

Sara Kazemi Manesh

Different Love Stories in Different Cultures.
A Comparative Analysis of Medieval Persian and French Chivalric
Romances

MA Thesis in Medieval Studies

Central European University

Budapest

May 2011

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Sara Kazemi Manesh
(Iran)

Thesis submitted to the Department of Medieval Studies,
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I, the undersigned, **Sara Kazemi Manesh**, candidate for the MA degree in Medieval Studies declare herewith that the present thesis is exclusively my own work, based on my research and only such external information as properly credited in notes and bibliography. I declare that no unidentified and illegitimate use was made of the work of others, and no part of the thesis infringes on any person's or institution's copyright. I also declare that no part of the thesis has been submitted in this form to any other institution of higher education for an academic degree.

Budapest, 25 May 2011

Signature

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PROLOGUE

As a student of English literature and as a translator, I have always dealt subconsciously with the comparative aspects of literary works; it seems almost impossible to look at a literary work and translate it into Persian (or from Persian to another language) without noticing the similarities and differences. But what makes it difficult to compare two literary works (or what is indeed challenging in this process) is the gap that may exist between them. For instance, there are striking similarities between the fairy tale of Rapunzel and the Persian romance of Zal and Roodabeh even though they were written in different parts of the world by authors who were seven centuries apart. Because of their differences and also because of the time gap between them, there is a void in a comparison of the works that makes the process of finding evidence difficult and confusing since it requires thorough research on the literature of seven centuries in a way that links these two works to each other or at least finds a commonality that connects them. At the same time this extensive research may eventually lead to a dead end since one cannot rule out the possibility of an accidental resemblance of ideas.

Having studied Persian literature – both classic and modern – and working as a literary translator, I have always been interested in taking what I find fascinating in my own culture and putting it in the new contexts of other cultures so that I can provide an overlapping space in which distanced themes can meet. The overlapping space that makes a cultural dialogue possible also gives a bird's eye view, covering the gaps between two seemingly different works. Cross-cultural and comparative studies carried out in recent years contribute to this cause to a great deal¹.

¹See for example: E. San Juan, *Reading West/Writing East: Studies in Comparative Literature and Culture* (Bern: Peter Lang Publishing Inc., 2011); Sahar Amer, *Crossing Borders: Love between Women in Medieval French and Arabic Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008).

One of the first things that led me to the idea of doing a comparative study of Persian and French romance literature was triggered by reading parts of Jules Mohl's introduction to his nineteenth century translation of the *Shahnameh* into French.² Mohl's translation of the *Shahnameh*, although he was German himself, is considered so reliable and significant that Persian translations of his introduction are still in printed in newer editions of the *Shahnameh*. It was also one of the first translations of Ferdowsi's book into a European language. Through my short encounter with Mohl's introduction I found myself interested in seeing how Ferdowsi's work could be positioned in the context of French literature of the Middle Ages. Later, as I was redefining my M.A thesis proposal, I received a suggestion to work on romances; I felt that I had found parallel grounds on which I could base my comparative work. Chrétien de Troyes seemed like the mirror I needed to reflect the patterns of Ferdowsi's work.

The main concern of this study is to show how a generic term, with themes and features applicable to a large number of literary works, can indeed open up to include notions quite different in their causes and yet similar in form and appearance. In this case, romance turned into an umbrella term covering the works of Chrétien de Troyes and Ferdowsi and many others. One can take a standard definition of romance, find corresponding ideas in the works of these two authors, and classify them in the same category. However, this study, if considered from a different angle, can show that two authors produce typologically similar works while they have absolutely contrasting motivations for them and their respective audiences. They can even have paradoxical contexts in mind for the display of their works, as is the case with Chrétien, who wrote for an elite audience, while Ferdowsi tried to produce a fine vernacular that could be read and understood by the masses via recitation.

²Abul Ghasem Ferdowsi, "*Le livre des rois: Traduit et commenté par Jules Mohl. Tome II*," ed. Julius Mohl, (Boston: Adamant Media Corporation, 2003).

Patricia Parker redefines romance as a form that does need an end but is not in urgent need of it;³ the nature of a comparative work on romances can be defined as a process of connecting the uncanny meeting points of distant⁴ authors. As a result, a sense of closure in a romance may be interpreted at its end or conclusion, while the message that authors convey might be more universal with an ongoing evolution which is not achieved by the end of the story but lingers in the readers' mind and involves them in a stream of interpretations.⁵ Parker goes on to say that romance after the high Middle Ages introduces a vague image of an unknown subject and when the identity of this subject is revealed, closure becomes more plausible.⁶ Therefore this comparative study is not aimed at pointing out an absolute conclusion, but at drawing attention to the potential of features of Persian romance that flow in the layers of the well known French romance literature that have already been discovered. It is a naked eye that tries to familiarize the reader who has seen only the global highlights of Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh* with deeper aspects of it to make room for further study.

A significant aim in comparing the romances of Chrétien with those of Ferdowsi is how the known points of one – namely, the French romances – can be useful in highlighting the corresponding themes in the other work (the *Shahnameh*) that seem to have been overlooked so far. In fact, I Chrétien helps me to free my work from presuppositions about Ferdowsi and avoid the well-studied areas of *Shahnameh* in order to find what has been missed in the previous studies. As Frye suggests,⁷ things start with the idea of introducing a

³ As if the end is a typologically promised point, but romance lingers on its threshold not the exact moment when it occurs.

⁴ Authors born in different centuries and in different places with contrasting backgrounds and cultures.

⁵ Patricia A. Parker, *Inescapable Romance: Studies in the Poetics of a Mode* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979).

⁶ Ibid, 4-5.

⁷ Northrope Frye, *The Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), 243.

certain theme or view point and later grow into an intermediary connecting the abstract and concrete aspects.⁸

⁸ The analyses of the French Romances are based on English translations of them to which references are given. For French editions of the romances of Chrétien de Troyes see specifically: Chrétien de Troyes, *Chrétien de Troyes: œuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1994).

CHAPTER ONE: BACKGROUND

The current study, a comparative work on medieval romances, cannot be isolated from the societies where their authors lived. One being from the West, France, and the other from the East, Persia, the romance authors Chrétien de Troyes and Ferdowsi appear to be worlds apart. With almost a century between them, they had experienced different life events and each had his own perspective on life, but they shared something similar and that was the way they reflected upon life. One thing that makes a comparative study about these two specific authors worthwhile is that despite their differences, they both produced a type of work that later became an undeniable part of literature (both in their home countries and in the world). Subject matter and technique are both strong points in the works of Chrétien and Ferdowsi, but they are not all that their writings have to offer. The events that surrounded their lives and how these events influenced their causes and motivations – and eventually made their works influence later generations of authors – are noteworthy. In order to have a better perspective on how their lives may have influenced them and consequently their subjects and styles, a short account of their lives can be helpful.

1.1 About the Authors

Hakim Abul-Qasim Ferdowsi Tusi (940 C.E. - 1020 C.E.) composed the *Shahnameh*⁹ in rhyming couplets and spent most of his life working on it.¹⁰ The work is generally categorized as an epic with national motifs. However, it consists of smaller parts, each of

⁹ For an English translation of the *Shahnameh*, see particularly: Abul Ghasem Ferdowsi, *Shahnameh: The Persian Book of Kings*, tr. Dick Davis (New York: Penguin Publishers, 2006).

¹⁰ *Shahnameh or The Book of Kings* (in Persian: شاهنامه) is an epic poetic book that Ferdowsi completed in the early eleventh century in Greater Persia. Persian scholars, through the course of time, have reached the consensus that this book saved the Persian language from the gradual deterioration it was facing after the Arab invasion – followed by Islamization and the progressive use of the Arabic language -- and other major international conflicts that led to the insertion of non-Persian material into the language. The content of the book is a combination of mythological, heroic and historical narratives that are accompanied by different love and life stories of the characters.

which tells a story while all the stories collectively share some major characters and themes. These stories – while they have their own independent identities – all contribute to the totality of the work as an epic about a certain hero, Rostam, who lived more than five hundred years and had magnificent adventures while pursuing a quest. Rostam's life is full of twists and he experiences all kinds of ups and downs during his journeys. This study deals with three of the prominent stories of the *Shahnameh*. The romances that this study focuses on are the love stories of Rostam's parents, his son, and one of his grandchildren; each of these stories is related to the hero of the *Shahnameh* in one way or another.

Ferdowsi was born to a well-off family in a village. Not much is known about his teenage years, except the fact that as a young man he sought the prose version of the *Shahnameh*, which was written by Abu Mansur Abd Al-Razaq as a historical account of pre-Islamic Persia.¹¹ The book itself no longer exists; however, the prologue (around 15 pages) does.¹² This book was the main source of Ferdowsi's work and from a young age¹³ he was interested in turning it into poetry and in the meantime adding literary beauty to it so that it could become a valuable work of pure Persian literature. The composition of the *Shahnameh* – as Ferdowsi himself states in the prologue – took over thirty years, during which the poet experienced a number of important events which influenced his life to a great extent. He witnessed internal conflicts and confrontations as well as wars in post-Islamic Persia (which was mostly because the country did not have one unified government for several decades), he then saw two dynasties rule Persia one after the other, the Samanids and the Ghaznavids, the first of which was deeply engaged in reviving Persian culture and the second one of which was of Turkish origin and did not care about the culture as much. Ferdowsi suffered the

¹¹ Isa Sadiq, *Ferdowsi: His Life, his Personality, and his Work* (Tehran: The Society for the Protection of National Monuments, 1968), 13.

¹² [S. Reza Zadeh Shafaq] صادق رضازاده شفق, *تاریخ ادبیات ایران* [The History of Iranian Literature], (Tehran: Danesh Publishers, 1981).

¹³ Ferdowsi acknowledges the slight and partial incorporation of Daqiqi's work in the *Shahnameh*. See: Olga M. Davidson, *Poet and Hero in the Persian Book of Kings* (Ithaca?New York: Cornell University Press, 1994).

sudden death of his young son and he also struggled with financial problems and other personal issues in his later years. These events are definitely reflected at different places in his work.¹⁴

There is debate about whether Ferdowsi had connections to the court or not, but scholars agree that he was merely a poet without any courtly postings. He was asked to compose poems in which Persian dignity would be reflected. This was an issue that concerned the Samanids (819-999) since they were constantly trying to revive the culture that had started to decline after the crisis followed by the end of the Sassanid dynasty's reign (651).¹⁵ Ferdowsi was affected by three different ruling systems in his lifetime and at the same time he – along with the nation – was recovering from the previous invasions that had left Persia devastated and in need of mending. His eagerness to keep working in spite of all the difficult conditions and with the hardships he faced (one being serious financial problems) originated from a more personal cause. In his poems he refers directly to the fact that he feels the burden on his shoulders that he has to save his mother tongue from deterioration and he has to leave a magnificent cultural treasure behind for the generations to come so that they can realize the truth and to improve what they could change and improve.¹⁶

Chrétien de Troyes (1135–1190), like Ferdowsi, has a sketchy biography as few facts are known about his life. Chrétien was a renowned French medieval poet whose work flourished in the second half of the twelfth century. The type of structure that he established in his work is considered a milestone on the path leading to the modern novel.¹⁷

He lived in the twelfth century, and, as his name suggests, he was from Troyes (either born and/or raised there or originally from there), which is located in the Champagne

¹⁴ S. M Dabir Siaghi, *Bargardane (revayat gune) Shahnameh Ferdowsi be nasr* (Tehran: Ghatre Publication, 2001), 13-16.

