MEMORY AS THE AGENT OF EARTHLY AND SPIRITUAL RESTORATION IN *ROBERT OF CISYLE*

ROBERT OF CISYLE *'DE DÜNYEVİ VE MANEVİ YENİLENME ARACI OLARAK BELLEK*

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Abstract
The fourteenth century anonymous English romance Robert of Cisyle describes the miraculous interference of the divine power to chastise a king, his subsequent submission to sufferings and withstanding them owing to his piety. Robert, the proud King of Cisyle, is indeed a self-victimizer as he puts his trust in the earthly powers until he is punished by God and realizes their triviality. As a passive romance hero, instead of pursuing his goals determinedly, Robert endures the ordeals in order to regain his rightful place in the society after he is estranged from it. By experiencing a descent in his status from a proud king to a king's fool, he is not recognized even by his family members, he is mocked and degraded by his people. At the end of the painful experiences, he realizes his being vulnerable and limited, although he is noble and wealthy. An angel replaces Robert to punish his pride and enable him to achieve self-awareness to be become a better king. His being consistently reminded that his status is that of a fool makes him remember what has corrupted him and made him sinful. Accordingly, in this article it is intended to discuss the role of memory in the romance that provides the key to restoration both in secular and religious sense, as epitomized in the case of Robert who not only achieves God's forgiveness but also regains his royal status.

Öz
On dördüncü yüzyıl anonim İngiliz romansı Robert of Cisyle günahından arınması için mucizevi bir şekilde ilahi gücün müdahale etmesi sonrasında bir kralın boyun eğdiği çilelere takvası sayesinde dayanmasını anlatmaktadır. Sicilya'nın gururlu kralı Robert, aslında Tanrı tarafından cezalandırılana ve onların önemsizliğini anlayana kadar dünyevi güçlere güvendiğinden kendi kendisinin kurbanıdır. Hedeflerinin peşinden kararlı bir şekilde gitmektense, Robert, pasif bir romans kahramanı olarak, toplumdan uzaklaştırıldıktan sonra toplumda hak ettiği yeri yeniden kazanmak için çilelere göğüs gerer. Gururlu bir kraldan kralın soytarısı statüsüne düşerek aile üyeleri tarafından bile tanınmaz, halkı tarafından alay edilir ve aşağılanır. Acı deneyimlerinin sonunda, soylu ve zengin olmasına rağmen, savunmasız ve sınırlandırılmış olduğunu fark eder. Kibrini cezalandırmak ve onun daha iyi bir kral olabilmesi için öz-farkındalığa ulaşmasını sağlamak için Robert'ın yerine bir melek geçer. Sürekli olarak bir soytarı statüsünde olduğunun hatırlatılması, onu neyin yozlaştırdığını ve günahkâr yaptığını hatırlamasına neden olur. Bu bağlamda, bu makalede yalnızca Tanrı tarafından affedilmekle kalmayıp aynı zamanda soylu statüsünü de yeniden kazanan Robert örneği üzerinden hem dünyevi hem de manevi anlamda yenilenmenin anahtarı olan belleğin romanstaki rolünün tartışılması amaçlanmaktadır.

Introduction

The definition of Middle English romance is contentious due to the variability of its characters, incidents, representations, languages, structure, and audience. This brings an ongoing criticism of not only the definition but also taxonomy of romances. Therefore, in order to comprehend the generic associations of *Robert of*

Cisyle,[1] it is crucial to introduce the debate on the definitions and classifications of Middle English romance briefly. According to Yin Liu, the difficulty to define romance derives from various reasons and one of them is the fact that it is uncertain whether the word romance refers to the language of the poem's source or to its genre (2006, pp. 335-336). It is restrictive and problematic to say that romance is the name given to a particular genre that emerged in twelfth-century France and spread in Europe, because apart from its chivalric associations, there is "much broader notion of romance, one that transcends the specificities of genre" which "expands romance from a particular genre into a more general type of literary production" (Fuchs, 2004, pp. 4-5). In Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner's words, "romance is the shape-shifter par excellence among medieval genres, a protean form that refuses to settle into neat boundaries" (2004, p. 13).

