

103 學年度中央大學英文系碩士班甄試入學考試

【筆試試題】

共 2 頁(採雙面印刷)

Briefly discuss a literary work or film of any kind that exemplifies the story pattern of “romance” as described in the following excerpt. Then provide an example of a failed romance, i.e., one that holds out the prospect of a happy ending but eventually fails to deliver that ending. Finally, explain how the genre of “romance” answers or addresses what we expect in daily life:

Romances satisfy our deepest imaginative desires. If we most fear loss of identity in separation from what we hold dearest and from what makes us what we are, romances allay that fear. As they imagine narratives of separation, errancy, and loss, they therapeutically deliver endings of reintegration, recovery, and return. That which was lost is found.

The word *romans* was originally a simple linguistic designation, meaning “French,” since French was derived from Latin, the language of Rome. In the twelfth century, however, the word narrowed in meaning, coming to designate narrative (forms of *roman* still mean “novel” in French, Italian, and German). The word then became particularly associated with a genre of narrative. It came to designate stories of separation and return, disintegration and reintegration.

Certainly classical Greek literature has examples of “romance” narratives, stories that involve separation, testing, and travel, all the prelude to, and premise of, a final homecoming and recognition. Homer’s *Odyssey* is fundamentally a romance; five later Greek narratives of this kind also survive. The broader modal commitment of romance to “comedy” (a story with a happy ending) also has classical roots. Romances are “comic” stories not because they make us laugh but, rather, like Shakespeare’s comedies, they make us feel good through happy endings.

The dynamic French-speaking court cultures of twelfth-century France and England gave the genre its most powerful, undying impetus. Chretien de Troyes (fl. 1160-90) is its greatest exponent in his Arthurian romances, but the rich set of Tristan materials, and the *lais* of Marie de France, are also of exceptional importance. The genre, once deeply planted in the twelfth century in French, flourishes anew in all European vernacular languages and in each historical period of European and American culture. It remains energetically immune to the literary plant killers of

moralistic objection, high literary disdain for escapist entertainment, and satire.

The fundamental characteristic of romances is structural, not stylistic. They can be short or long, oral or literary, but to be romances they must have, or adapt, a particular story structure. Romances classically have a tripartite structure: integration (or implied integration); disintegration; and reintegration. They begin in, or at least imply, a protected, civilized state of some integrated social unit (e.g., family). That state is disrupted, expelling a member of the unit (the hero or heroine of the story, who is usually young) into a wild place. Undergoing the tests of that wild place is the premise of return to the integrated, civilized state of familial and/or social unity. Successfully undergoing tests in the wild often results in marriage, in which case return to home and family is also return to an enlarged home and family.

This story pattern is characteristic of many fairy stories, medieval romances, Shakespearean comedies, novels, and popular movies. It not only represents desire but activates desire in its readers: the pleasure we take in such stories derives from our desire for the reintegration of lives in a coherent and constructive narrative. The desired pattern can also, of course, be adapted in many variations. In particular, it can be activated in order to be frustrated: some protagonists, particularly adulterous ones like Tristan and Ysolt, never reach home, forever needing to defer that unreachable happy ending of recognition.

Romances, then, are symbolic stories, replaying and allaying the fears of the young as they face the apparently insuperable challenges of the adult world. Their deepest wisdom is this: civilization is not a unitary concept. To enter and remain in the world of civilized order, we must, say romances, have commerce with all that threatens it. To regain Rome at the center, we must first be tested in the marginal wilds of romance. To be recognized and found, we must first be lost.