, the genre's most prestigious author. In *A Sicilian Romance* (1790) and its successors, Radcliffe revised the female Quixote scenario to refashion female subjectivity as the narrative center of truth and value, rewarding rather than correcting its (to be sure, entirely proper) desire. Radcliffe fortified her heroine's sensibility with an intensified rhetoric of scenic description and the authority of a national poetic tradition, consisting of the Shakespeare-based romance-revival canon established by modern poets such as Thomas Gray, Thomas Warton, and William Collins.

The strategy of investing modern romance with the authority of a national tradition was amplified, with formidable scholarship and literary sophistication, by Sir Walter Scott, who more than anyone else established the primary modern senses of romance as both a subjective state of the imagination and as the literary form of a premodern culture. Beginning with *Waverley* (1814), Scott's novels turn critically upon their own history and genealogy, invoking a range of materials and techniques that constitute a vital body of artistic resources rather than a lapsed past. Scott's novels thus activate a categorical mixture of thematic and formal sources: national, regional, and imperial; ancient and modern; courtly, urban, and rural; native and exotic. The earlier novels address the social and cultural constitution of modern Scotland; Scott began to subtitle his novels "A Romance" with *Ivanhoe* (1819), signaling the move away from this proximate history to remoter, exotic settings accessible only through literary sources. As the cultural history of the novel includes the traditional opposition between romance and history, so the progress of the hero and the evolution of the nation toward modernity together rehearse a complex, dialectical movement. Figures of romance, designating the hero's adolescent illusions as well as premodern cultural habits, fall under the inexorable pressure of "real history," but romance also returns as the medium in which the subject is able to inhabit modernity, released from the conflicts of historical development. In a complex (Cervantean) irony, romance signifies the faculty of aesthetic self-consciousness through which modern readers imagine their relation to past and present conditions. Scott's romance thus performs a co-option and containment of historic cultural differences, and their oppositional energies, in a dynamic imperial regime; at the same time, the final turn to romance advertises the fictive, provisional status of the narrative resolution, and of the dispensation of modernity, inviting a critical interrogation---an extension of the imaginative play---that a seamless insistence on "the real" would have excluded.

Romanticism, the title retrospectively given to the era, describes the resort of many poets (even more than novelists) to the nationalist and/or adversary cultural energies signified by romance, moving the term toward its modern sense of a human desire in critical tension with modern life. The examples of Lord Byron and John Keats as well as Scott indicate the range of politics with which the term could be charged, although the critical or transcendental principle tended to claim the form of lyric, and the internalization of narrative tropes (Bloom, 1971). Novelists who assumed the title of romance often did so in response to Scott's example, especially if they were Scottish novelists. James Hogg's *The Three Perils of Man; or, War, Women and Witchcraft: A Border Romance* (1822) activates the demonic figures of Border folklore in subversive opposition to Enlightenment canons of historical realism.

The 1830s saw a regothicization of historical romance in the wake of Scott by younger writers such as W. Harrison Ainsworth and G.P.R. James. Henceforth, historical fiction would largely be confined to the status of "mere romance" as the Victorian social novel, from the 1840s onward, took up Scott's dialectical combination of romance and realism. The most prestigious of the Victorian novelists tended to follow the example of Scott's Scottish novels in avoiding the taxonomic trap of the novel-romance distinction. Dickens' novels, for example, deploy the narrative techniques of romance adapted from Scott, such as plots hinging on lost or secret origins, the providential intervention of demonic or guardian figures, etc., to represent an uncanny enhancement and visionary transformation of modern social reality. With his ideological objections to historicism, which he associated with Toryism, Dickens abandons premodern culture as the referential basis for romance, preferring instead the transcendental yearnings of an alienated individual imagination. Dickens' sources are urban popular culture, spiritual allegory (divested of a theological framework), and the nursery rhymes and tales of childhood (accommodating the figure of an unfallen fancy, the most potent of all). The authentic avatars of romance---children or childlike young women---bear a special grace, a salvational aura (*Dombey and Son*, 1848; *Little Dorrit*, 1857).

Victorian women writers, in the wake of Scott's strong historicizing and masculinizing of romance, were especially conscious of the stigma that remained attached to the term, reinforced by the designation of domesticity as their proper cultural sphere. Now that the novel was established as a canonical genre practiced by male professional authors, romance was even more likely to be the label of an inferior literature in which the feminine and the popular were conflated, especially with the industrialization of a genuine mass market for fiction in the second half of the 19th century. This did not mean that women did not continue to use romance tropes and signifiers to challenge the ideological freight of realism. If Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847) offers a "wild" deconstruction of the Scott regional-historical romance after the post-Gothic manner of Hogg, Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley* (1849) claims the title of the real ("unromantic as Monday morning") in order to contest it from within, most strikingly in a series of allegorical didactic interpolations. George Eliot moved from the assertion of an amplified and rigorous realism (*Adam Bede*, 1859) to a synthesis of romance devices in order to represent the dynamic, transformative energies of "culture" as such. Daniel Deronda (1876), perhaps the century's most ambitious extension and revision of the Scott model, explodes the 19th-century narrative of national identity by counterpointing an "English" plot of courtship and marriage (corresponding to a feminine domestic realism) with a "Hebraic" romance of revealed origins and world-historical destiny.

