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Spatial Dichotomy in the Medieval Chivalry Romance (City/ forest)

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Пространственная дихотомия в средневековом рыцарском романе

The main spatial dichotomy of the medieval chivalry romances – **city/forest** – expresses the artistic and structural opposition which exists between the **court civilization (city/castle)** and so-called **wild nature** (the world existing beyond the court/castle). Obviously, the reader should not expect reality or naturalism during description of one special area (*forest*) as well as the second one (*palace, castle*). “The descriptive and geographical details are not simply mimetic. They are determined both by the internal logic of the narrative itself, and by a long literary tradition of representations of nature. In stories, where the errant knights ride out to confront unknown, this defamiliarization of a well-charted territory produces just what romance calls for: a realm of adventure” [3, 12-13], in the depth of which the process of penetration of those moral values which is the basis in the formation of ideal person should be finished.

Cultural models of medieval west are taken from the Bible, where the **wild nature – desert** – as a symbol and historical and geographical reality are ambivalent notions and considered as opposition to **civilization or town**. The image of **desert** denoting a **solitary spot** in the Middle Ages is transformed into the **forest** although becomes distant from concrete geographical meaning and maintains its earlier, so-called “biblical image” – associated with wild environment, opposite to civilization [1, 49-54].

Those **wild** spots described in medieval romances are clearly the products of author’s imagination and not objective reality. In 1250 in England the last **wild forest** – the Forest of Dean disappeared in order to give way to such tidy, strictly organized forest tracts familiar to the late medieval England and which were under strong control of property. In French reality too the motive of **gaste forest** (uninhabited, deserted, arid forest) appeared just in time when real wild forests gradually started to disappear and fell into oblivion (the verbs **gast** and **gastine** which mean uncultivated, uninhabited spot are synonyms to the word **forest**). Champagne noblemen, at the court of which a majority of romances were composed, got considerable economic profit from selling of licenses to those persons who wanted to turn uncultivated areas into the croplands. At this time the introduction of **wild forest** by Chretien de Troyes sounds rather paradoxical. Although, one of the first researchers of the writer’s creative work - Hartman von Aue indicates that the use of the motive of **forest** in Chretien’s narrative has very clear and specially determined function. The **forest**, or limitless and infinite space far away from civilization, caused strange fear and trepidation in King Arthur’s errant knights actively seeking adventure, because it didn’t give them any key where they were or where they went or how long their journey would last. In addition to this, the woods were filled with wild animals and rather strange people, mainly pagans or outlaws. Correspondingly, two notions in medieval thinking got into close contact – wild environment and spiritual emptiness, which definitely took deep roots in the thinking of previous epoch .

In the system of values of medieval period, the **city (castle/court)**, i.e. civilized, organized environment was opposed to **the forest (wild nature)**. In courteous romances it is King Arthur’s court (cp. the court idyll in Arabia, India or Mulghazanzar from “The Knight in the Panther’s Skin”) – the symbol of elegance, delicacy and courtesy. However, the antithesis **castle/forest** is more complex than it

may seem at a glance, because one more binary opposition exists in the medieval chivalric romances – **hunting forest** and **gaste forest**. The forest in which the knights are seeking for adventures completely differs from the forest where they are hunting. In the woods which are close to the castles the knights forget their everyday problems for a while and temporarily free from the load of the court life abandon themselves to enjoy bliss in the nature (cp. *hunting in the field, mountain and hill foot; /there were numerous dogs, hawks and eagles, return early* [4, 470]). Naturally, in this case too, the forest for hunting is the same scenery invented by imagination as the **gaste forest**. Their opposition is built on the same principles of binary opposition which exists between castle and forest, between the court and wild nature [1, 58]. Correspondingly, both king and his knights may be considered as so-called forest men who visit hunting forest from time to time in order to fall into the same comfort and leisure which is offered by court (e.g. the hunting on white deer in Chretien de Troyes's "Erec", the episode of Arthur's escaped falcon in Wolfram von Eschenbach's "Parzival", the hunting cycle in "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight", Avtandil and King Rostevan's hunting in the "Knight in the Panther's Skin").