Romance scholars mostly identify and interpret the subject matters and forms of romances, and they tend to define romance in relation to other genres like ancient Greek epic or French *chanson de geste*[2]; didactic and religious works, chronicles, folk tales[3] etc., which complicates the boundaries of these genres and makes it difficult to define romance exactly. It is also problematic to define romance by considering its audience since the romance audience diversified throughout the Middle Ages. Despite the fact that the noble males and females were the earlier audience of romances since romances tell stories related to their ideals and anxieties, from the mid-thirteenth century onwards, gradually the romance audience shifted to the gentry and the bourgeoise in England because cultural production moved from courts to bourgeoise households and urban centres after the Hundred Years War and the Black Death (Krueger, 2004, pp. 3-5). This variety of identification and interpretation of romance brings forth the multiplicity of its classification according to several provenances. Romances are classified in accordance with their being translations or adaptations, audience, authorship,

[1] The romance is titled *Robert of Sicily*, *Roberd of Cisyle*, or *Roberd of Cysylle* in some romance collections.

[2] For a comprehensive survey on this issue, see Finlayson, J. (1980). Definitions of Middle English Romance. *The Chaucer Review*, 15 (1), 43-62; Vinaver, E. (1971). *The Rise of Romance*. Oxford: Clarendon Press; Crane, S. (1986). *Insular Romance: Politics, Faith, and Culture in Anglo-Norman and Middle English Literature*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

[3] See Frye, N. (1976). *The Secular Scripture: A Study of the Structure of Romance*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press; Finlayson, J. (1980). Definitions of Middle English Romance. *The Chaucer Review*, 15 (1), 43-62; Mehl, D. (1968). *The Middle English Romances of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries*. London: Routledge; Griffin, N. E. (1923). The Definition of Romance. *PMLA*, 38 (1), 50-70.

textual communities, being in prose or verse, associations with other genres, matters, meters, rhyme-schemes, length, incidents, characters, date, and area of composition.[4]

These classifications offer a better understanding and identification of romance and expose its compositional features, as well as revealing their structural and thematic similarities and differences. Romance taxonomies differ in different collections prepared by several editors. For instance, while Jehan Bodel, William J. R. Barron, and William H. Schofield classify romances according to their matters,[5] Anna H. Billings and John E. Wells use the term 'legend' instead of 'matter'.[6] Derek Pearsall prefers a formal and stylistic analysis of romances,[7] while John Finlayson believes in the uselessness of the classification by matters.[8] George Kane offers to evaluate romances according to their being 'good' or 'bad' by focusing on their artistic constructions,[9] yet Albert C. Baugh prefers to make use of their length to classify romances.[10] Another scholar taking length of a romance into consideration in grouping is Dieter Mehl who groups romances under titles of 'the shorter romances' and 'the longer romances' in addition to 'homiletic romances' and 'novels in verse'.[11] Derek Pearsall groups romances alternatively according to their date,[12] though Edith Rickert, Charles S. Baldwin, Laura H. Loomis, John Stevens, Lee C. Ramsey, Donald B. Sands, Noël J. Menuge, Felicity Riddy, Helen Cooper attempt to

[4] For a comprehensive study on the romance taxonomies see Introduction part of my PhD thesis: Taşdelen, P. (2012). *Romancing the Ordeal: Representations of Pain and Suffering in Middle English Metrical Romances* [Unpublished PhD thesis]. University of Hull. Also, see Loomis, L. H. (1924). *Medieval Romance in England: A Study of the Sources and Analogues of the Non-Cyclic Metrical Romances*. New York: Oxford University Press.

[5] See Schofield, W. H. (1906). *English Literature from the Norman Conquest to Chaucer*. London: Macmillan; Barron, W. R. J. (1987). *English Medieval Romance*. Harlow: Longman.

[6] See Billings, A. H. (1901). *A Guide to the Middle English Metrical Romances Dealing with English and Germanic Legends, and with the Cycles of Charlemagne and of Arthur*. New York: Holt; Wells, J. E. (1916). *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English, 1050-1400*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

[7] See Pearsall, D. (1988). The Development of Middle English Romance. In D. Brewer (Ed.). *Studies in Medieval English Romances: Some New Approaches* (pp. 11-35). Cambridge: D. S. Brewer.