Otherwise, the term romance remained the unstable signifier of narrative modes divergent from domestic realism, even if it often meant nothing much more precise than "popular work of fiction." As the century progressed, romance became linked to the proliferation of genres that represented sites or forces more radically alien to a modern social order: primitive, pagan, mystic, demonic, or otherwise exotic. The pioneer of the development was Edward Bulwer-Lytton, who wrote (besides historical romances) a range of experimental fictions exploring alternative genres, including post-Gothic occult fantasy (*Zanoni*, 1842) and prototypical science fiction (*The Coming Race*, 1871). The neo-Gothic "sensation novel" of the 1860s (and its offspring, detective fiction) subverted domestic realism from within its *mise-en-scène*; the movement's most original practitioner, Wilkie Collins, gave the subtitle "A Romance" to *The Moonstone* (1868) in recognition of the triumph of an alien cultural power, as Hindu secret agents reclaim a looted diamond in defiance of English policework. As the literary market diversified in the 1880s and 1890s, so did nonrealist or antirealist genres, as well as author specialization: occult fantasy (Marie Corelli), ghost and horror fiction (Margaret Oliphant, Bram Stoker), imperial adventure (H. Rider Haggard), utopian romance (William Morris), "scientific romance" (H.G. Wells), and many more. In the eyes of many writers and reviewers, romance stood for a thoroughly commodified state of fiction and a literary production absolutely controlled by the market, strictly distinguished from the didactic realism of a George Gissing or the serious artistry of a Henry James. Few were the authors allowed to be masters of romance rather than its drudges. If Robert Louis Stevenson was admired as a connoisseur-practitioner who made consummate aesthetic play with romance

conventions (Prince Otto, 1885), Joseph Conrad offered the riskier case of an author investing a popular genre with advanced philosophical content and formal experimentation. (If Stevenson's *Kidnapped* [1886] miniaturizes the Scott novel to adolescent scale, Conrad's *Lord Jim* [1900] updates it as the vessel of an inquiry into the epistemology of character and action.) The appearance of the modern category of the bestseller at the end of the century sealed this stratification of the literary market, with romance consigned--- when not the project of select masters--- overwhelmingly to "scribbling females."

North American developments were somewhat different, although again the woman writer was cast as the producer of frivolous if not deleterious rubbish. In the middle decades of the 20th century, American academic criticism set up a masculine dynasty of 19th-century novelists (James Fenimore Cooper and Edgar Allen Poe through Hawthorne and Herman Melville) who boldly departed from English norms in their exploration of non-realist modes of romance, allegory, and fable. Indeed, an influential account defined the American tradition as one of romance rather than the novel (Chase, 1957). The central figure, Hawthorne, theorized his own work as "romance" (*The House of the Seven Gables*, 1851; *The Marble Faun*, 1860) and dissociated it from an inferior industry of sentimental domestic fiction by women writers. The gender hierarchy, in other words, reversed the English genre hierarchy, so that romance became the badge of a masculine aesthetic exceptionalism (played out, in works by Cooper, Melville, et al., in antidomestic homosocial adventures). Since the 1970s, Americanist scholars have been debating and revising this literary history. For the purposes of the present essay, it remains to be noted that the mid-century election of romance to the dignity of a national form derived from interesting developments in modernist cultural theory.

The fate of romance in early 20th-century Britain faithfully traced the literary demography of modernism: on the one hand, a decisive fall into the abyss of a feminized mass culture, where romance carried on a degraded material existence as best-selling fiction by and for women; on the other, an idealized exaltation to the sphere of modernist theory, where romance came to articulate the essential structures of a collective (racial or universal) imagination, yielding the potent figures of myth and archetype. It was at once the principle of that literature empirically most embedded in modernity and, in an ultimate fulfillment of the logic of romance revival, of an archaic or natural narrative transcending it. The dichotomy is memorably posed in the "Nausicaa" episode of James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922): the mythic narrative schema taken from the *Odyssey* ironically frames a stylistic pastiche of the trashy romances that constitute Gertie MacDowell's subjectivity ---which, like every other subjectivity in the book, has no access to the mythic schema (an irony that cuts both ways). The empirical declension of romance issued in its contemporary vernacular association with a popular brandname commodity, defined more by wholesale manufacture and marketing (*Harlequin*, *Mills*, and *Boon*) than by the work of an author. Recent scholarship has defended this romance subculture against the traditional charge of female Quixotism, arguing that reading constitutes a domain of discrimination and reflection here just as much as anywhere else (Radford, 1986; Radway, 1984).