As opposed to the hunting forest, the wild forest is considered to be the negative of the **court/castle** (**castle** _ as a symbol of elegance, refinement; **forest** _ it's total antipode). An errant knight wandering in the trackless forest feels himself lonely and solitary. Being far from the court ceremonies, he is surrounded by indifferent, gloomy decor which is antithetic to that of refined culture which follower he is (cp. *he came to a desolate region, void of the children of Adam/For thirty days he traversed it, and met not a single person* [4, 181]; *For a whole month he had traveled but no man had he seen or encountered,/ And though there was plenty of game, he neither hunted, nor slew it* [4, 191]). In connection with the above mentioned, an interesting statement is expressed by Andrei Mikhailov. Speaking on the typology of the French chivalric romance, he makes a clear distinction between the so-called one's own and strange land. The first one – Arthur's court, where courtesy morale and justice dominate, appreciates the heroism. If here and there we still find perfidious and evil men, (e.g. seneschal Kei), in the end of the romance they are punished either by Arthur's supreme power or by the coincidence of obstacles. Thus the space is not only topographical but also moral notion. It is true that during description of the natural scenes Chretien de Troyes, as well as other medieval authors is not distinguished with verbosity but while depicting one's own space attractive light colors are used.

A **strange space** or a trackless forest, in which the hero sets forth in search of adventures, is a place of magic and danger. It is neutral and always hostile in relation to the hero. From the moral viewpoint too, this is a negative, a homeless space. Here natural conditions coincide and correspond to the moral because the illegality, injustice, deception and disloyalty rule in a strange space. It should be noted that during description of a **strange space** the evaluation of **own space** always (although implicitly) present. **Strange space** is evaluated by means of **one's own**, as a complete antipode to **one's own** (good-bad, grateful-ungrateful, beautiful-ugly, friendly-hostile, quiet-risky, reliable-unreliable, safe-dangerous, etc., [2, 181-182]). Thus to render forest scenes in courteous romances, the authors use the same motives as in

description of the court but only with negative modulation. The meaning of the **forest** here is interpreted by means of terms denoting luxuriance and festive mood. However, it is outlined that unlike the court, the **forest** cannot offer these pleasures to his guests. Thus **the court** in these romances functions as a obvious norm to which **the forest** can't correspond [3, 16-22]. Therefore, the knights' life lack of the comfort of courteous world and festive mood of the court inhabitants proceeds in wild forest, which is indifferent and antithetic to that refined culture the followers of which they are.

Naturally, the above mentioned is connected with the so-called theme of **wild or forest man** which was an ordinary topos of Latin literature of the Middle Ages. The search of this prototype leads us to the well-known episode of Geoffrey of Monmouth "Vita Merlini". Merlin, who considered himself guilty in his brothers' death, set forth into the forest to live wild and had to endure extreme hardships, although at the same time he acquires prophetic powers [1, 107]. This theme later transfers to courteous romance, namely, to Chrétien de Troyes' "Yvain". As it is stated by Jacques Le Goff, Yvain's madness after he had crossed cultivated fields and left the frontiers of King Arthur's estate was localized in the **forest** which is far more **complex** area (shelter, quest for adventures, place of remorse, etc) than it seems at first sight. Here "Yvain" ceases to be a knight and becomes a hunter. The hero loses memory, sleeps on a bare ground, eats raw meat and wears animals' skin [1, 110-111]. It seems that a kind of circle is tied between **human world** and **animals' world**.

It is true, Yvain becomes unsociable but he shows discontent that he has to eat raw meat in order to satisfy his hunger and to acknowledge the fact that in the forest there will be nor bread, nor wine, nor salt, nor table cloth, etc. The reference to the "cooked" food, spoon and knife, wine, napkins and various attributes of the court or civilized life are in forest scenes too. Although it is specially underlined that it is impossible to find them in the forest [3, 22-26].