¹⁵ Arthur E. Christensen, *L'Iran sous les Sassanides*, tr. Rashid Yassemi (Tehran: Negah Publishing, 2005), 477-487.

Ardenne region of today's France. He had a great Latin education, which was the language of the educated elite communities. This might be one of the reasons for his innovations in writing like couplet breaking and rich rhymes so that the recitation of his poems would have an enhanced effect on the aristocratic audience, who did not know how to read.¹⁸ Also there is a theory that he was educated as a cleric, although the content of his work is not particularly religious and, moreover, the chivalric concept of love was not approved by the Church's requirement of chastity. In fact, one does not find direct or indirect biblical themes in Chrétien's work at all.

It is not known exactly where and how Chrétien's literary career took wing, although his work has been the subject of discussions and analyses in classical literary circles for years. He apparently used traditional Celtic material prevalent in Brittany, perhaps already translated into French by an earlier poet, but the lightness and freshness of the narratives are his own and he is indeed confident in his style, which seems to show that he was not writing out of despair for an external need (e.g., financial). Chrétien is most famous for the romance *Perceval, or the Story of the Grail*, of which 9,234 lines have survived. He may have found the story of the Grail in a manuscript given to him by Philippe d'Alsace and decided to develop it further. The romance is the earliest extant narrative of the legend of the Holy Grail although it was left unfinished. It was written at the request of Philip, Count of Flanders, and tells the story of a crude, naïve young Welshman who becomes the most famous knight of his day.¹⁹

¹⁶ [R. Homayounfarrokhi] رکن الدین همایونفرخ. شاهنامه و فردوسی: پژوهشی نو پیرامون حکیم ابوالقاسم فردوسی و سلطان محمود. [Shahnameh and Ferdowsi: A New Survey on Hakim Abul-Qasim Ferdowsi and Sultan Mahmud Ghaznavid], (Tehran: Asaatir Publishers, 1998).

¹⁷ Estelle Doudet, *Chrétien de Troyes* (Paris: Tallandier, 2009).

¹⁸ Douglas Kelly, "Narrative Poetics, Orality and Performance," in *A Companion to Chrétien de Troyes*, ed. Norris J. Lacy, Joan Tasker Grimbert (Cambridge: D.S.Brewer, 2005), 52-53.

¹⁹ For more information on Chrétien's literary background see particularly: Laurence Harf-Lancner, "Chrétien's Literary Background," in *A Companion to Chrétien de Troyes*, ed. Norris J. Lacy, Joan Tasker Grimbert (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2005), 26-42.

During his literary career Chrétien was present at the court of Countess Marie (1145-1198), daughter of Eleanor of Aquitaine, who later became queen to England's Henry II. Thus he had knowledge of court life as well as the courtly affairs of England. He also worked in eastern France under the patronage of Philippe d'Alsace, count of Flanders (1141-1191). It can be stated that he observed closely the Arthurian subjects he later wrote about.²⁰

Why Chrétien stands out among other significant Arthurian authors and why this study focuses on him among all the others arose from the way he treats the subject matter and makes use of its unique qualities. Chrétien does not take his subject matter for granted. This is especially significant since early medieval literature did not have a complex structure in which one would find traces of multi-dimensional characters and themes as might be the case today. Chrétien's work shows that he was indeed observing and absorbing what surrounded him and his reflection of it was vibrant and in-depth, not a mere realistic narration of what was already there. His work has an aspect of documentation with touches of functionality added to the beauty that one expects from a classical literary work of this rank. From this perspective, Chrétien de Troyes took a more factual approach to the subject matter of his stories than Ferdowsi and focused on notions of courtly love, the Arthurian cycle, and chivalry. It is believed that Celtic story Tellers indirectly provided de Troyes with his subject matter and that he obtained the initial idea for his stories from the vernacular and orally recited accounts of such story tellers as there is no evidence to prove that his sources were written.²¹ What is common among most of the authors of romances is that they basically used a mystical discourse in which there were touches of hyperbole and supernatural elements that made their stories fascinating for the general audience. However, Chrétien later altered that and formed his own discourse based on the deeper layers of the stories. His approach used a

²⁰ Douglas Kelly, "Narrative Poetics," in *A Companion to Chrétien de Troyes* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2005), 52-63.

²¹ Jean Frappier, *Chrétien de Troyes: The Man and His Work* (City: Ohio State University Press, 1982).

more rational and pragmatic discourse which was closer to a realistic representation of events; therefore, it can be stated that in a way Chrétien avoided the exaggerated form of narration usually seen in vernacular stories of the time. It should also be noted that he – whether intentionally or subconsciously – explored the world of newer techniques of writing. While the stream of consciousness was not known (or identified as such) to the authors of the Middle Ages, Chrétien’s special attention to his characters’ thoughts and his detailed account of their decision making processes (shown in the form of long cognitive soliloquies) shows that he cared about the psychology of his characters, especially the process that led them to change their thoughts and moods due to fluctuating circumstances.

CHAPTER TWO: ROMANCE, A GENRE?

It is difficult to define romance simply as a genre and attribute some features to it and consider the job done. In fact, critics have long argued whether they can consider romance – more specifically, medieval romance – a genre since its changeable and baffling characteristics make it almost impossible to define.²² As a result, there is a tendency among some literary experts to call romance a mode rather than a genre in order to apply a term that better describes it. Still, the very concept of mode itself can be somewhat confusing. Kevin Whetter refers to Alastair Fowler,²³ who believes that a mode is a more flexible and less complete form of a genre. In other words, Fowler believes that scholars refer to romance as a mode because this term gives them the opportunity of introducing romance as it is: confusing in nature and hard to fully define. However, most scholars who believe in such an application fail to explain exactly how mode might differ from genre. Perhaps the best way to describe a romance is Frye's approach to the issue as an archetypal form:²⁴ "Romance is the structural core of all fiction and a more humanized form of myth." The problem is being able to represent romance as it is without reducing its literary value and damaging its image.²⁵ Frye goes on to justify his approach to the issue of mode by referring to the concepts of hero, myth, and romance. The hero of a romance is one who does marvels but is still a human – with human attributes and faults – in nature and identity. Frye explains that in a romance the

²² K. S. Whetter, *Understanding Genre and Medieval Romance* (Ashgate: Aldershot, 2008), 35.

²³ Alastair Fowler, *Kinds of Literature: An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982).

²⁴ *Understanding Genre* (Ashgate: Aldershot, 2008), 38.

²⁵ A short story intended for children is placed within the boundaries of the genre of Fiction, for instance; meanwhile, Rold Dahl's *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* as well as Homer's *Odyssey* are also works of fiction. However, what distinguishes these works from each other and places them in a hierarchy is other features they might have, fwwhich make the *Odyssey* a great mythological epic work and Dahl's work a humorous yet melodramatic children's story. But one has to remember that after all these are works of fiction indeed. The same can apply to romance. Romance may be something more than a mere genre with definite frameworks but it is still a genre in the first place.

norms and laws of nature exist but they are slightly suspended in application²⁶ and this trims the hero into a shape understandable and tangible to the reader yet unique enough to raise ironical questions in the mind.²⁷ This is the challenge that both the romance characters and the romance audience face and are required to deal with as the hero is the eye of the storm and the reader is the one feeling sympathy or empathy.

In fact romance as a mode or genre has a multi-dimensional identity just like the sense of belonging that Eugene O'Neill introduces in *The Hairy Ape*.²⁸ It is the ongoing quest of humans in correspondence with the environment which never ends but is fragmented and stagnated in accordance with different elements. The vagueness in the definition of romance as a genre or a mode has a wide range and resolving it is outside the focus of this study. Thus, with the intention of not reducing matters down to rigidly bordered definitions and predetermined notions, this study shall refer to romance as a literary form.

As one of the literary forms that developed early, the romance came to displace heroic epics at the peak of the chivalric age in the twelfth century – especially in France – and it continued to flourish in the high Middle Ages until the seventeenth century, when its popularity declined. A romance can be referred to as a means that connects vernacular discourse and subject matter to the prestigious literary approach of documentation, fabrication, and narration. A romance is generally identified as a story about love or its consequences, most likely concerned with the courtly life of a main character who goes on a quest and goes through different adventures with the aim of being united or reunited with his beloved.²⁹ One of the significant benchmarks for defining a romance is the characters. Many scholars believe that the power given to a character in a work of romance – and also an epic –

²⁶For a more detailed elaboration on this see: Patricia A. Parker, *Inescapable Romance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 8.

²⁷ Northrop Frye, *The Anatomy of Criticism*, 186-188.

²⁸ Eugene O'Neill, *The Hairy Ape: A Comedy of Ancient and Modern Life* (LaVergne: Lighting Source Inc., 2006).

is a determining factor in its definition. Romance characters, especially the leading characters, display a blurry combination of private interests and concerns entwined with socio-political matters and issues. Such characters represent themselves as individuals with certain needs and interests; contrasted to others, who are not directly involved in the course of the narration.³⁰ As Whetter puts it,

Romance hero's encounters with hostile giants, dragons and knights benefits and serves both his lord and the society in which he lives. Certainly the challenge to the court, which is a standard feature of Arthurian romances, results in the hero's undertaking adventures for at least partially socio-political reasons.

There is no linear development in romances that will not intersect the turning points of the plot. A romance can start as any other story might and progress or flow accordingly; however, there can be a sense of order in a romance that is marked by the presence of prominent elements. The common elements that can be found in most romances to some extent include: involvement with love, lovers' quest, adventure, success (marked by union or reunion) or failure (marked by separation, death and the like). In a chivalric romance, the main focus of the story is not the accident of falling in love, but the adventures that the characters go through in order to have the opportunity to find solace.³¹ In other words, a romance may be immediately associated with love, but love is only one of several themes of it³² and there are many instances that demonstrate that it is not the main theme.³³

Romance is a work of fiction that incorporates and combines the real and the impossible. In a romance, through the course of the story and as the two parties' feelings for each other grow, they gradually come to know each other better and get involved. In a typical fairy tale account of a chivalric romance, this involvement may not be much highlighted as

²⁹Stephen Greenblatt and Meyer Howard Abrams, *Norton Anthology of English Literature: the Major Authors* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006).

³⁰*Understanding Genre* (Ashgate: Aldershot, 2008), 61.