The theoretical aggrandizement of romance was prepared by Victorian intellectuals. According to John Ruskin, the premodern symbolic systems of Gothic architecture and Greek mythology represented the free expression of objective forms of nature by individual artisans in an organic society; imitation of their example could heal the ontological trauma of modernity, reconnecting the national sensibility with a defaced natural order. Ruskin's account of Greek myth in *The Queen of the Air* (1869) anticipates later accounts of narrative forms grounded in sacred, primordial intuitions and processes. With its interest in primitive culture and prehistoric "survivals," Victorian anthropology claimed a global, transhistorical field of reference, fortified by a rhetoric of scientific authority. In the most ambitious example, *The Golden Bough* (1890), Sir James Frazer's encyclopedic synthesis of mythologies is arranged in a master narrative rooted in the seasonal cycles of death and regeneration. At about the same time, Freudian psychoanalysis scripted the structural dynamics of the psyche as a set of fundamental plots of desire and prohibition. Freud provided for a scientific justification of romance, conventionally associated with

fantasy states, as an authentic chart of inner psychic reality. It was Carl Jung who decisively (not to say reductively) combined psychoanalysis with Frazerian cultural anthropology to explicate the narrative themes of a "collective unconscious," locking individual, historical identities into a taxonomy of essential, mythic agencies or "archetypes." Jungianism, with its hermeneutic of universal binary oppositions, flourished in the West, especially in the United States, during the Cold War, with consequences for the discourse of romance.

These developments marked a completion of the modern reevaluation of romance as a category of narrative alienated from (yet investing) modernity. Now romance represented a domain more real than realism's socially and historically contingent, transient phenomenology; it emerged no longer merely from a national or psychic past, through the discourses of history and culture, but from an atemporal domain of origins, structurally essential and thus eternally recurring, through the discourses of myth and race. Jessie L. Weston (*From Ritual to Romance*, 1920) injected Frazer's scheme into historical literature with an argument that the medieval Grail romances expressed ancient vegetation rituals. Weston's thesis was taken up by T.S. Eliot (who coined the self-descriptive phrase "mythical method" in a 1923 review of *Ulysses*); his poem *The Waste Land* (1922) invokes the shadow of a grand primordial narrative of the Aryan race, bound to natural rhythms and forces, which might contain the fractured utterances of modernity. John Cowper Powys' *A Glastonbury Romance* (1932) recapitulates both works of Weston and Eliot to rehearse, on the grandest scale, the forms and ambitions of the 19th-century novel in its dialectical relation to "romance," the mystic double that inhabits and exceeds it. In many ways Powys stands at the end of the novel-romance tradition his work summarizes. The crisis of realism proclaimed by modernism brought the end of its prestige as a representation adequate to the world; realism declined to the status of just another romance, the outdated historical expression of a bourgeois hegemonic confidence. The role of romance as its antithetical double was accordingly attenuated. The nonrealist or magic realist modes of postmodern fiction draw on an enlarged cultural horizon, including non-European traditions, so that it is not especially illuminating to speak of, for example, Maxine Hong Kingston, Salman Rushdie, or Jeanette Winterson as authors of "romance," except perhaps from the perspective of an imperial Jungianism. Those writers who might plausibly be seen as still working the vein affiliate their work to specific traditions: Iris Murdoch (Powys' most interesting successor) invokes British and continental literary and philosophical genealogies of "romance and realism" (*The Sea, The Sea*, 1978; *The Green Knight*, 1993); Fay Weldon mobilizes ancient vernacular conventions through the styles of contemporary popular fiction (*The Hearts and Lives of Men*, 1987). Otherwise, recent Anglo-American fiction has preferred the more reliably oppositional connotations of "Gothic."

The modernist high-cultural account of romance persisted in postwar literary criticism, which generated a remarkable canon of romance-revival mythographies by poets and scholars such as G. Wilson Knight, Robert Graves, Northrop Frye, and Harold Bloom. Frye, the most influential of these, composed the apotheosis of romance as a "secular scripture," the total form of all plots and figures, thus the register of the human imagination (1976). More recently, the rhetoric of identity politics has encouraged a recovery of archetypalist criticism from the poststructuralist critique of essentialism; Margaret Doody's *True Story of the Novel* (1996) is an outstanding recent attempt to recast the history of fiction through a romance typology, now grounded on a female nature (a gentler version of Robert Graves' 1948 *White Goddess*). Interestingly, Doody repeats the ancient gesture of claiming the legitimate title "novel" by repudiating that of "romance," suggesting that an old story is far from over.