There is threefold functional loading in leaving for the forest and merging with wild environment in "The Knight in the Panther's Skin": 1. It is linked with love and identified with **roaming** – *If the lover weeps for his beloved, tears are her due. Wandering and solitude befit him, and must be esteemed as roaming.* [4, 31]; *Since a true lover is destined to suffer alone, I leave you/ Leave you to roam like a madman weeping my heart out in anguish./Lovers must boldly go forth and seek brave quests for their loved ones* [4, 775]. Correspondingly, for a desperate and driven mad lover the forest, wild environment represent a kind of refuge where remote from people he can live in solitude plunging into his thoughts – *Maddened I roam in the forests, worn out and faint from weeping,* [4, 647]; 2. As in chivalric romances the **forest** (antithetic environment of the court) appears as that lineal space on which the errant knight's "path" on his quest for adventures goes and in the depth of which the process of forming his personality is to be finished. The notion of the **roam** which corresponds to the word **gachra** in the "The Knight in the Panther's Skin," is connected either with the fulfillment of lover's errand (*Solitude favors the lover pursuing the will of his mistress* [4, 160]) or **adventure** (*Idle repining is useless! Better to go forth and seek her* [4, 577]). Both in the first and second case a strange

space which is neutral, uninhabited and homeless – *he came to a desolate region, void of the children of Adam,/ For thirty days he traversed it, and met not a single being* [4, 181] – acquires significant symbolic loading because it is just here that the story of the knight's quest is to be developed.

It should be noted that dichotomy between **the forest** and **the court** is perceptible both in the first and second case. Like Yvain merges with nature, in his quest maddened Tariel finally abandons his community **the place of men**, finds refuge in a deserted cave – *A fitting abode for me were the haunts of the stag and of goats* [4, 645], *Ever since then I am here and can't differ from animals* [4, 649]. His chivalric valor in this new space is reduced only to the function of a hunter. He satisfies his hunger only with hunt game, wears panther's skin as garment. It is interesting to note that in order to return Tariel to civilized life, Avtandil and Asmat build their arguments just on the mentioned dichotomy – **human world/ animals world** – *With the wild beasts you wander, alone in the deepest of forests/ Shunning the friendship of men* [4, 269]; *Can you attain your desire by weeping and roaming the forests?* [4, 866]; 3. As it is in European chivalric romances, forest is a space between civilization centers (the court /castle) and its function is to show vividly the contrast which is necessary for differentiation of the structural unit of the **quest** or **adventure** from that structural unit as it is, let us say, feast, hospitality, etc. (*Now for a while I will leave, turn from the banquet and music* [4,164]).

When the knight being tired from the roaming reaches the *city/castle*, the scenery instantly changes – no surrounding space, the forces of nature are not so tough and hostile any longer (*We went and surveyed his city. Never has man seen such splendors!* [4, 604]; *We landed by night. When we came ashore we saw gardens before us* [4, 583]; *When they arrived at the city they found a magnificent palace,/ Ministers seated in state, and slaves richly appareled./They entered the spacious court; and all who beheld them were ravished/By Avtandil's beauty and grace and the knightly figure of Pridon* [4, 998]). According to Ed Putter, an important novelty of the Medieval narrative is the fact that this *new* scenery is seen from the vantage point of knights or personages and the novelty is expressed not only by those verbs which express the act of contemplation (cp. **went, surveyed**), but by those details which are easy for the reader to comprehend (*They arrived at a prosperous city, which was surrounded by orchards and a thicket of spacious gardens/Full of beautiful flowers fragrant and dazzling in color* [4, 1049]).

In the majority of medieval romances the personages see the fortress first from a far, from which it is not possible to observe all the details or they see the environment where this fortress is erected. The light which is seen from this new scenery is absolutely in correlation with the abundance and wealth that is so much deprived off the personage while being in a dark wild forest.