³¹Roberta L. Krueger, *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 115-167.

the hero is concentrating on defeating supernatural elements and beasts and other dangerous forces and he knows that at some point – when his adventures are over – he will manage to find his love. It is as if he has been promised a reward. One can say that there is not much face-to-face or direct interaction between the lover and the beloved in such instances in chivalric romances.

Aside from the main concern of the story, a romance also deals with socio-political issues that are related to the time period in which a particular work was written. These issues are usually displayed through the demeanor of the characters. For instance, in a typical medieval chivalric romance, ideally the way the hero/knight behaves is a combination of a full display of honor, respect, royalty, and courtly love.³⁴ It should be noted here that courtly love – while it might be taken for granted as the knight's sentiments regarding the lady – may address the king and be another pattern of the knight's sense of patriotic commitment and responsibility.³⁵

What is today considered the principle idea of the aesthetic movement – which arose in the nineteenth century – can also be traced in old romances. The conflicts that the characters – whether male or female – are struggling with are of the same nature. In each romances there are sub-branches of two major conflicts (i.e., internal and external):

- Character vs. Self
- Character vs. Character
- Character vs. Society
- Character vs. Nature
- Character vs. Human-made Obstacles

³² In her introduction to *Inescapable Romance*, Patricia Parker suggests that one should focus less on content or *materia* (i.e., the notion of love here) and pay more attention to form and design of the work.

³³ David Daiches, *Critical Approaches to Literature* (New York: Longman., 1981), 97-110.

³⁴ Roberta L. Krueger, *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance*, 81-85.

³⁵ Simon Gaunt, Sarah Kay, *The Cambridge Companion to French Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 79-83.

- Character vs. Destiny

Considering these conflicts as significant points in a romance, this literary form turns into a medium which reflects various features of real life. The essence of characters blossoms best in their relationships with their kinsmen, friends, enemies, superiors, and other characters that play a role in their lives. It is in confrontations and encounters that characters can show their true qualities and be known for them. One can say that romances symbolically show how the medieval human needed to prioritize the events of life or at least how he/she was expected to do so. The creator of a romance was either trying to embed the reality of medieval society in the body of the fiction or simply suggest how society was expected to be in an idealistic perspective.³⁶

³⁶ It is also possible for the author to use a combination of these in his work.

CHAPTER THREE: A DISCUSSION OF ROMANCES, LOVE IN PROGRESS

Studying any work of literature requires investing some time in its form and order even if it is not a technical study focusing on the structure of the work. Thus, it is important to have a systematic perspective in approaching a literary work for analysis. As for romances, one may not find a linear pattern in all of them but still they share features and highlights that can be used as points on a mind map for analytical work. Any romance – even without being mistakenly toned down to a mere love story – has an orderly flow. There are characters in it that fall in love and struggle to be together. This is more or less present in all romances whether they end in happy-ever-after or not. Between the meeting of the lovers and their eventual fate (be it union or separation) there are different types of conflicts. The characters struggle with obstacles that come their way, they deal with their internal doubts and dilemmas, and they even have to face other characters that act as obstacles. Also, for a comparative work it is of great significance to be clear about *what* is being studied and *how* the comparison is approached. Therefore, the most important themes to be discussed in the general analysis of the five romances are listed below to provide the reader with a better view of the analytical process. These themes can be traced to some extent in all five romances and are arranged so as to represent the common flow of the story.

1. A beginning
2. Characters' social status
3. Discourses and Reactions
4. Outcomes

3.1. ZAL AND ROODABEH

The story of Zal and Roodabeh is one of the significant romances of the *Shahnameh* since it describes the marriage that eventually led to the birth of Ferdowsi's main hero, Rostam. Roodabeh was a princess of Kabul and lived in the palace with her parents, Mehrab and Sindokht. Zal was the son of Sam, a great warrior and protector of Persia. When he heard about the magnificent beauty of Roodabeh he fell in love with her. Roodabeh heard about Zal's courage and merits from her father, Mehrab, and she fell in love with him as well. Zal,³⁷ according to this romance, is a young man with good merits, who is greatly praised by the king and also respected and well-received by him. The issue of peace and formal relations is an important point at the beginning of this story. The king invites Zal to the palace and although Zal intends to accept his invitation, their meeting at the king's palace seems impossible due to the strains in the relations of their two countries, which originate from an old conflict. Zal rejects the king's invitation and the king –offended and upset – understands the matter and accepts it. The two are in no way willing to jeopardize the well-settled relations of their countries and they put their political and national benefits before their personal interests.

Later, Zal hears about the king's daughter. Zal and Roodabeh have not met yet, nor have they heard about each other; however, before their actual meeting they fall in love with each other. In other words, each of them falls in love with the perfect descriptions he/she hears of the other party. Had the encounter between Zal and the king been less pleasant and had they not gotten along well, the king would not have told his wife about Zal's charming character and his other merits and Roodabeh might never have become interested in him. It

is the concept of image presentation that leads to the incident of love in this story. How others present Roodabeh's image to Zal and how Roodabeh hears about this courageous prince from her father are how the mutual feelings of love are triggered. The two arrange to meet each other without the presence of Roodabeh's parents since their families would not have agreed on their union had they been informed since they had been enemies from old times.

The character of Roodabeh, as a young woman, is the exact opposite of the standard code of the role of women in the medieval society.³⁸ Roodabeh is openly ready to explore her personal life and even her sexuality; when she hears about Zal or when she knows that she is going to meet him, she dresses nicely and tries to look her best. She is not much concerned with the forbidden and she pretty much takes matters into her own hands. She realizes the risk she is taking by making a decision to meet with Zal without her father's approval and yet she plans a secret meeting with him. Through the story there are instances in which Roodabeh apparently puts her foot down and asks for something that she desires and does not fear possible punishment.

Sindokht³⁹ is another female character in the story, who plays a key role in the progress of the events. Through the course of the events she is shown as a discreet and smart woman who is trusted by her husband and can actually influence him. In a way, she can be compared to Guinevere regarding the authority she has, although this type of authority was not usual for women in the Middle Ages. Sindokht is especially significant since she does not act subjectively on behalf of her daughter or her husband. She weighs the gravity of the situation and tries to make the best decision. What Sindokht does is not merely how an overly protective mother would act to save her daughter from her husband's anger. There are scenes in which Sindokht criticizes her daughter and asks her to act more wisely. Sindokht is

³⁷ Zal (زال), also written as Zaal, was the son of Sam and the grandchild of Nariman. His forefathers were all heroes responsible as protectors of Persian lands. He is famous for his white hair (due to albinism) and great courage and wisdom (since he grew up in the mountains under the supervision of the legendary bird, Simorgh).

³⁸ It is in contrast with the concept of maiden as well.

recognized and respected for her discretion, not only by her immediate family but also by Zal's father – who is a powerful ruler and champion himself. Eventually, after a period of crisis and negotiations among Roodabeh's parents, Zal, and his father, Sam, and also between Sindokht and Sam, and after the fortunetellers have informed Sam that from this marriage a great warrior will be born who will protect Persia for years, they eventually agree and the two lovers are united in marriage. They have a son, Rostam (the prominent hero of the *Shahnameh*), and a daughter, Zohra.⁴⁰

3.2. BIJAN AND MANIJEH

A group of Armenians ask Kai Khosrow to help them save their fertile lands and gardens from the attacks of wild boars. Bijan, a Persian warrior and the grandson of Rostam, volunteers to chase them away and this he does. His companion and guide, Gorgin, who did not do his duty in assisting him, tricks him to go into Afrasiab's territory in Turan and celebrate there so that Bijan's delay in returning home will enrage Kai Khosrow.

The story opens at a feast at the king's palace after an important victory. There is much emphasis on the king's character as just and generous, who is forthcoming and wise. His power and authority are shown through the way Armenians go to him for help and how he receives them while he is in the middle of a feast. After Bijan, a brave young prince, volunteers to chase away the boars, the king sends the hero named Gorgin with him to keep him company and assist him in his difficult quest. The sense of duty and responsibility that is displayed here reveals the importance of faithfulness and attentiveness for a warrior (or a knight). Gorgin is shown to be a character in opposition to Bijan's codes of courage and faithfulness as he is quite relaxed and does not seem to be much concerned about his duty.

³⁹ Roodabeh's mother.

Gorgin seems to consider his job to be more of a formality where he is not supposed to be active. However, later, when Bijan successfully finishes the job and makes the area secure again, Gorgin is no longer relaxed. He comes to his senses and becomes concerned about the king's possible reaction to his negligence in case Bijan reports the events. It is difficult to draw a line between the evil and righteous aspects of Gorgin's character here since he is both in transition from one end to the other (and back) and also because it is not possible to rule him completely as evil or righteous.⁴⁰

Gorgin starts to become bolder in protecting his position and dignity; he even dares to lead Bijan to a kind of failure so that he will not be the only negligent one. This leads to a series of incidents in which Bijan fails to return to the court and is instead involved in festive and leisurely unions with a princess, Manijeh, and drifts away from the real world and the serious matters he was to be in charge of. All these events lead to more chaos. In Turan, Bijan falls in love with Afrasiab's daughter, Manijeh, and spends time with her in her camp. When he intends to leave, Manijeh, not wanting to lose him, drugs him and kidnaps him and takes him to her palace. Bijan comes to his senses there and spends more time with the princess. Afrasiab becomes angry when he hears this and imprisons Bijan at the bottom of a well and has a heavy rock placed on it. He also disowns his daughter for treason. Manijeh's father, King Afrasiab of Turan, becomes enraged by the sight of Bijan and believes that he is there to overthrow him and take his place. At this point in the story the chain of events has reached a deadlock where things are out of Bijan's control and he is in trouble. Afrasiab punishes both Bijan and his daughter harshly. The way Bijan is imprisoned inside a well, where he neither can move freely in the outside world nor even see what is going on around him, may be a

⁴⁰ S. M. Dabir Siaghi, *Bargardane (revayat gune) Shahnameh Ferdowsi be nasr* [برگردان روایتگونه‌ی شاهنامه‌ی] [فردوسی به نثر] (Tehran: Ghatre Publication, 2001), 41-51.

⁴¹ This is a notion present in other stories in the *Shahnameh*. There is no absolute presentation of natural good or evil in characters. From this perspective they are in fact as close to the real human as they can be in the sense that environment – life events and what they are followed or surrounded by – bring out the essence of character

symbolic representation of how he is paying for misusing his freedom as a warrior and following the wrong track. However, there is no way out for him; Manijeh stays with him all the time and takes care of him.

Gorgin spends a while alone, waiting for Bijan to come back, but when he does not return Gorgin becomes worried. Bijan's prolonged absence rings a bell for Gorgin and brings him to his senses. From this point on, Gorgin is no longer the self-centered character who would almost do anything to protect his own dignity. He makes the choice of going back to the court and reporting Bijan missing. He is trying to fix things before they get worse,⁴² which means that subconsciously he is ready to face the consequences of what he has done.