Ian Duncan

See also ADVENTURE NOVEL AND IMPERIAL ROMANCE; CRITICS AND CRITICISM (18TH CENTURY); CRITICS AND CRITICISM (19TH CENTURY); GENRE CRITICISM (PROBLEMS IN CATEGORIZING THE NOVEL AS A GENRE); GOTHIC NOVEL; GREEK AND ROMAN NARRATIVE (FORMS OF THE NOVEL IN THE ANCIENT WORLD); HISTORICAL NOVEL; HISTORICAL WRITING AND THE NOVEL; MEDIEVAL NARRATIVE; MIMESIS (REPRESENTATION AND REFERENTIALITY IN THE NOVEL); MYTH AND THE

NOVEL; NOVEL AND ROMANCE: ETYMOLOGIES; PROSE NOVELISTIC FORMS; REALISM;
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ADVENTURE NOVEL AND IMPERIAL ROMANCE

[IMPERIAL ROMANCE]

[COLONIAL ROMANCE]

From Old French, the term *adventure* signified at first "a thing about to happen to anyone." In much modern adventure fiction, particularly in thrillers and spy stories, that meaning is latent. "Anyone" can be the unsuspecting protagonist of an adventure novel. Ordinary lives can be precipitately put at hazard. People can be transplanted from their familiar surroundings to strange and threatening places. As the term *adventure* evolved, elements of danger, recklessness, and daring attached themselves to it. Thus we can trace a parallel movement toward a literature in which *adventure* is less a matter of chance than of will and desire: *adventure* becomes something that is sought after by intrepid characters rather than something that accidentally happens to characters. This shift is especially evident in that fecund subbranch of adventure fiction, the imperial romance.

This form of popular fiction, which was often written for serious, polemical purposes, belongs to the late 19th and early 20th centuries (although important elements of the genre may be traced back to earlier examples of prose fiction, as discussed below). The connection has been pithily hypothesized by Martin Green (1979). "Adventure," he contends, is "the energizing myth of empire" ; it generates myths that inspire action, both military and mercantile. Imperial romance is itself a kind of imperial phenomenon, spreading from the centers of the European empires---notably London and Paris---in search of exotic subject matter in their colonized territories. In time, authors from those territories (notably Australia, Canada, New Zealand, South Africa, and the Caribbean) began to write adventure fiction in ways indebted to, but revisionist of, their predecessors. Their particular need was to retrieve or confect a usable past in their own countries that would validate the romance enterprise, to discover what Rolf Boldrewood called, in *Robbery Under Arms* (1888), "the domain of legend and tradition."

Adventure fiction is retrospective, a disposition that appears early and perhaps most significantly in the historical novel, which was pioneered by Sir Walter Scott and James Fenimore Cooper and their emulators around the world. In this mode, adventure fiction treats the development of nation states, revives episodes of their heroic pasts, or furnishes myths of national values and virtues as in, for example, Scott's account of Anglo-Saxon and Norman rivalry in *Ivanhoe* (1819). His novels, like Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826), often are set in borderlands, such as that between England and Scotland. In Cooper's case it is the "bloody ground" where the French and English territorial claims clashed in North America. In the temporal settings of their fiction, outlawry is powerful, but heroic virtue still may prevail in what ultimately is the settling of national destinies. Such backward-glancing fiction is also frequently imbued with nostalgia for more adventurous times, which---if in fact lost forever---are imaginatively recoverable.

There is also an alternative, prospective mode of adventure fiction that imagines the recovery of mysterious lost worlds and lost races, the pioneering of lands new to Europeans and the exploitation of the rich domains hitherto unknown to them. The extension of the territory of imperial romance fiction was the literary counterpart of the geographical expansion of the 19th-century European empires. Ghosted by the fear that their material might be exhausted, these writers colonized darkest Africa, the dead heart of Australia (for example, in Rosa Praed's romance about a lost race, *Fugitive Anne*, 1904), and in due course the moon (to which Jules Verne led the way) and the future (notably in H.G. Wells' *The Time Machine*, 1895). Their enterprise was to refute the gloomy judgment on the possibilities for adventure that were voiced by the newspaper editor in Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Lost World* (1912): "I'm afraid the day for this sort of thing is rather past. ... The big blank spaces in the map are all being filled in, and there's no room for romance anywhere." The author made it his business to rebut such pessimism.

Some adventure fiction was devoted to imperialist boosting, as with former war correspondent G. A. Henty, whose long and successful series of novels was intended chiefly for juvenile audiences. These books sported such formulaic titles as *Under Drake's Flag* (1882) and dealt with the heroic ages of the British Empire. War has been a prime subject of adventure fiction. Scott, for instance, wrote of the Crusades, Cooper of the Seven Years' War. C. S. Forester's series of ebullient novels of the Napoleonic War at sea had a hero, Hornblower, who was modeled on Lord Nelson. Among innumerable modern successors are Patrick O'Brian and Bernard Cornwell, who treat the same historical period as Forester with an ironic tinge but also with an almost pedantic care for detail. Both show a concern as intense and scrupulous as Scott's to ground their adventure stories plausibly in the time in which they are set. Thus, paradoxically, adventure fiction can seek a realistic validation for its imaginative license.