At the sight of a fortress the hero becomes convinced that all the hardships which he had to overcome in his quest left behind and now he stands before warm hearted host whose house arouses in him the association with his own space (*They sat and banqueted gaily on choicest of viands and liquors./As a kinsman treats a kinsman, thus was Avtandil treated* [4, 1000]). On the other hand, the scenes of hospitality in a strange place, in spite of the warmth shown by the host, lack of the

comfort (that is manifested e.g., in a cheerful mood), which is found in abundance in the scenes of the court. Yvain wandering in the forest encounters a hermit who despite of having little social contact with civilized world (sells animal's skin and buys bread} is nevertheless a **wild man** - neither his hovel is built by a man nor his meat is properly roasted. Correspondingly, Chrétien de Troyes successively shows comfort composing elements which Yvain lacks in the forest (porridge, wine, salt, flavorings, cutlery, napkins, etc.) The same principle is used when Tariel and Avtandil share a meal. Despite Asmath's best efforts, Devi's cave is not and can't become a native space for Tariel. Therefore his hospitality lacks ceremoniousness and festivity: *Roasted some meal and bidding them eat, placed it before them/ Though they entreated and begged him to eat Tariel sat listless./ He bit off a piece of the meat but could scarcely swallow a morsel* [4, 912]. Thus Tariel and Avtandil's talk at the table lacks usual chivalric gaiety and proceeds in accordance with the situation. Here, as it is common during chivalric feast, much wine is not drunk – (cp. *There was gay feasting and drinking on scale befitting their power.../The gem-studded plates were of gold and the bowls of turquoise and ruby./the king gave command that all who were drunk be tended and cared for* [4, 476]).

Despite the fact that the view of a castle in medieval chivalry romances has the aura of **another world** which dramatically differs from **the forest world** and the hero tired from wandering returns to the civilized world for a while, very often warm welcome and sensation of long-expected comfort which he feels in this fortress distracts his attention to see severe reality – that major adventures should happen just there, in this castle [3, 41]. In Chrétien de Troyes' romances as well as with Sir Gawain's anonymous author the disorder of space linearity represents a danger to the hero. From **adventurous space** the hero moves to **ordinary space** although very often in that locality where during wandering he stops for a while. Ordinary and adventurous space merge – knight tournament, new hardships, waylaid danger, etc. Although some protagonists prepare in advance to undergo misfortune which is predicted in case of deviation from the path and meeting face to face with castle frontier. Correspondingly, the introduction of a new space-castle, in the so-called adventurous structure is one of the means of the development of the narration which is realized either by the inclusion of romantic or heroic elements.

It is true, that the medieval court is an “ideal locus, where the courtly values can be explored, but in the accounts of the forest a concern for standards or refinement can continue to be a preoccupation of the narrative, precisely because it is cast as the inverted mirror image of the forest or castle” [3, 27]. As a result we obtain a decoration which is able to show the contrasts so that not to break up the world outlook borrowed from imaginary world of these romances. Thus medieval knights and authors of romances not only safely escaped to the forest, hostile and homeless environment which ‘tries’ to separate them from their roots but they preserve their identity and even more improve those values which are dictated by chivalric code of nobility.

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Пространственная дихотомия в средневековом рыцарском романе
Аннотация

Ключевые слова: средневековый роман, пространство, дихотомия, город, замок, двор, лес, рыцарь.

Главная пространственная дихотомия средневекового рыцарского романа – **город(замок)/лес** – выражает ту художественно-структурную оппозицию, которая существует между цивилизацией **двора (замка)** и дикой природой (пространством за замком). Описание обоих пространственных сегментов (пейзаж - дворец, замок) обусловлено как внутренней логикой нарратива, так и долгой литературной традицией. Дефамиляризация хорошо знакомой территории приводит к тому, для чего собственно и пишется этот роман: открытию т.н. царства приключений, в котором должен завершиться процесс осмысления моральных ценностей, являющихся основой основ формирования идеальной личности.

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(City/ forest)
Summary

Keywords: medieval, romance, space, dichotomy, city, castle, court, forest, knight.

The principle spatial dichotomy of the medieval chivalry romance – **city (court)/forest** – reveals an artistic and structural opposition between courtly civilization (**city/castle**) and wild nature - forest (the world outside the court/castle). The descriptive and geographical details are determined both by the internal logic of narrative itself, and long literary tradition of representation of nature. The defamiliarization of a well-charted territory produces just what romance calls for: a realm of adventure in the depth of which the process of penetration of those moral values which is the basis in the formation of ideal person should be finished.