[8] See Finlayson, J. (1980). Definitions of Middle English Romance. *The Chaucer Review*, 15 (1), 43-62.

[9] See Kane G. (1970). *Middle English Literature: A Critical Study of the Romances, the Religious Lyrics, 'Piers Plowman'*. New York: Barnes and Noble.

[10] See Baugh, A. C. (1959). Improvisation in the Middle English Romance. *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 103 (3), 418-454.

[11] See Mehl, D. (1968). *The Middle English Romances of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries*. London: Routledge.

[12] See Pearsall, D. (1988). The Development of Middle English Romance. In D. Brewer (Ed.). *Studies in Medieval English Romances: Some New Approaches* (pp. 11-35). Cambridge: D. S. Brewer.

bring together romances under multiple themes and motifs.[13] Susan Crane defines the romances written under the influence of the Anglo-Norman dialect as 'insular romances'[14], different from Erik Kooper who groups 'sentimental and humorous romances'.[15] In addition to these, Nicola McDonald, Derek Brewer, Raluca L. Radulescu and Cory J. Rushton discuss the features of 'popular romances'.[16] In Dieter Mehl's words, "we have in Middle English hardly any purely 'secular' manuscripts or collections of romances to compare with those of France and Germany. Nearly all romances have survived in large collections containing for the most part religious and didactic literature" (1968, p. 7). Apart from this, in their classifications, Roger Dalrymple, Dieter Mehl, Andrea Hopkins, and John Finlayson stress the strong religious affinities of several romances.[17]

William H. Schofield classifies *Robert of Cisyle* under title of 'Other Romances' including Byzantine and Early French, Reminiscent, Legendary and Historical, 'The Nine Worthies' (1906, p. 314) while John E. Wells puts *Robert of Cisyle* in the group of 'Legendary Romances of Didactic Intent' (1916, p. 162). Additionally, Dieter Mehl stresses the affinity of shorter romances with religious literature, particularly with

[13] See Rickert, E. (1908). *Early English Romances in Verse*. London: Chatto and Windus; Baldwin, C. S. (1914). *An Introduction to Medieval English Literature*. London: Longmans; Loomis, L. H. (1963). *Medieval Romance in England: A Study of the Sources and Analogues of the Non-Cyclic Metrical Romances*. New York: Burt Franklin; Stevens, J. (1973). *Medieval Romance: Themes and Approaches*. London: Hutchinson; Ramsey, L. C. (1983). *Chivalric Romances: Popular Literature in Medieval England*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press; Sands, D. B. (Ed.). (1986). *Middle English Verse Romances*. Exeter: Exeter University Press; Menuge, N. J. (1999). The Wardship Romance: A New Methodology. In R. Field (Ed.). *Tradition and Transformation in Medieval Romance* (pp. 29-43). Cambridge: D. S. Brewer; Riddy, F. (2000). Middle English Romance: Family, Marriage, Intimacy. In R. L. Krueger (Ed.). *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance* (pp. 235-252). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Cooper, H. (2004). *The English Romance in Time: Transforming Motifs from Geoffrey of Monmouth to the Death of Shakespeare*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[14] See Crane, S. (1986). *Insular Romance: Politics, Faith, and Culture in Anglo-Norman and Middle English Literature*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

[15] See Kooper, E. (Ed.). (2006). *Sentimental and Humorous Romances*. Kalamazoo, Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications.

[16] See McDonald, N. (2004). A Polemical Introduction. In N. McDonald (Ed.). *Pulp Fictions of Medieval England: Essays in Popular Romance* (pp. 1-21). Manchester: Manchester University Press; Brewer, D. (2004). The Popular English Metrical Romances. In C. J. Saunders (Ed.). *A Companion to Romance: From Classical to Contemporary* (pp. 45-64). Oxford: Blackwell; Radulescu, R. L., and Rushton C. J. (2009). Introduction. In R. L. Radulescu and C. J. Rushton (Ed.s.). *A Companion to Medieval Popular Romance* (1-8). Cambridge: D. S. Brewer.