One of the most curious, specialized instances of this circumstance is the turn-of-the-century, pan-European adventure literature that---by imagining in detail the war to come---helped prepare Europeans for the likelihood of World War I. For instance, journalist William Le Queux's *The Invasion of 1910* (1906) was originally published in Northcliffe's *Daily Mail* with maps showing what parts of Britain the Germans would secure the next day. Erskine Childers, who was executed by British authorities in 1922 for his Irish nationalist beliefs, wrote the best of these

works of prediction, *The Riddle of the Sands* (1903). The phenomenon is analyzed by I. F. Clarke in *Voices Prophesying War, 1763-1984* (1966).

The tone of imperial romance fiction has also been melancholy, cautionary, preferring to demythologize the strange lands upon which European adventurers intrude as often as it exults in their conquest. This writing sometimes becomes the vehicle for social criticism, prophecy, and satire. Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) is a satire of European Enlightenment pretensions in the form of an adventure novel and is perhaps a proleptic satire of that form as well. H. G. Wells' *The War of the Worlds* (1898), with its famous imagining of a Martian invasion (a piece of psycho-pathology from which the world has not since been spared), castigates British imperial hubris. Yet those who were public proponents of the virtues of the empire often responded ambivalently to its possible fate. At the end of the 19th century, Rudyard Kipling's poem "The Recessional" sounded a solemn note. He believed, as did H. Rider Haggard (probably the most influential of all imperial romance authors), in the cyclical pattern of history. The "wheel of empire" (a title adopted by Alan Sandison in his fine study of the "Imperial Idea" in late 19th- and early 20th-century fiction, 1967) would continue to turn. Thus the British Empire, just because it was near its zenith, faced imminent decline. The civilization of ancient Rome was the model for Kipling's and Haggard's gloomy prognostications. A more general scepticism about the worth, distinct from the likely fate, of civilization was explored in novels such as Haggard's *Allan Quatermain* (1887), in which civilization is seen as merely veneer over the essentially savage nature of mankind.

The imperial romance involves an outward journey into unknown, faraway lands and perils. Just as importantly, it enforces a vertiginous descent into the unconscious mind of the adventurer. That is, imperial romance is intimately concerned with regression, whether it is Haggard's unpeeling of the layers of civilization as his adventurers are jolted by the experience of "lost" African lands, or Marlow, musing in Joseph Conrad's "Heart of Darkness" (1902) on his mission up the Congo to find the charismatic Kurtz: "going up that river was like travelling back to the beginnings of the world." The "primitives" whom adventurers encounter may be more horribly fascinating for being signs of the atavism in themselves than they want to admit. The landscape of imperial romance is strikingly expressionistic; compelling and fearsome, it is studded with caves, grottoes, and underground rivers into which the adventurers are perilously drawn. This is a literature that seems to have foreknowledge of the depth psychology of Freud and Jung (the latter one of Haggard's most distinguished admirers). By contrast with their subterranean reaches, the romance landscapes are frequently mountainous, better to afford European interlopers the illusion that their proconsular sweep of vision confers command. Descending into undiscovered realms, they will be chastened as well as imperiled. The challenges they have to face are epistemological as well as physical. The derangement occasioned by what they learn (in the case of Conrad's Kurtz, for example) is as much a jeopardy to them as dangers sought out and confronted.

According to Paul Zweig in his study of "the fate of adventure in the modern world" (1974), adventure fiction is obsessed with escape and therefore harbors a corresponding fear of imprisonment. Typically this involves a flight from domestic life and its obligations and, in particular, from the social and sexual power of women. James Fenimore Cooper's *Natty Bumppo*, hero of the *Leatherstocking Tales*, is a resolute misogynist. Herman Melville's Ahab in *Moby-Dick* (1851) has turned his back on a loved wife and child. The nature of adventure in this fiction frequently involves an escape from savage or sinister imprisonment. Sometimes the imprisonment is politically based, as in Alexandre Dumas' *Le Comte de Monte-Cristo* (1844-45; *The Count of Monte-Cristo*), in which the eponymous hero escapes from the Chateau d'If to make a fortune and wreak revenge on those responsible for his incarceration. More generally, adventure fiction is escapist. It indulges the primal desire of readers, those happy, vicarious adventurers, to be someone---and somewhere---else. They are transported out of their familiar surroundings into the world of espionage, to a lost world deep in the South American jungles, or to new worlds beyond the solar system. Willingly they surrender to the pleasures and the frissons of an escape they know to be temporary.

Despite its recent, unrespectable reputation, adventure literature has a distinguished pedigree. Zweig sees Homer's wily and indomitable Odysseus (whose name he translates as approximately equal to "trouble") as the precursor of all adventure heroes. The adventurer's condition is "to be at one with trouble." His destiny is solitary: he is at home everywhere and therefore nowhere. Perhaps the first adventure novel is Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), whose eponymous hero is marooned on a desert island where he endures and triumphantly surmounts decades of mental and physical trials. Yet *Crusoe* is the most unadventurous of men. That is, one of the earliest protagonists of adventure fiction resists the ethos of circumstance in which unwillingly he has been placed. During the 19th century, although the literature of adventure may have been marginalized critically, it flourished in popular culture in Europe and the United States, whether in Grimm's fairy tales, the French romans noirs of Eugène Sue, Frédéric Soulié, and Pinson du Terrail, or Edgar Allan Poe's short fiction and his novel *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* (1838), in which---following Samuel Taylor Coleridge---Antarctica becomes an adventure precinct. As the century proceeded, more serious players became engaged in the deployment and transformation of adventure fiction. Among them were such canonical authors as Joseph Conrad, Rudyard Kipling, Herman Melville, Mark Twain, and Robert Louis Stevenson.