Manijeh spends a year on top of Bijan's underground cell, takes food for him, and weeps there. In the meantime Giv, Bijan's father, asks Kai Khosrow to help him find his son and Kai Khosrow does this by looking into a crystal globe. He then sends Rostam with an army, disguised as merchants, to save Bijan. Rostam and Manijeh meet and he saves Bijan and takes the couple to Persian, where they marry.⁴³

Throughout Bijan's ordeal with the misery of being captive, Manijeh appears supportive, strong, and faithful to her lover. It is never mentioned if she feels guilty for dragging him into this unfortunate situation since it was her selfish desire that caused Bijan to act irresponsibly in the first place. In fact, there are not many monologues or soliloquies in this story. Manijeh's selfless behavior, the fact that she does not go back to the court to ask her father's forgiveness, and chooses to stay with Bijan under any circumstances can be the result of two things, one her love for Bijan and the other a feeling of guilt and responsibility. Manijeh is represented in two different ways here. First, she is the fun loving immature princess who does not think twice about serving her own interests and then she

and make them act the way they do. The fact that there is no absolute good or evil makes such stories more tangible and believable.

⁴² This is where one can ponder Gorgin's disposition and real essence.

⁴³ S. M. Dabir Siaghi, *Bargardane (revayat gune) Shahnameh Ferdowsi be nasr*, 172-179.

becomes a selfless and devoted lover who does not care about what she has lost to be with the one she loves most.

3.3. SOHRAB AND GORDAFARID

Gordafarid is the daughter of Gojdaham, an old hero in charge of a castle located on the border between Iran and Turan. When Sohrab – Rostam’s son and commander of the Turanian Army – was about to march on Persia, Gordafarid could not tolerate her father’s (Gojdaham) captivity and took action herself. She dressed as a male knight and fought with Sohrab outside the castle until her helmet fell off her head and Sohrab saw her hair and her beauty and fell in love with her. From the beginning of this story Gordafarid is described as a young and beautiful woman who is also a skillful warrior and is famous for her combat skills and her courage. It is important to know that the concept of *love* is a pure accident in this story and is completely different from other romances in the *Shahnameh*. During the first encounter between Gordafarid and Sohrab each of them is unaware of the true identity of the other. Gordafarid does not know that Sohrab is the son of Rostam, thus considers him an outsider who is after power, and Sohrab does not know that his strong opponent is a woman. One incident leads to the other and they face each other not in a sentimental mode but in a serious and harsh battle, where the only thing they focus on is victory. Gordafarid reflects the image of the tough girl; she is serving a cause beyond personal desires. She wishes to protect the castle and her father’s dignity. It should be noted that Gordafarid did not act as a warrior under urgent circumstances since Ferdowsi clearly mentions that she was indeed a warrior beforehand. Thus, learning war craft and training for it appears to have been a matter of personal choice and Gordafarid is not merely obliged to take up the role of a soldier. Although at the beginning of the story Gordafarid is mentioned as beautiful and charming, it

is not until later that her beauty is fully described for the reader. The reason why Ferdowsi chooses to do so is that he first wishes to present Gordafarid as a bold woman regardless of her looks – which are usually the center of descriptions of women in romance literature – and later uses Gordafarid's charming features to show how Sohrab's disposition toward her changes completely, which automatically helps Gordafarid succeed. In other words, Gordafarid does not choose the easy way of using her beauty to deceive Sohrab,⁴⁴ but she rather faces Sohrab like an equal opponent who does not seek mercy or pity. Later, when Sohrab accidentally finds out about her secret and subconsciously starts to adore her, her beauty acts as a factor leading to her victory. Sohrab does trap Gordafarid, but the moment he looks into her eyes he falls in love with her and cannot resist his emotions. They go inside the castle to discuss the matter and Gordafarid turns down Sohrab's marriage proposal as she sees no place for her personal love life while her land is being threatened and she feels responsible for defending her national dignity and making her father proud.⁴⁵

Gordafarid's wisdom and rational attitude is revealed here again, when she – emotionally detached – tells Sohrab that a marriage between them would be impossible. Note that there is no mention of any romance or marriage proposal here and Gordafarid only realizes Sohrab's feelings by considering the circumstances and his behavior. The romance of Sohrab and Gordafarid is one of the shortest stories of the *Shahnameh*, but it is significant because of the way it presents a world upside down in which the lady love is a warrior without sentimental emotions⁴⁶ and because of a major difference it has from the other romances of the *Shahnameh*.

The romances mentioned in the *Shahnameh* portray women who fall in love with their heroes and struggle along with their lovers to be united with them. In this romance, however,

⁴⁴ She actually does the opposite by hiding it and trying to do what a man would do.

⁴⁵ [Abolqasem Ferdowsi] شاهنامه . ابوالقاسم فردوسی [Shahnameh], (Tehran, Elham Co., 2008).

⁴⁶ Love in this romance is not mutual at all and it never becomes mutual. Gordafarid is the only receiver of emotions, who never reflects upon them.

it is actually the man who falls madly in love with the lady only to be rejected by her and the struggle is when he tries to let go of her and put his emotions aside in forgetfulness.

3.4. EREC AND ENIDE⁴⁷

The story of Erec and Enide⁴⁸ opens at spring time in Cardigan at the magnificent court of the king. While Erec is walking with Guinevere as her bodyguard, a knight and his rude servant come their way and insult Guinevere's maid. Guinevere asks Erec to chase them and avenge the insult. Thus, Erec's first quest starts. It is during this quest that he meets Enide and shows himself as an exceptionally powerful knight to the court of Arthur.

All that one might get from Chrétien's description in the first few scenes is the beauty of the surroundings and the abundance of fair ladies and courageous knights at the court. As is usually the case with the stories about the court of King Arthur, everything seems in order and pleasant in a utopian way.

One of the first things that catches the reader's eye is how the women are described. Not only in Erec and Enide, but also in other romances by Chrétien, the description of women is not merely a matter of diction or the author's word choice, but it also reflects how women behaved or were expected to behave at the time. In modern literature the use of predetermined adjectives has become quite limited as authors try to create a neutral atmosphere in their works so that the readers can decide for themselves about the nature of a character. It is now up to the reader to see if a character is wise or not or if she is beautiful or not. However, Chrétien uses a discourse⁴⁹ which quite obviously points out that *all* the ladies at the court were *prudent* as if the reader – along with Chrétien – enters the court and

⁴⁷ *The complete romances of Chrétien de Troyes*, tr. David Staine (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990)

⁴⁸ For an analysis of Erec and Enide see Z. P. Zaddy, "The Structure of Chrétien's Erec," *The Modern Language Review* 62, No.4 (1967): 608-619.

⁴⁹ See: Chrétien de Troyes, *Cligès - Edition bilingue français-ancien français*, tr. Laurence Harf Lancer (Paris: Honore Chapion, 2006).

immediately recognizes that these women are wise and well-behaved. These are the norms; it is as if this is the default setting of the story.⁵⁰

Erec is described as one of the best knights of the Round Table (while, surprisingly, he is not even twenty-five years old). At the beginning of the story he shows wisdom and rationality as he decides to postpone revenge to a better time when he is armed and more focused rather than attacking the rude knight immediately without pondering the issue.

Later Erec follows the strange knight – as the queen has ordered – and arrives in a new town, where he meets with Enide's father and is impressed by her beauty. Therefore he makes an arrangement with Enide's father that he will marry her after defeating the knight. Note that the marriage is an absolutely formal arrangement and there is no mention of love, unless it is a kind of erotic love triggered by Enide's beauty.⁵¹

It appears that although Chrétien is mistakenly considered to have romance as his general theme, he actually does not care much about it in a sense that it can be referred to as his main concern. What Chrétien is concerned with is how the personal life of a man (a knight or the hero of the story) can be harmonized and balanced with his career as an independent person. In other words, can a married man still live the so-called liberated life he once had when he was single? This aspect of a man's life not only involves him but it also involves the woman as she has to come to terms with the fact that she is not the sole focus of her husband's life and that no matter how tolerant and understanding she might be, she still

⁵⁰ The use of the word *dame/pucelle* – in the original text, i.e., *maiden*, is also abundant, which is something that should not be taken for granted. Maiden is not a mere title given to a young lady; it is in fact the representative of an ideology that blended well into the socio-political and religious constructs of medieval society. Maidenhood was a significant stage in the life of a medieval woman. According to the definition, a maiden or a maidenly woman is a young lady who is no longer a child and is supposed to be beautiful – the center of male attention – and yet a virgin, at the same time sexually mature and at the peak of her femininity. How all these qualities can actually co-exist in a young woman can itself be questioned even if one only considers the fact that it is impossible for a young virgin girl to be sexually mature and at the peak of her femininity. This is apparently expressed in the case of Enide, where she is described as a girl with golden tresses, blushing cheeks, and red lips while there is constant emphasis on the fact that all these features exist in her naturally. She is also described as discreet and open-hearted, which leads the reader back to the notion of maidenhood and prudence. See Lisa M. Bitel, *Women in Early Medieval Europe, 400-1100* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 154-198.

⁵¹ Peter S. Noble, *Love and Marriage in Chrétien de Troyes* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1982).

can be trapped in confusion marked by feelings of jealousy and possessiveness. As can be derived from the romance of Erec and Enide, a woman cannot enjoy her life with a man who is distracted from his previous life by the event of marriage.⁵² Enide – as the case is with many of women – wishes to see Erec as he was before he married her. She wants others to see him in the same way. Although Enide enjoys the attention she receives from Erec, she still does not tolerate his character shift from a brave and mighty knight to a domestic lover who does nothing but stay home with her. After marriage, when Erec starts to ignore his duties and spend time with her instead, his reputation is almost ruined and Enide, having heard the bitter comments about her husband, is disturbed not only because of the unfair gossip but also because the perfection of her life, transformed from a poor peasant girl to an elite woman married to an excellent knight is shaken and she is confused. She also feels ashamed since she thinks that she is the reason and the cause for her husband's negligence and the feeling of guilt destroys her happiness so that she cannot enjoy her newlywed life anymore. Later, hoping to push Erec back to his previous state, Enide tells him about this and he is enraged because he thinks Enide is not grateful for the attention he gives her. He forbids her to speak and takes her on a journey with him.

Erec finds it difficult to admit that although Enide's words referring to the gossip about him were audacious, she was indeed right; he is enraged and cannot simply forgive his wife. His feeling of rage is intensified even more since he feels that Enide is not grateful for all the attention he has given her (while she may have not asked for such intense devotion and, of course, she never forced it out of him) and he believes that he has to punish her and make her suffer for her audacity.

⁵² Ibid., 17.