[17] See Dalrymple, R. (2000). *Language and Piety in Middle English Romance*. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer; Mehl, D. (1968). *The Middle English Romances of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries*. London: Routledge; Hopkins, A. (1990). *The Sinful Knights: A Study of Middle English Penitential Romance*. Oxford: Clarendon Press; Finlayson, J. (1980). Definitions of Middle English Romance. *The Chaucer Review*, 15 (1), 43-62.

saints' legends, due to the fact that moral and didactic tones are similar in romances and legends. He states that there is another group of romances which is close to legends, and he describes the romances in this group as homiletic romances. To describe this group, Dieter Mehl claims that "[t]heir story-material does not usually come from one of the traditional cycles, but often from legends. Although the homiletic romances do not portray any canonized Saints, they are sometimes related to such Saints […] In all the homiletic poems, the plot is completely subordinated to the moral and religious theme" (1968, p. 85). Dieter Mehl further explains that "[t]wo story-patterns are particularly typical of the homiletic romances. Several of them describe the history of men in whose lives God intervenes very directly, usually by a miracle, in order to chastize them and eventually to save them, as in *Robert of Sicily*" (1968, p. 85). By emphasizing this romance's being a moral and didactic tale without an intrigue or a knightly adventure, Dieter Mehl points out that "Robert's grief and repentance occupy much space and are particularly important for the homiletic intention of the poem" (1968, p. 88). Moreover, Laura Hibbard Loomis classifies *Robert of Cisyle* under title of 'Romances of Trial and Faith' by indicating that "[t]he Middle English version of *Robert of Cisyle* may be considered either a romance or an ecclesiastical legend" (1963, p. 58). Ad Putter also mentions "the strong didactic or penitential impulse" in *Robert of Cisyle* (2013, p. 1).

As it is pointed out by several romance scholars, *Robert of Cisyle* has a strong pious tone because of its hero who struggles to win back his rightful social position through the recognition of his sinfulness and his subsequent renewal. The romance's didacticism stems from the sinful hero's redemption by means of his withstanding his ordeal, and his subsequent earthly and spiritual restoration through his recognition of his sin. The romance describes the eponymous hero's recognition of his hubris and his subsequent transformation from a proud king into a humble person at the end of his extraordinary divine punishment. The interest in the romance shifts from Robert's kingship to his ordeal by emphasizing the significance of his chastisement by the divine intervention. Robert's recognition, particularly of his own excessive pride, has an edifying purpose, because Robert as a man of excessive self-esteem comprehends the futility of his earthly authority as a consequence of his trial. Meanwhile, his acknowledgment of his folly and his successive restoration become possible only when he remembers his former arrogant self; therefore, in Robert's case, his memory stands crucial for his earthly and spiritual restoration.

Memory as the Agent of Self-Realization

As Jamie McKinstry expresses, "[m]emory is essential for a character to understand his or her situation in a tale and for an audience to be able to follow their progress and comprehend a romance's structural or moral unity" (2015, p. 3). Within this perspective, Robert's memory is essential for the romance audience to recognize their own experiences. Robert's experience consists of his being disrupted, and then through difficulties his re-establishing himself after repentance for his sins of pride and impiety. Until this happens, Robert ignores his pride and unpiety, and he refrains from being humble and devout. As Andrea Hopkins explains, the heroes of penitential romances are cut from whatever they know and whoever they love suddenly, and they experience a period of suffering and seeking in loneliness (1990, p. 20). Likewise, Robert embarks on such a period of seeking his self, though unwillingly. Prior to this, Robert is the king of Sicily, brother of Pope Urban, and brother of Valemounde, the Emperor of Germany. He is so proud that "*He thoughte more in worldes honour,/Than in Crist, ur saveour."* (Foster, 2007, p. 81, 33-34). Robert does not know what the Magnificat[18] is because of his ignorance of the Christian faith, and when he hears it, he does not recognize it:

> In "Magnificat" he herde a vers,
> He made a clerk hit him rehers
> In langage of his owne tonge,
> In Latyn he nuste, that heo songe.
> The vers was this, I telle the:
> Deposuit potentes de sede,
> Et exaltavit humiles.
> This was the vers, withouten les.
> The clerk seide anone riht;
> "Sire, such is Godes miht,
> That he may make heyghe lowe
> And lowe heighe in luytel throwe (Foster, 2007, p. 81-82, 35-46).[19]

[18] Magnificat is "**1.a** The Latin version of the song of the Virgin Mary, Luke i. 46-55, 'My soul doth magnify the Lord.' **b** This canticle or a musical setting of it, esp. as part of the office of Vespers, or Evensong. **2.** Hence, a song or rhapsody of praise". See Neilson, W. A., Knott, T. A., Carhart P. W., (Ed.s). (1950). Magnificat. In *Webster's New International Dictionary of the English Language* (2nd ed., p. 1481). G&C. Merriam Company.