Melville's early novel *Typee* (1846) purported to be the true story of how the author had fallen among "singular and interesting people" (cannibals) on an island in the South Pacific. Part of the iconoclastic burden of the book is its assault on the harm done by European missionaries in the Pacific. A further controversy is occasioned by the issue of whether this tale of exotic racial and cultural contact is fact or fiction. This question serves to illuminate the formal similarities between imperial romance and adventure fiction and 19th- and early 20th-century travel writing. Beguiling, dangerous encounters between European explorers and travelers and the native peoples of distant lands are the substance, for example, of Charles Doughty's *Travels in Arabia Deserta* (1888), Gertrude Bell's *The Desert and the Sown* (1907), and T. E. Lawrence's *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (1926), among many similar so-called true stories of hazardous exploration. In an important sense, adventure fiction is always travel literature, involving as it does a journey away from the physically, morally, and culturally familiar to unknown places whence return can never be guaranteed and where the danger endured will have been as much to mind as to body.

Imperial romance and travel books typically dramatize, at some vital moment in their narratives, the penetration of mysterious and alluring lands and of alien manners that are best known by intimidating but enticing rumor. The possession of such a strange, new world---whether in fact or as a grandiose delusion--- has an evident sexual intimation that many of these works may be more fully aware of than they choose to disclose. In one of the most famous imperial romances, Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* (1885), the object of the quest is multifaceted; this is a search for a lost brother, for the fabled diamond mines of the Biblical king, and for the satisfaction of curiosity. The quest is triggered by the discovery of a map. Here Haggard acknowledged his debt to Stevenson's seminal tale *Treasure Island* (1883), in which the passing of the map from the aging pirate Bill Bones to Jim Hawkins initiates the hunt for the buried treasure of the notorious pirate Captain Flint. Haggard's novel sparked other, literal quests. The year following its publication, several British parties set off into the interior of Africa to seek Solomon's mines. They misread the text. Although Haggard was not proffering an imperialist fantasy of plunder, he, too, was susceptible: a few years later he ventured to Mexico in search of the Aztec treasure that had been plundered, and then lost, by the Spaniards. This journey furnished his romance *Montezuma's Daughter* (1893). Having made their fortunes in *King Solomon's Mines*, Quatermain, Captain Good, and Sir Henry Curtis abandon them willingly in the sequel, *Allan Quatermain* (1887), to undertake another quest the objects of which are altogether intangible. They seek adventure for itself, particularized as the satisfaction of their curiosity regarding the existence of a fabled lost city (the mysterious Zu-Vendis), again supposed to be somewhere in the capacious heart of Africa. They are in recoil from the jaded civilization of England. As Quatermain admits, "the thirst for the wilderness was on me; I could tolerate this place no more; I would go and die as I had lived, among the wild game

and the savages." If this is an atavistic dream, it is not exactly fulfilled, for Quatermain dies among a lost white race, whose ruler Curtis becomes, guaranteeing to preserve its state of "comparative barbarism."

There is no palpable treasure at the end of this quest. The treasure, which is the object of desire in so much imperial romance fiction, is, after all, a complex and ambiguous thing. Indeed, the adventuring impulse may run contrary to, and even impede, the desire for gain. Quatermain pockets some of Solomon's diamonds as a canny afterthought. Dead stuff that has been accumulated in past ages, a treasure is not any simple means to redeem and secure the future for those who seek to win it. There is a strange, ineradicable, antimaterialistic streak in the ethic of some of the cardinal works of imperial adventure, whether Haggard's, or Kipling's *Kim* (1901), or the scientific romances of Wells and Verne.

Zweig contends that another crucial element of the adventure tale is that it is "anti-novelistic" because it celebrates risk and privileges deracination; its energies are profoundly antisocial, altogether averse to such temperate accommodations within the bourgeois social fabric as marriage, the substance of 19th-century realist fiction in Europe. Insofar as this is the case, the abiding critical unease with adventure fiction is better understood. Imperial romances have suffered not only from their central celebration of domestic irresponsibility, but they have also, unjustly, been subject to political-cum-literary prejudice about a system of power, late 19th-century imperialism, that the best of them endorse ---if at all---with the most radical reservations. Nowhere is that system more consistently called to account than in the works of Kipling, Haggard, and Wells, for the two former, at least, have suffered from accusations of jingoism.