Erec's behavior is a follow-through of the *chanson de geste*⁵³. In chansons de geste a man is in relation and interaction with other men and the role of the woman or women is quite marginal if not excluded completely. Parts of the story of Erec and Enide are the manifestation of this literary tradition. For example, in the middle of the story, where Enide comes to believe that her lord is dead, she is taken away by a new knight who wishes to marry her immediately. The new knight is a complete stranger who knows well that Enide is overtaken by grief. Although he is rejected by her he feels that he is entitled to take Enide to his castle. It is as if he has found something precious and believes it belongs to him. He marries her, threatens her so that she would stop mourning, and when she refuses to do so or eat, he hits her in the face. When Enide refuses to change, he hits her a second time. Such behavior is the indication of objectifying Enide and bringing her down to the role of a mere doll which is loved for the sake of her beauty and is not expected to converse or make choices. All Enide is expected to do is agree and surrender. When she does not do so, even her best quality, her magnificent beauty, which lies in her face for the most part, cannot hold the knight's anger back. Reacting to Enide from the position of power and aiming his anger at her best feature is how the knight makes a statement. If he does not get what he desires, he shall destroy it.

As mentioned above, at some points Chrétien seems as if he is objectifying his female character, which happens to Enide but never to Guinevere.⁵⁴ However; this is not an indication of a fully misogynistic approach since later in the course of the story Enide is given a chance to show her real identity and the duality that lies beneath her quiet, harmless, and defenseless appearance. Chrétien seems to have carefully avoided creating an

⁵³ Simon Gaunt, *Gender and Genre in Medieval French Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 22-68.

⁵⁴ It can also be seen vividly in the part where Enide is *given* to Erec *by the hand* and *is received* by him in return while in the meantime she does not talk or proclaim anything at all as if she is merely the object of an exchange.

androcentric plot even though he does show both aspects of the issue.⁵⁵ He appears to be completely in favor of gender alterity in his female characters. For example, if Chrétien had taken an androcentric approach he would not have let King Arthur listen to Guinevere's advice to postpone the decision regarding which lady to kiss until Erec's return. Chrétien explicitly shows a kind of support for the female character of the story when, after Erec's successful return, Guinevere asks Arthur to confess to the fact that she was right and King Arthur does so, adding that it was the right thing to take advice from his wife.

It is surprising to know that in Erec and Enide there is almost no notion of love at first sight. Erec and Enide see each other in a neutral atmosphere. While Erec does understand how incredibly beautiful Enide is, he does not try to interact with her directly. Even when Enide takes him by the hand and leads him to his resting place for the night at her father's request there is no indication of communication between them. It seems that Enide's beauty was the first thing to trigger her being noticed by Erec and as time goes on and Erec learns more about her background through speaking to her father, he becomes more interested in her. Yet, there is no sign of fondness or love. In fact, the need to have a lady by his side in order to be able to take part in a contest is an excuse for Erec to initiate a conversation about having Enide as his lady. Had Erec not been obliged to have a lady by his side, he might have needed to show his interest for Enide in a different way. It would be unfair to say that Erec offered to take Enide with him just out of sympathy for a young lady of noble origins, who was deprived of her right to have a lavish life.

When Erec forbids his wife to talk on their journey, she cannot obey him as she cares for him and cannot bear to see him get hurt. Erec's reason for forbidding his wife to talk during their journey is a confusing issue. There has long been speculation as to why Erec treats his wife poorly and if Enide did anything wrong or not. It would be an injustice to the

⁵⁵ This is especially seen in the way he presents two different images of women in his stories: one is the quiet fair lady and the other is the strong and self-confident woman.

reason for the story and to the character of Erec to consider Enide completely innocent. S. Mussetter, in his critical account of the story, partly blames Enide herself for what comes upon her, for he believes if Enide had not spoken from her raw emotions in the famous bedroom scene, she may have experienced less hardship. On the other hand, Burgess refers to Enide's mistake as *Felix Culpa* because it eventually functions as a shock that brings Erec back to the right path.

While some may consider Erec's behavior poor and harsh, there are still some points which can show the opposite. If Erec was completely disappointed in his wife, why did he take her and only her with him on his journey? If he had changed his mind about her wisdom and did not trust her any longer he would have taken a squire or another knight with him. The act of going on an undefined journey with Enide right after finding trouble in their marriage shows that Erec had not lost hope and wished to give Enide (and himself) another chance.⁵⁶ During the journey Enide disobeys her husband several times and each time Erec threatens to never forgive her if she speaks another word; yet each time he forgives her. It is as if this journey is not merely a punishment for them, but it is a form of catharsis for them both. During the journey Erec faces quite a few troubles and suffers a great deal, yet he refuses to seek help even though he has the chance. Erec and Enide complete this journey while they are reaching a point of balance internally. They mature and they understand their qualities more than before. This proves to be the key to their eventual victorious return, when, having passed through their adventures, once again they can show a united face as a couple.

⁵⁶ G. J. Brogyanyi, "Motivation in Erec et Enide," *Kentucky Romance Quarterly* 19 (1972), 417.

3.5. CLIGÈS⁵⁷

Cligès⁵⁸ is the second of Chrétien's romances, which he wrote after Erec and Enide. The dominant theme of this romance is courtly behavior and adultery. It is also the only romance by Chrétien in which war is discussed in realistic detail. In this romance, the narrative tends to travel from the lovers' accounts to the war recollections and the back. The narrative style of each story – although they are intermingled – isolates it from the other one.

The story opens with a detailed description of the love story of Alexander and Soredamors, Cligès' parents, which puts much emphasis on the courtly manners they both display. Most of the descriptions in this part of the romance refer to the way the lovers burn with desire for each other,⁵⁹ yet they know they have to hold their emotions back and behave in the best courtly manner, which means to be selfless and to always consider matters of dignity and honor as the most significant priorities. This code of courtly manners may also be a reflection of the social norms of the Middle Ages that made marriage the business of people other than the couple. As is seen in this story, eventually it is the queen, who notices that the lovers are in pain and helps them get the recognition they need.

Later in the story, Cligès, who was born in Arthur's realm but grew up in Greece, goes back to Arthur's land to be knighted and in the meantime his uncle, Alis, is king until Cligès matures enough to take over. Cligès falls in love with Alis' soon-to-be wife, Fenice.

⁵⁷ *The Complete Romances of Chrétien de Troyes*, tr. David Staine (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990)

⁵⁸ For an analysis of Cligès see particularly: Lucie Polak, *Chrétien de Troyes: Cligès* (London: Grant and Cutler, 1982)

⁵⁹ Alexander describes in rhetorical detail how he has fallen in love because his eyes have betrayed him by letting the arrow of love get in through them. He then transforms this image of arrow into something valuable that he will cherish. The arrow from here on is love itself, it is a woman, or to be more precise *the woman he loves*. The clothes that Alexander describes his love in are not simply representative of the beloved as a woman. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries the dress code kept the two genders from being distinguished from each other, so this can be an introduction of the notion of gender ambiguity to this romance. Yet his lingering pleasure – the love he feels for Soredamors – is interrupted by war. However, the two stories seem to be pushing each other forward inadvertently.

Because of the adulterous nature of this love⁶⁰ and the danger that it brings with it they have to make everyone believe that Fenice is dead so that they can run away and consummate their love. This theme is more tangible as Fenice is struggling with the troubles that an arranged marriage will bestow upon her. Fenice knows that if she marries Alis, whatever goes on between the two of them and however she may feel, no one will be able to intervene in their marital relationship.⁶¹ Fenice fears the loneliness that she will suffer from after an arranged marriage. The fact that she will be restricted by a man with whom she has never interacted troubles her mind; this is even more highlighted in the larger perspective, where Fenice is a young maiden going to a different country with a man who is more of a stranger than her husband.

In Cligès, fear, mixed with constant confusion and uncertainty, is the inseparable part of love. The main characters of the romance are constantly struggling with a paranoid consideration of their affairs. They are obsessed with thoughts that analyze every single detail of a plausible action before it can occur and yet in several instances these obsessive thoughts lead to no action at all. The pondering goes on for so long that time is lost and it is preferred to do nothing rather than take a risk. The long soliloquies of the characters – especially Fenice – and their redundant questions or self-inquiries prove that the obsession never leaves them alone and causes them to suffer.

Fenice understands the restrictions she faces as a woman and she is reluctant to jeopardize her honor and simply run away with Cligès. She does know that she is entitled to a marriage full of mutual love and respect, yet she wants to achieve such an end in the most legitimate way. Fenice does obey the rules that society has made for her; however, this does not make her conform to them fully. Even at the moments when she has fully accepted the circumstances, she wishes to try and find a way to do what she desires most. She loves Cligès

⁶⁰ *Love and Marriage in Chrétien de Troyes* (Wales: Cardiff University Press, 1982), 34.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, , 36.

and longs to be with him, but not at any price. As a result Fenice can be considered a discreet and witty woman in her approach to the personal affairs of her life. Her clever plot to pretend to have passed away and the way she gets her nurse to help her with it is demonstration of this claim. She does not surrender to passion; rather, she thinks carefully about the consequences of her actions and wishes to do what is most appropriate. Furthermore, Fenice is a woman of strong will and courage and she is ready to endure the severest of pains,⁶² when she knows that she fights for the right cause. Cligès, on the other hand, is more willing to take risky actions but he is also bright and reasonable. The conversations that Cligès and Fenice have after his return from Brittany are more negotiations than sentimental dialogues. They discuss possible solutions and present ideas as to how they can make their union possible without causing trouble and chaos. Eventually they hide in a tower that had been made for them by Cligès friend, but Alis finds out about this affair. Cligès seeks Arthur's help but in the meantime Alis passes away and Cligès is free to marry Fenice and rule his lands.

⁶² A clear example of which is the torture she endures by the three physicians, who come to her supposed death bed.

CHAPTER FOUR: VARIETIES OF SAMENESS, VARIETIES OF DIFFERENCE

4.1 THE MEETING AND PARTING OF THE LOVERS

Perhaps the most general implication of the romances discussed here is that the two parties meet in an accidental manner in unexpected circumstances and the outcome of their meeting leads to a combination of conventional and unconventional events and relationships. However, the accident is not necessarily the well-known love-at-first-sight, which leads to direct and personal interactions – as the case is with Bijan and Manijeh. Bijan is by no means intending to find a wife for himself and he is on a completely different quest when he is told by his companion, Gorgin, that there are beautiful girls at the spring feasts on the border of Turan. Bijan was tempted by Gorgin's words and did listen to him, but he never imagined meeting a princess with whom he would later start a tumultuous and painful adventure. Everything simply started with Bijan celebrating and enjoying his time with Manijeh, but this led to them developing a strong bond later. One cannot ignore the active role of Manijeh in the formation of this bond. If it were not for her authoritative persistence and audacity, Bijan might have returned to his homeland after a short visit to her.