[19] The romance exists in ten manuscripts. Bodleian 3938, English Poetry A.1 (Vernon), at the Bodleian Library, Oxford University is preferred in Foster's edition.

The lines from the Magnificat explained to Robert by the clerk foreshadow Robert's own falling low and rising up afterwards. Robert's change of status does not happen instantaneously as he is to recall his lack of faith and humility so that he can restore himself. Until this happens, Robert merely has memories of the days when he had self-confidence and authority. He believes to be peerless and invincible in the world, and, conceitedly, he claims to be invulnerable:

> What mon hath such pouwer,
> Me to bringe lowe in daunger?
> I am flour of chivalrye,
> Myn enemys I may distruye;
> No mon lyveth in no londe,
> That me may withstonde (Foster, 2007, p. 82, 51-56).

Robert assumes that he would immortalize his name and fame as a peerless knight and king, and in people's memory he would never fade. He is so blinded with his desire for being admirable and honorable that he disregards the necessity of being a devout Christian. He celebrates his privileged social position as the king of Sicily; yet, he is far away from the essence of the Christian faith. He asks what the Magnificat means, and ignores a clerk's warning that God may turn someone mighty to someone needy and low. As a consequence of his high self-esteem and his lack of modesty, and after he sleeps throughout the church service, his appearance is taken on by an angel. Since the angel replaces him, in his court, Robert is recognized neither by the porters of the court nor by the sexton of the church, which angers him a lot:

> The porter seide: "Ho clepeth so?"
> He onswerde anon tho:
> "Thou schalt witen, ar I go:
> Thi kyng I am; thou schalt knowe.
> In prison thou schalt ligge lowe
> And ben anhonged and todrawe
> As a traytur bi the lawe.
> Thou schalt wel witen, I am kyng,
> Open the gates, gadelyng!" (Foster, 2007, p. 83, 96-104).

Robert insists on the fact that he is the king, and does not understand the reason for his being unrecognized by the porters of his court. He is perplexed as it seems that he is out of his porters' memory even if his own memory disobeys to his unrecognition. Hence, once he is taken to the court and stands in front of the angel

which has replaced him, he is asked by the angel who he is, and he insistently says that he is the king:

> What art thou?" seide the angel.
> Qwath Robert: "Thou shalt wite wel,
> That I am kyng and kyng wol be,
> With wronge thou hast my dignité.
> The Pope of Roome is my brother
> And the emperour myn other;
> Heo wol me wreke, for soth to telle,
> I wot, heo nulle not longe dwelle."
> "Thow art my fol," seide the angel,
> "Thou schal be schoren everichdel,
> Lych a fool, a fool to be,
> Wher is now thi dignité?
> Thi counseyler schal ben an ape,
> And o clothyng you worth ischape (Foster, 2007, p. 84, 145-158).

Robert's own memory confirms that he is the king, the Pope and the Emperor are his brothers. However, the angel's response contradicts not only his social position but also his memory. The angel declares that Robert, contrary to his own claim, is his fool. Moreover, the angel questions Robert's dignity as a reminiscence of his hubris. Robert is humiliated as an ape is equated to him in social position, and he is asked to eat on the ground. This violates his memory as Robert is accustomed to be treated as the king, and be regarded by his people. Yet, now, he has turned into a scorned figure; he has been robbed of all his privileges, authority, and fame. When he remembers his prosperous life, his memories hurt him more due to the fact that he has lost his privileges, and furthermore, his retrieval is uncertain. Therefore, more than his fall from grace, it is his memory which torments him more with recurrence of his being deprived of whatever he had before. Although Robert is dispossessed of his noble status and wealth, during the angel's three years of reign, anything wrong, false, guile, and treacherous disappear in Sicily. There is plenty of joy, love and charity instead of strife between the couples and brothers. These years of peace and prosperity in the memories of his people are in contrast to these years of suffering and shame in Robert's memory. During these years, Robert is repetitively reminded by the angel of his having lost his dignity:

> Houndes, how so hit bifalle,
> Schulen eten with the in halle;
> Thou schalt eten on the ground;

Thin assayour schal ben an hound,
To assaye thi mete bifore the;
Wher is now thi dignité?" (Foster, 2007, p. 84, 163-168).