Unfashionable, too, is the emphasis of adventure fiction on story. Airport paperback schlock, or "page-turners," have done a great deal to discredit the force of adventure narrative, the stories in its hoard that are at once unique and exemplary, whether they tell of Odysseus or Beowulf, Lancelot or Don Quixote. Such accounts of heroic loneliness as those by Stevenson, Haggard, or Conan Doyle, however imbued with pride and folly, have indelibly marked Western reckoning of the value and costs of adventures for those driven to embark upon them. Staple elements of later adventure narrative, in particular of imperial romance, have a formulaic force. They speak of collective, rather than resolutely individual, quests. They tell of assembling and equipping the party for its journey to the unknown; the thrilling relation of the rites of passage, losses, and discoveries of its members; scrutiny of their personal transformations in the course of encounters with people other than themselves; and, finally, the imagining of their return to a prosaic world unwilling to credit, but credulous about, their tales of miracles.

Certain notable 19th-century examples of adventure fiction have been subjected to an ironic reinspection. Famously, R. M. Ballantyne's *The Coral Island* (1857) was revised for supposedly cynical modern sensibilities by William Golding in *Lord of the Flies* (1954). Yet it is questionable whether Ballantyne's Jack--- going berserk, regressing, as he fights with cannibals---is less terrible than the incremental cruelties practiced by Golding's stranded party of British schoolchildren. Homage has been paid to Haggard's plot lines by the best-selling thriller writer Wilbur Smith, notably to King Solomon's Mines, in *The Leopard Hunts in Darkness* (1981). In *Miss Smilla's Feeling for Snow* (1993), set in Greenland, a hitherto unexplored romance frontier, Peter Hoeg treats a modern treasure hunt with ambivalence and moral complexity. The medium of cinema has been adept at the parodic translation, whether intentional or not, of thousands of old and new adventure stories to the screen.

The adventure genre is the staple of many Hollywood studios and of many actors' careers. Imperial romance is the business of George Lucas' "Star Wars" trilogy. Johann David Wyss' *The Swiss Family Robinson* (1812-13) was the basis of a television series of adventures in outer space. Much before that series, Wyss' novel of a marooned family who effortlessly cope with adversity (and so advertise national virtues) had been reprovably revised by Captain Frederick Marryat in *Masterman Ready* (1841-42), in which work is the watchword of survival.

Few of the film adaptations of adventure literature entertain the iconoclasm that so regularly marks out imperial romance, especially during that hectically creative time at the turn of the century in Britain, when Wells, Conrad, Kipling, Haggard, and a host of imitators and less imaginatively daring writers flourished. Nor, despite

publicists' earnest endeavors, has cinema sent so many archetypal figures into the Western imagination as the novel of adventure. That imaginary loom of adventure includes Victor Hugo's *Quasimodo* and the *Hunchback of Notre Dame*, Alexandre Dumas' *D'Artagnan and the Man in the Iron Mask*, Mary Shelley's *Dr. Frankenstein* and his monster, Robert Louis Stevenson's *Jekyll and Hyde*, Long John Silver and Blind Pew, Herman Melville's *Ahab* and indeed the *White Whale*, Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*, Haggard's *She* (of the 1887 novel of that name and its three sequels), Kipling's *Kim*, Wells' *Time Traveler*, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *Sherlock Holmes*, Baroness Orczy's *Scarlet Pimpernel* (a hero whose existence is now almost wholly metaphorical, scarcely connected to his fictional context of reactionary politics during the French Revolution), Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (and the whole subliterate of vampire sequels that that novel spawned), and Joseph Conrad's *Nostromo* and *Lord Jim* (the first a meretricious hero, the second a man immobilized by his heroic dreams).

In the main these monomaniacal, courageous protagonists of adventure fiction are essentially uncomplicated. Freed from the trammels of social obligation, they are shorn willfully and willingly of domestic attachments. Enamored of a heroic idea of the self, they are secretive yet narcissistic, capable of violent and precipitate action, although frequently paralyzed by its prospect. To lump them together as adventurers, or heroes, is to miss the anguish and self-doubt of the main characters of adventure fiction, especially in its manifestation as imperial romance. By extension, it is to overlook the ambivalence at the heart of the enterprise of European imperialism. Exotic settings---whether in the Pacific Islands of Melville's novels, in Louis Becke's *By Reef and Palm* (1894), in the Africa over-frequented by literary travelers, or in South American "countries" such as Conrad's *Costaguana* in *Nostromo* (1904)---provide a sharp means of dissection of European manners, morals, and imperialist presumptions. The comparisons with their own societies that venturers felt compelled to make did not always tell against the "savage" races with which they came in contact. Ever afterward, a moral relativism began to infect such comparisons: they became the basis of chastening knowledge of oneself and one's culture rather than a facile means for the assertion of superiority. Above all, novels of adventure seek to be exciting. They allow and solicit readers' indulgence, at second hand, in terrifying journeys and mortal dangers. Yet the escapes that this literature encourages---in the hands of its most serious practitioners---are always conditional. Adventure fiction, especially imperial romance, has always been as much in earnest as in game.