Indeed, Manijeh does something spontaneous out of her new-found affection for Bijan and afterwards she does as her heart tells her to do. As a result of her efforts, in a short span of time she induces more vibrant feelings of love in Bijan and this gradually growing mutuality keeps them together. This might come the closest to Fenice's ordeal with the emotions and with the complexity of the circumstances under which she started a difficult relationship with Cligès. Fenice sees Cligès without having a chance to personally get acquainted with him while she is promised to Cligès' uncle, Alis. Their relationship starts with accidentally finding each other and having to deal with feelings of sorrow and anxiety as none of them has a way of approaching the other in person. On one hand, Cligès (although he

is in love with Fenice) is focused on his duties and responsibilities regarding his uncle. On the other hand, Fenice desperately struggles to find a way to be with him without causing trouble. She is constantly thinking and analyzing her situation and wants to find a solution that can help her get what she desires without being the subject of scandalous rumors. Therefore, it is through her efforts that the lovers' mutual feelings grow and they manage to meet in person and express their feelings to each other and plan their future.

Cligès' romance also shares a spectacular feature with the romance of Zal and Roodabeh in that they both represent a kind of forbidden love as the lovers' union may potentially lead to national disaster. These two romances are close in nature to the Hellenic love that entails war and disaster and jeopardizes international peace. Zal and Roodabeh share a history of bitter animosity between their countries? due to Roodabeh's ancestor having massacred Persians . This notion of remaining loyal to the court that comes in the scene of romance prevents the lovers from having a completely personal relationship since they need to consider other issues while making decisions. Zal and Roodabeh struggle separately to persuade their parents (as well as their respective courts) to accept and allow their marriage without taking into account the unpleasant memories of past that left the two countries estranged. The same issue is seen in Cligès, where the lovers' union is – by nature – equal to treason, scandal, and adultery, so Fenice and Cligès have no choice but to devise a complicated plot and be together in secrecy. Had they simply eloped, there would have been an uproar amongst the royal members of the court that entailed war and unrest. Cligès and Fenice, however, are perhaps the luckiest couple (of all the five one mentioned) since when things go wrong and their countries are on the verge of starting a war because of what they have done, Alis dies and with him dies the cause of the couple's fear.

The aspect of how romance characters meet each other unexpectedly is an ever-present theme in such stories; one must also keep in mind that sometimes unexpected

meetings are accompanied by a great deal of irony. The short but exceptional romance of Sohrab and Gordafarid is the most ironic and complicated example of the lovers' meeting as the very image of the ladylove is vague and unorthodox. Sohrab and Gordafarid meet each other as two knights who are merely opponents in the battlefield. Each of them has their own cause to fight for and this makes it difficult for the reader to attribute the common features of romance lovers to them. The narration of the story may already let the reader know that Gordafarid is a woman, but this aspect of her identity is not seen through the eyes of Sohrab and he simply sees her as the object of a one-on-one battle until Gordafarid's helmet falls off her head and her beautiful hair and face are revealed. From this moment on it is not possible for Sohrab to remain focused on the battle as he was. This is the time that he sees the face a woman and he sees the face of love. The irony is at its peak here since Gordafarid's appearance conforms to the preconceived notions of maidenly beauty and womanhood, but she is dressed in full armor. The moment the reader – along with Sohrab – starts to get emotionally involved with the scene, Gordafarid's explicitly cold reaction to Sohrab's amazement forbids them to imagine a possible sentimental interaction. Although Sohrab is stereotypically bewitched by Gordafarid's beauty and seems to be ready to seek a peaceful resolution to their ordeal and get involved with her, Gordafarid is by no means interested in a relationship.

Sohrab and Gordafarid meet and part, but the feeling of regret for an unachievable romance is not mutual. Sohrab is the only one in love, but the strategic situation where he is stranded prevents him from trying harder and spending time and energy on initiating a romantic relationship with Gordafarid. Love in the romance of Sohrab and Gordafarid is like a stillborn child since they never have a chance to be formally involved in a two-way relationship with interactions and reactions. The notion of love and passion in this romance is also influenced by personal decisions, as Sohrab does not use force or too much persistence

to be united with his love. He rather chooses to suffer her everlasting absence in secret but keep things the way she tried to keep them. The question is: Had they met under different circumstances in a time of peace, would they have given themselves a chance to know and love each other?

Erec and Enide happen to meet each other (and start a typical medieval relationship with a patriarchal marriage arrangement) before they actually get involved intellectually and emotionally. One can derive from this romance that Erec and Enide meet twice. Once they meet in a common way, when a male member of the nobility spots a beautiful maiden and asks her father for her hand in marriage. From this perspective, Enide and Erec do not meet and interact. They see each other and the male characters merely open formal negotiations and make final decisions. Up to here things are typically traditional and empty of emotions without requiring mutual affection. However, Erec and Enide meet once more at the end of the romance as two mature characters, a man and a woman (not merely a maiden), who have been through a storm of adventures and difficulties together, thus having realized each other's true qualities. This causes them to see each other differently, free from the formalities imposed upon them that formerly defined them in rigid terms of nobility and respect. After their adventures they are ready to embrace the true essence of their union, which is based on mutual understanding.

Between the two meetings of Erec and Enide there is a period of separation that causes the lovers to become isolated from each other although they are physically close to one another. They get involved in a series of misunderstandings and unintentional mistakes that lead to their estrangement and push them closer to the threshold of a complete surrender of their inhibitions as husband and wife. In other words, Erec and Enide are united in traditional matrimony, are estranged through their immaturity and differences, and are

reunited in understanding, coming to terms with realities and forgiving each other. In the end it is their new emotional – yet logical – bond that keeps them together.

4.2 JOYS AND SUFFERINGS OF LOVE

Regardless of meeting (becoming united or reunited) and parting (separation of any kind) that are two extreme levels of the joys and pains of love, there are other emotions that come between them. The five romances discussed in this thesis share some of these emotions in their and have some sentimental experiences that are unique to one or a couple of them.

The joys of love do not necessarily appear at the meetings of all the lovers as in the romance of Zal and Roodabeh, where they fall in love with each other before they meet. Roodabeh hears about the magnificence of Zal from her father and falls in love with the image her father presents of him. She embraces this image and is eager to let Zal know about her true feelings. The excitement makes her restless and causes her to take action in secret and send a message to him. Therefore, through a secret correspondence, the two develop a bond before being united.

Although Zal and Roodabeh are the only characters that fall in love before meeting, the notion of secret love is not exclusive to them. Cligès and Fenice also go through the same hidden-love phase, when Fenice is promised to Alis and they cannot make their affections public. Love in these two romances is the driving force that leads the characters to act independently and boldly to make possible what has been forbidden to them. It takes Roodabeh to the point where she meets Zal on the roof of the castle while her parents are not aware of her decision and it causes Cligès and Fenice to elope eventually.

Another type of joy represented in these romances is the joy of victory, whether in a character's satisfaction with being in a position of power⁶³ or in merely winning the heart of

⁶³ Power can be redefined here as a feeling of confidence and authority. For instance, the way Gordafarid dresses as a knight and goes to the battlefield to protect her father's dignity implies her confidence as a strong

one's beloved, as can be seen in Manijeh when she persuades Bijan to stay with her in her palace. Erec also experiences this joy by defeating Yder and succeeding in both seeking revenge on behalf of the queen and elevating Enide to a position that suits her beauty. Thus, Erec's victory is a type of victory that is beneficial for others as well.

Physical joy and satisfaction or erotic love are highlighted more vividly in two of the romances. Erec and Enide start their relationship on a traditional and erotic level, when they are not really communicating through dialogue but they do enjoy the company of each other in their marriage chamber.⁶⁴ Chrétien describes their erotic bond in the first scenes of the story (after their marriage) and refers to them again when Erec and Enide solve their issues and are reunited. In Bijan and Manijeh the same notion is used when Bijan goes to spend time with Manijeh for the first time and their festive mood is described by Ferdowsi. The erotic drive of their budding relationship is so strong that Manijeh cannot let go of Bijan and deceitfully takes him to her palace to spend more time with him. Although in the other three romances there might be slight or bold references to the erotic aspect of love, Erec and Enide along with Bijan and Manijeh are the most explicit examples of this notion.

The other recurrent theme of joy is being rescued and feeling safe. This happens in various ways and to different characters in some of these romances and entails pleasant feelings. When Bijan is imprisoned in an empty well with Manijeh wandering around in shabby clothes and both lovers are desperate, Bijan's grandfather comes to their rescue and manages to set him free and take them both to the court, where they can live happily in safety. In Cligès the same theme is also present, when Fenice pretends to be dead and is taken to a secure tower where she cannot be discovered by Alis' men. Later in Cligès, when their secret is disclosed and they are escaping punishment by seeking assistance from King Arthur,

person. She may not show explicitly that she is happy with what she does, but being able to confront a powerful hero is by itself a victory for her.

⁶⁴ *Love and Marriage in Chrétien de Troyes* (Wales: Cardiff University Press, 1982), 17.

they are assured of his support and are accepted at his court. Enide also enjoys the feeling of safety after being forced to remarry – when Erec was presumed to be dead – and was miserable in a foreign land, when Erec (as if rising from the dead just for her sake) came to her rescue and took her to safety.

On the other hand, the pains and sufferings that these romances present cover a wide span of their own.⁶⁵ The first kind of love-related pain is lovesickness, as in being rejected by one's beloved or in having a forbidden wish. Sohrab has to endure the suffering of rejection after Gordafarid tells him that their union is not possible. Roodabeh and Zal also go through a difficult process to persuade their parents and the courts of their countries that their marriage would not end in war and disaster. Fenice experiences the same feeling of lovesickness, when she finds herself engaged to a man she does not love and in love with a man she cannot have. Patience and suffering for being unable to be united because of external forces (e.g., political) is the direct reason for lovesickness in these romances.

Another aspect of suffering for love is the physical and psychological pain (torture) the lovers have to endure at times. Fenice, a young and beautiful woman, suffers enormous and harsh physical torture and tolerates it only because she desires to be with her beloved. Enide is beaten by her second husband when she refuses to conform to his demands because she is still in love with Erec and is grief-stricken by his apparent death. She is even ready to endure more torture because she is by no means willing to forget her love for Erec. Enide also goes through another type of pain, namely, forced silence, which is hard to bear as she is deprived of her right to speak her mind and express herself freely. This is hard for her, especially since she has just started to become more expressive and talkative as in the

⁶⁵ Sylvia Huot, *Madness in Medieval French Literature: Identities Found and Lost* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), chapters 1-4.

beginning of the story she was merely a young girl and completely immature.⁶⁶ It is challenging and painful for her to decide what to do while facing the dilemma of remaining in the role of the submissive wife or coming out of her shell as a mature woman.⁶⁷

What keeps the lovers away or forces them to separate is another reason for their suffering. This can be a formal or political issue (as is the case with Cligès) or an imposed distance (as with Bijan and Manijeh). From this perspective there also is a kind of fluctuation that causes the events to take different turns. Erec and Enide start their marriage with joy and pleasure but they start to experience marital problems after Erec is blamed for his carelessness. Bijan and Manijeh also start a joyful relationship until Manijeh's father is enraged by their careless behavior and accuses them of treason and disowns his own daughter. In such cases, things start in the best way possible but something foreshadows future problems. Then the lovers have to face the consequences of their actions and either be patient until they resolve the issues on their own or by getting assistance from outside.