Peter Pierce

See also JOSEPH CONRAD 1857-1924 (ENGLISH); JAMES FENIMORE COOPER 1789-1851 (UNITED STATES); DANIEL DEFOE 1660-1731 (ENGLISH); ALEXANDRE DUMAS (PÈRE) 1802-70 (FRENCH); GULLIVER'S TRAVELS BY JONATHAN SWIFT (1726); HISTORICAL NOVEL; KIM BY RUDYARD KIPLING (1901); HERMAN MELVILLE 1819-91 (UNITED STATES); POSTCOLONIAL NARRATIVE AND CRITICISM OF THE NOVEL; ROMANCE; SIR WALTER SCOTT 1771-1832 (SCOTTISH); ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON 1850-94 (SCOTTISH); WAR NOVEL (REPRESENTATIONS OF WAR IN THE NOVEL)

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PREFACE. to Hawthorne's *House of Seven Gables*

WHEN a writer calls his work a Romance, it need hardly be observed that he wishes to claim a certain latitude, both as to its fashion and material, which he would not have felt himself entitled to assume had he professed to be writing a Novel. The latter form of composition is presumed to aim at a very minute fidelity, not merely to the possible, but to the probable and ordinary course of man's experience. The former--while, as a work of art, it must rigidly subject itself to laws, and while it sins unpardonably so far as it may swerve aside from the truth of the human heart--has fairly a right to present that truth under circumstances, to a great extent, of the writer's own choosing or creation. If he think fit, also, he may so manage his atmospherical medium as to bring out or mellow the lights and deepen and enrich the shadows of the picture. He will be wise, no doubt, to make a very moderate use of the privileges here stated, and, especially, to mingle the Marvelous rather as a slight, delicate, and evanescent flavor, than as any portion of the actual substance of the dish offered to the public. He can hardly be said, however, to commit a literary crime even if he disregard this caution.

In the present work, the author has proposed to himself--but with what success, fortunately, it is not for him to judge--to keep undeviatingly within his immunities. The point of view in which this tale comes under the Romantic definition lies in the attempt to connect a bygone time with the very present that is flitting away from us. It is a legend prolonging itself, from an epoch now gray in the distance, down into our own broad daylight, and bringing along with it some of its legendary mist, which the reader, according to his pleasure, may either disregard, or allow it to float almost imperceptibly about the characters and events for the sake of a picturesque effect. The narrative, it may be, is woven of so humble a texture as to require this advantage, and, at the same time, to render it the more difficult of attainment.

Many writers lay very great stress upon some definite moral purpose, at which they profess to aim their works. Not to be deficient in this particular, the author has provided himself with a moral--the truth, namely, that the wrong-doing of one generation lives into the successive ones, and, divesting itself of every temporary advantage, becomes a pure and uncontrollable mischief; and he would feel it a singular gratification if this romance might effectually convince mankind--or, indeed, any one man--of the folly of tumbling down an avalanche of ill-gotten gold,

or real estate, on the heads of an unfortunate posterity, thereby to maim and crush them, until the accumulated mass shall be scattered abroad in its original atoms. In good faith, however, he is not sufficiently imaginative to flatter himself with the slightest hope of this kind. When romances do really teach anything, or produce any effective operation, it is usually through a far more subtle process than the ostensible one. The author has considered it hardly worth his while, therefore, relentlessly to impale the story with its moral as with an iron rod,--or, rather, as by sticking a pin through a butterfly, --thus at once depriving it of life, and causing it to stiffen in an ungainly and unnatural attitude. A high truth, indeed, fairly, finely, and skilfully wrought out, brightening at every step, and crowning the final development of a work of fiction, may add an artistic glory, but is never any truer, and seldom any more evident, at the last page than at the first.

The reader may perhaps choose to assign an actual locality to the imaginary events of this narrative. If permitted by the historical connection,--which, though slight, was essential to his plan,--the author would very willingly have avoided anything of this nature. Not to speak of other objections, it exposes the romance to an inflexible and exceedingly dangerous species of criticism, by bringing his fancy-pictures almost into positive contact with the realities of the moment. It has been no part of his object, however, to describe local manners, nor in any way to meddle with the characteristics of a community for whom he cherishes a proper respect and a natural regard. He trusts not to be considered as unpardonably offending by laying out a street that infringes upon nobody's private rights, and appropriating a lot of land which had no visible owner, and building a house of materials long in use for constructing castles in the air. The personages of the tale--though they give themselves out to be of ancient stability and considerable prominence--are really of the author's own making, or at all events, of his own mixing; their virtues can shed no lustre, nor their defects redound, in the remotest degree, to the discredit of the venerable town of which they profess to be inhabitants. He would be glad, therefore, if--especially in the quarter to which he alludes--the book may be read strictly as a Romance, having a great deal more to do with the clouds overhead than with any portion of the actual soil of the County of Essex.

LENOX, January 27, 1851.