4.3 GENDER AND POWER

The way characters behave and their interactions with each other – whether male or female – is an absolute function of their social status, which is a challenging issue and hard to define. Social status is the driving force among the norms created by any hierarchical regulator such as religion, law, and the like. Regardless of such norms and regulations that are immediately associated with social status, gender is by definition a basic yet controversial aspect of it. One may try to maintain an objective stance while discussing gender issues and analyze the related literature without using such labels as feminist or androcentric; however, the restrictions women have faced through the course of time – before, during and after the

⁶⁶ Penny Sullivan, "The Education of the Heroine in Chretien's Erec et Enide," *Neophilologus* 69 (1985): 321-331.

⁶⁷ Maura Coghlan, "The Flaw in Enide's Character: A Study of Chrétien de Troyes' Erec," *Reading Medieval Studies* 5 (1979): 21-27.

Middle Ages – make it impossible to devote equal time and energy to the gender-related roles of men and women in literature.

Coming down to the issue of romances and their characters, the Arthurian context is a highly discussed area regarding gender issues. As Hartmann Von Aue suggests, in the Arthurian world men are specifically allowed to seek social status via performing physical deeds and through expressing themselves freely while women are often on the margins and use passive means of expression if they are to express themselves at all. Politeness is a common behavior in women's attitudes, for which they are credited in both Erec and Enide and in Cligès. The ongoing internal conflicts that the female characters of these stories have while deciding to show their emotions or converse with another character (e.g., the knight) is a sign of the boundaries they face, which stem from social expectations.⁶⁸ Politeness in the attitude of the medieval woman is not merely correctness in interaction; rather, it is the realization of the contexts in which she is required to remain silent (unless spoken to).⁶⁹ In contrast, silence is a symbol of faith and trust. Enide is punished for her lack of trust in her husband and has to pay for this sin by remaining silent unless he addresses her. Later, as the story progresses, Enide feels entitled to have the authority to act against her husband's word and speak out to warn him. This apparent shift in power practice and its transformation from one character to the other is a sign of imbalance between social norms and their practicality. Enide has been brought up as a properly behaved woman, who up to a certain point does nothing but conform to what comes upon her and what is decided for her. From a certain point on, however, Enide seems to realize her role and identity and she is no longer ready to accept without objection. It is as if she is internalizing what has settled in her mentality through expressing herself and embracing the consequences.

⁶⁸ Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson. "Universals in Language Usage: Politeness Phenomena," In *Questions and Politeness: Strategies in Social Interaction*, ed. Esther N. Goody. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1978), 56-289.

On a different level, while women are not expected to act freely and authoritatively in the presence of men, they are different if placed in smaller and more private circles.⁷⁰ Examples of this can be found in Fenice's conversations with Thessala while she is completely quiet and speechless in the presence of others. Guinevere, an example of a powerful woman, is also cautious with her speech and seems more talkative in her private conversations with Enide. However, this aspect of silence and women's power practice can be considered a major contrast between Chrétien and Ferdowsi since in the three Persian romances discussed the leading female character seems to go beyond such boundaries. Gordafarid is out as a knight and Sindokht goes – without informing her husband – to negotiate significant issues with the Persians in their camp and her daughter Roodabeh openly expresses her desire for Zal in the presence of her father. Also, Manijeh boldly brings Bijan to her palace and leisurely spends time with him and when her father confronts them, she insists on staying with Bijan to the point that she is disowned by her father. This apparent audacity of Persian women seen in Ferdowsi's work that contrasts with Chrétien's descriptions of women requires closer investigation.

By comparing the status of women in Ferdowsi's society and in his book – if his work is considered a reflection of real life experiences in society – it can be stated that the *Shahnameh* creates a different image of the female role than the actual one. In the pre-Islamic era and during the first centuries following the Arab invasion, which was accompanied by the official introduction of Islam to Iran and subsequently the gradual conversion of its population, women went through a transition in their social status and general roles. This transition was of a dichotomous nature was partly positive (since it liberated Zoroastrian and Jewish women from some restrictions) and partly negative since it restricted the active role of women in public places along with their male partners and husbands. In other words, the

⁶⁹ Patrick M. McConeghy, "Women's Speech and Silence in Hartmann Von Aue's *Erec*," *Modern Language Association* 102 (1987): 772-783.

transition of female roles starting before Ferdowsi's birth and continuing during his life gave women more freedom within the closed spaces of their private lives and in the long run controlled their presence in public and active life.⁷¹ Therefore, there is a high chance that Ferdowsi, through presenting images and descriptions of highly authoritative female characters that have pragmatic approaches to their life events, is trying to simulate a different form of society. He appears to be setting an example for his readers and by doing so he intends to communicate ways of bypassing the rigid rules of society that promote inequality. In contrast, Chrétien appears to have more of a moral intention in parts of his work. For instance, in the last part of *Cligès* he seems to tell the reader that after what Fenice did it became hard for other kings to trust their brides. It is as if he wants his audience – mostly elite and noble – to realize that adultery in any form and by any name is something that one cannot get away with.

The female characters that Ferdowsi creates seem to have a variety of characteristics and features without the usual restrictions seen in real life. In other words he was inspired by the environment but he also gave himself the liberty to go beyond the facts. The characters that this study is dealing with – namely Manijeh, Gordafarid, Sindokht and Roodabeh – basically share the features of strong and intelligent women who endure hardships for the sake of their male companion.⁷² Chrétien also seems to have followed a similar pattern, although he has a more conservative approach to it. He does intend to display unique features of his characters, but he wishes to show them without disturbing the accepted norms. At times Chrétien's discourse seems more ironic than Ferdowsi's.

⁷⁰ Patrick M. McConeghy, "Women's Speech and Silence in Hartmann Von Aue's *Erec*," 774.

⁷¹ Jamsheed K. Choksy, "Women during the Transition from Sasanian to Early Islamic Times," in *Women in Iran from the Rise of Islam to 1800*, ed. Guity Nashat and Lois Beck (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 48-61.

⁷² This is partly a reflection of Ferdowsi's real life experience in which his wife played a supportive role and he remembers and appreciates this several times in the *Shahnameh*. He respects and reflects upon the presence and companionship of his own wife through creating supportive female roles in his stories.

In either case, both authors are more or less moving outside the traditional framework in which the iconic image of the good wife is dominant. In such a framework one expects women characters to constantly try to honor their fathers and husbands, have authority – if at all – under their full supervision and dominance, and are supposed to behave irreproachably at all times.⁷³ These features are present in the leading female characters of the romances discussed, but they are not permanent. In the most explicit case, Enide is shown as a stereotypical example of the medieval woman – a copy of her mother’s character, who tends not to express herself but to agree with her husband – and she later comes out of this shell and becomes independent.

While the leading females of the five romances discussed here all have elements of strong will power and independence, their authoritative powers are highlighted still more if they are married. The identity and recognition that a typical married woman in the Middle Ages could achieve can be traced in these characters as well. Roodabeh, for instance, is a young woman with a mind of her own, who does not seem to be afraid of breaking the rules. At the same time, while her struggles to achieve what she wants enrage Mehrab so much that he wishes to kill her,⁷⁴ her mother, Sindokht, has more practical power. Sindokht and Guinevere are examples of post-marriage recognition and how it could empower women at that time. It is important to remember that marriage did not remove or reduce male dominance. It was rather a way through which the manifestation of female interference and influence became possible practically.⁷⁵ This is also seen in the romance of Bijan and Manijeh, in which Manijeh literally becomes a nomad after she reveals her love for Bijan and remains that way until Bijan’s grandfather saves them both and takes them to a land where

⁷³ Silvana Vecchio, “The Good Wife,” in *A History of Women in the West II Silences of the Middle Ages*, tr. Clarissa Botsford (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1992), 105-135.

⁷⁴ The same happens with Manijeh. When Afrasiab realizes how Manijeh has spent time with Bijan in secret, he gets angry and wishes she had killed his daughter at birth in order to prevent such scandalous treason.

⁷⁵ Georges Duby, “The Courtly Model,” in *A History of Women in the Middle Ages*, (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1992), 250-252.

they can marry and be respected as a couple. Manijeh is a means through which Bijan's rescue becomes possible and she is only recognized as his companion and the one who cared for him.

Another aspect of gender-related power manifestation can be studied by considering the reactions of male characters to what their female companions do. From this perspective, Chrétien's model of society is less open to female authority than Ferdowsi's. With the exception of Guinevere – who is the queen and makes comments and suggestions – the other two female characters (Fenice and Enide) face possible suppression if they express their thoughts. Fenice does not dare to disagree with her father's decision to marry her to the old Alis and has to be adventurous if she wants to be with her beloved knight and Enide is forced to keep silent the moment she expresses concern and criticizes her husband. In comparison, in Ferdowsi's romances only Manijeh and Roodabeh are treated harshly for acting against their fathers' wills.⁷⁶ Roodabeh objects to her father's word and gets support from her mother, who eventually manages to help solve the issue and is even thanked by Mehrab for her help in settling the situation. Gordafarid is recognized for who she is and does not receive negative responses for her abnormal behavior. This outlook shows more flexibility in the male characters of Ferdowsi and supports the idea of him trying to modify and improve his society.

⁷⁶ And unlike Fenice, who became a bad example for the next queens to come, they only suffered (not physically) for a short while until they were united with their lovers.

4.4 STRENGTH OF WOMEN, WEAKNESS OF MEN?

Although the representation of the social issues Chrétien and Ferdowsi witnessed and realized during their lifetime cannot be separated or isolated from the facts, one cannot deny their active and subjective role in introducing characters with features that surpassed these facts. The extent to which such a deed was intentional on the part of the authors can be discussed; however, there is no doubt that at some points they are both presenting an image of a world upside down, a world in which a typical citizen of a medieval society would be surprised and confused since they would face incidents that they were either taught to avoid, or considered wrong in principle. This upside down world, for the most part, is portrayed by the level of growth that female characters achieve and the way they shed the old traditional skin of norms. As the title of this section suggests, still it is not possible to absolutely state whether this boldness and highlighting of women means anything close to weakness among men. Because of the relative nature of their relationship and the way the genders interact, boldness of one of them may lead to the weakness of the other – or may contribute to it – but this does not mean that it is the only cause.

In the romance of Zal and Roodabeh, there is an example of a female character, Roodabeh's mother, Sindokht, who is given the opportunity to explore the often-masculine world of negotiations and decisions. Sindokht's character itself has the foundation of a witty and reasonable personage with a great talent for communication. She is so charming and bright that none of the other male characters of the opposing party question her authority and they all recognize her position as worthy of face-to-face dialogue. But she also owes this recognition to Mehrab's exceptional perceptiveness. Throughout the story, at points when Mehrab is enraged by her daughter's audacity and explicit expression of her love for Zal, while the reader normally expects a typical harsh reaction from him, he takes the time to

listen to his wife. He trusts Sindokht and does not suppress her authority. At the end of the story he even thanks his wife for taking action personally and settling an issue that could have led to disaster. This is close to the kind of recognition and appreciation that King Arthur accords Guinevere regarding her comments and consultations (e.g., the white stage hunt and how she asked everyone to wait for Erec).

The issue here is not a matter of so-called moral right or wrong in approaching female and male characters from an equal – or semi-equal – point of view because the message that these romances convey may be interpreted as quite ironic. However, the very fact that the authors do not completely avoid presenting images of free and authoritative women is to be appreciated since they do not rule out the sense of possibility that such an issue could have had in the strictly structured medieval society, a possibility for parallel life styles and exercising one's will regardless of gender-related restrictions or privileges.

Another thing to be mentioned here is the notion of ignorance and underestimation that leads to a role shift between male and female characters. In *Cligès* there are two supporting characters which are significant parts of the story and their actions make the plot of this romance feasible; however, none of the authoritative male characters – like Fenice's father or Alis – ever become suspicious of what Thessala does. She is so invisible that she can freely move around and do what she is ordered to do without being noticed while at the same time she is quite powerful and dangerous in her invisibility. Thessala knows the art of magic and uses it for the sake of her lady. It appears that she is considered just another maid like the hundreds of other women that live at the court and serve their ladies. It makes sense that it is the weakness of Alis – the weakness of men – to take Thessala for granted. On the other hand, a similar character in the romance of *Zal and Roodabeh* has a different experience. She, unlike Thessala, is nameless and unrecognized. She does not have any gifts and indeed she is just a normal sincere maid. However, while again the dominant male

character of the story (Roodabeh's father) is not even around to notice her, Sindokht notices her and becomes suspicious and inquires about her actions. This actually leads to Roodabeh's secret love being disclosed. On this note, it appears that the notion of the weakness of men lies in their underestimation of women, which in turn leads to the female characters appearing smarter or more powerful at times.

It is difficult to state clearly if the medieval woman whose image is reflected in these five romances was of a weak nature or not. Looking at the journey these romance characters take and their subsequent evolution, one is able to trace incidents that gradually give them strength or highlight their hidden abilities. This can be seen vividly in Enide, who is a good example of how the circumstances of a society and an environment define a character and shape it in a certain way without her active participation. On the other hand, these circumstances can have a different effect on her at an appropriate time. Enide is raised as the typical medieval woman and she is comfortable with that role, but the moment she is separated from the context that binds her to such a role (i.e., family, hometown, and other environments that are known to her) she is on her own to explore the world. The fact that she does not have a relationship with her husband before they marry makes Erec an outsider in her new life, therefore, Enide cannot predict Erec's behavioral codes and act accordingly. This pushes her to think differently and weight the gravity of the situation, decide, observe the outcome of her decision, and face the consequences. It is through this experimental loneliness that Enide is reborn as a strong woman.

It should be noted that the relative nature of male-female interaction in these stories; as one character shows weakness or experiences a set-back, the other one in return may show strength and make a move forward. This can be seen in the romance of Bijan and Manijeh. Bijan has surrendered to his desires and is enjoying Manijeh's company so much that he does not notice the passage of time. When he does remember that he needs to leave and return to

court, he does not take immediate action, thus Manijeh uses the opportunity and feels bold enough to drug him and literally abduct him. Even later, when Bijan comes to his senses and finds himself in Manijeh's chamber, she finds it easy to persuade him to stay and spend time with her. Fenice also has a similar episode. While Cligès has taken all necessary measures to keep their relationship under secret and their hiding place unknown to others, Fenice – having been away from the outside world – uses the opportunity of a romantic moment with her lover and persuades him to let her go outside. Gordafarid also uses another opportunity of the male character's weakness because of her magnificent beauty and lets him believe that he shall go inside the castle with her and win the battle while she is planning to use his lenient side and protect her own cause.

Perhaps the most general statement that can be made about the female characters of these romances regarding their level of power compared to the male characters is that it is the environment that leads them to the position of power. This happens whether through depriving them of it – leading to a subsequent rebellious phase – or by providing them with it for some reason (as the case is with Sindokht).

4.5 A SENSE OF CLOSURE

As Patricia Parker suggests,⁷⁷ romance does not necessarily entail a traditional closing scene in which all the actions that were described up to a certain point come to a single event that is the end. While a romance needs a partial framework and has one or more objectives, one cannot expect it to end as if after the last paragraph all the possibilities for further development fade. As Jocelyn Sharlet suggests in her review of Meisami's book,⁷⁸ structure can be the starting point an author clings on to, but the way generating meaning is

⁷⁷ Patricia A. Parker, *Inescapable Romance*, 4.

approached through a certain genre or a combination of genres is significant as well. The truth is that romance literature is using ornamental elements of love and human nature to engage the readers' minds in a comprehensive process that is bound to become independent from the progress of the story. As the reader starts to read any of these romances, first it seems more like a meeting in which the reader familiarizes herself with the characters, their possible motifs, and the dominant themes of the story, but as the story starts to climax and display its challenges, the reader leaves that role of a mere witness behind and becomes involved. At this point the reader is interacting with the story. This way of reading has two levels, one of which is more literary and depends on the text while the other is independent of the text and takes place in the mind of the reader. The latter is the reason why one cannot attribute a full-stop to a romance.

Closure is a more abstract theme in Chrétien's romances since he wrote them separately and they were independent stories that did not relate to one another, meaning that it is up to the reader to think and develop those stories further according to the universality of the motifs and the sympathy they induce in one's mind. In *Cligès* there is a slight hint about this when Fenice is mentioned as the reason for later generations of kings to guard their queens more closely. Here the reader starts to wonder what life – especially courtly life – looked like after the adventures Fenice's actions entailed. However, this issue is based on more concrete grounds in Ferdowsi's romances. The reason is that all of Ferdowsi's works – including his romances – are part of a wider perspective (i.e., the *Shahnameh*) and the stories are formed around certain characters that re-appear in them. The romances of the *Shahnameh* that are mentioned in this study can be traced further in other parts of the book. So in a thorough reading of *Shahnameh*, one will definitely encounter the same characters more than

⁷⁸ Julie Scott Meisami, *Structure and Meaning in Medieval Arabic and Persian Poetry* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2003); Anthony C. Yu, *Comparative Journeys: Essays on Literature and Religion East and West* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

a few times in different contexts and conditions and have the opportunity to see their evolution and even grow with them.⁷⁹

From a more general view point, when dealing with romances one needs to remember that expecting a certain end or even expecting an end (like an achievement) is not the best way to approach the thought behind the story. Focusing only on the content of the story deprives the reader of comprehending it better and examining the other themes it has to offer. The romance of Sohrab and Gordafarid is a good example since it takes the readers on a journey on which up to a certain point they expect an accident of love to happen since everything seems to be in order. The young brave knight is there, the beautiful lady is shown, and the two get involved in an intense argument for a while. But things do not end the way a typical romance reader expects them to. Sohrab and Gordafarid are constantly causing a frequent transformation from order to chaos and vice versa. Perhaps one of the powerful influences of romance is this quality of creating order and disorder at critical moments so that characters can have an intense life that makes them act in certain ways. Erec and Enide start with order, are thrown into a chaotic journey, and they manage to get out of it in time before it becomes everlasting. Romance characters live their lives under a magnifying glass and are tested through life events. They either make it to the orderly life they have been striving for, or fail to do so and remain in a state of imbalance as the case is with Sohrab.

Looking at romances as types of a cognitive process which is narrowed down to certain incidents and characters but is not limited to them and has the capacity to grow and embrace other issues, it can be stated that end is a relative expression for them. Perhaps it is better to say that a romance ends with a touch of closure which is not to be considered permanent; there is always a possibility that someone – the author or the reader – will feel the

⁷⁹ For example, the reader has the opportunity to read about Zal's childhood, growing up, his later life with Roodabeh and the events they go through together, etc.

need to continue the quest or think of a new quest. This is how romance reflects life, as in real life there is no absolute and final end since after each end, there is a new beginning.

EPILOGUE

As David Daiches puts it, the representation of human nature in literature must be generally understandable but practically plausible so that it can have a pleasant influence on the audience. According to him, this way of representation has passion embedded in it and in the meantime touches the readers' basic psychological structures and induces reactions in them.⁸⁰ This makes sense in romance literature as a tool that reflects human life/nature without manipulating it so much as to turn it into a still life image that remains stagnant forever at some point in time and place. Romance reflects life like a liquid mirror.

The discussions and analyses in this study were aimed to follow the same pattern a romance has and the main concern has been presenting a large scale image of romance in which more detailed/focused pictures of Persian romances are represented without being merely descriptive, as the case is with most of the studies on the subject.⁸¹ Throughout this work special attention has been dedicated to multi-dimensional aspects of romance literature with the goal of helping the reader have a different way of seeing the elements outside a rigidly established framework. It should also be noted that no work of literature should be taken for granted even if it has been surveyed before by different scholars. There is always a new way to explore things and find novel ideas for further research if – and only if – one realizes that previous research – no matter how complete it might look – may have still skipped a point that can be discovered and developed.

The general point that keeps the romances of Ferdowsi and Chrétien related is that no matter how different their national and cultural motivations might be they share the universal essence of human nature. This is where Ferdowsi and Chrétien meet and share the outcome of

⁸⁰ David Daiches, *Critical Approaches to Literature* (New York: Longman, 1981), 91.

⁸¹ Mahmoud Omidshafar, "Waters and Women, Maidens and Might: The Passage of Royal Authority in the *Shahnama*," in *Women in Iran from the Rise of Islam to 1800*, ed. Guity Nashat, Lois Beck (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 170-171.

this meeting in characters and themes that cross borders of time and place and stand together as figures representing the everlasting involvement of humans with the mysteries of life.

As was discussed above, a romance is not expected to end abruptly and absolutely at some point. Rather, it lingers in the mind of the reader and goes through an evolution accordingly. What is not supposed to be missed here is the relative resolutions that are born in the course of a romance since the authors' work – both Ferdowsi's and Chrétien's – are not merely creating dilemmas but also paving the way for the resolution of controversies.⁸²

This study was designed to show a relatively unexplored part of romance literature and reflect upon some of its significant themes. However, there are still questions to be answered and problems to be solved regarding the other levels of a comparative analysis. Among them are the technical and literal aspects of such works with regard to matters of iconography, symbolism, psychoanalysis, and the like.

As Frye would say,⁸³ what keeps a romance coherent is adventure and as long as there is adventure the author can go on writing until he gets tired and decides to end things. However, the quest will continue and so will research.

⁸² Kadam Ali Sarrami, *From the Color of Flower to the Sting of Thorn* [از رنگ گل تا رنج خار] (Tehran: Sherkate Entesharat e Elmi Farhangi, 2009), 560.

⁸³ Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, 186.

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