However, Robert insistently claims to be the king by rejecting his fall from dignity, although the angel constantly reminds Robert of his being his fool. Meanwhile, Robert's memories of his deprived and scorned life constitute a collection of personal experiences devouring what is left of his pride. Mixed up in his mind, Robert feels helpless yet not totally forsaken. He never forgets the fact that he is the king, and he still expects that he will be recognized by someone. He lives among the dogs for three years and is laughed at by people; yet, all these hardships that befall on him such as his low status, change of appearance, coming near to death because of hunger and thirst contribute to his maturation process and getting over himself.

The romance poet describes Robert as a mournful figure "*That he scholde for his pryde / Such hap among his men betyde!*" (Foster, 2007, p. 85, 195-196), hence he explains that his misfortune is an inevitable result of his pride. The sudden reversal of Robert's fortune lacks a direct engagement with Robert's social position only; but rather, it stems from his individual disintegration. Robert's lack of piety, his hubris, and self-esteem are the pivotal reasons for his reversal of fortune. In Edward E. Foster's words, in the fall of Robert, there is didactic caution to everybody because "we can observe the punishment of arrogance and the reward for humility which links the hero to 'people like us' " (1997, p. 403). The audience is reminded of the fact that human beings are vulnerable to sin and liable to challenge God's power. In Robert's case the fool's disguise is functional, since, as Velma B. Richmond points out, it is a metaphor for the man separated from worldly values (1975, p. 73). This separation is necessary and crucial for Robert's refreshing his memory, and hence, concentrating on the reasons for his ordeal which is essential for his earthly and spiritual restoration. For this, he has to become aware of his folly at first by retrospection of who he was before and questioning of who he is now. Yet, Robert fails to recollect for a while, and instead, he insists on persuading the people that he is the king of Sicily. Even when he accompanies the angel in Rome when the angel, Urban and Valemounde meet, he vainly expects that his brothers would know him:

Whon his bretheren nolde him knowe:
"Allas," quath he, "nou am I lowe."
For he hopede, bi eny thing,

His bretheren wolde ha mad him kyng;
And whon his hope was al ago,
He seide “allas” and “weilawo.”
He seide “allas” that he was bore,
For he was a mon forlore;
He seide “allas” that he was mad,
For of his lyf he was al sad.
“Allas, allas,” was al his song:
His heer he tar, his hondes wrong,
And evere he seide, “Allas, Allas.” (Foster, 2007, p. 87, 295-307).

His being unrecognized by his brothers is a turning point for his realization of his current low status. He curses the day he was born, laments for being forlorn, tears his hair, and wrings his hands in woe. These expressions of deep grief and sadness are the indicators of Robert’s big disappointment, and also hint at his self-reproach. Nebuchadnezzar’s ordeal becomes a reminiscence of Robert’s own trial as both of them are deflated kings.[20] Robert recollects Nebuchadnezzar who experienced a downfall similar to his one, and claims that his situation is worse compared to that of Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar was a peerless king in terms of nobility and brevity; yet, once his general Sir Holofernes who deeply regarded him as God died, Nebuchadnezzar grieved deeply, and lived on grass and roots in in the desert for fifteen years:

Nabugodonosor lyvede in desert;
Dorst he noughwher ben apert;
Fyftene yer he livede thare
With rootes, gras, and evel fare.
And al of mos his clothing was:
Al com that bi Godes gras:
He criyede merci with delful chere,
God him restored, as he was ere.
“Nou am I in such caas,
And wel worse then he was (Foster, 2007, p. 88, 324-334).

Similar to Robert, Nebuchadnezzar was an impoverished king robbed of his privileges, and he was subjected to a chastised life until he was forgiven by God. However, since he is in deep despair and he struggles to reassert himself as the king, Robert recalls Nebuchadnezzar’s downfall only, without remembering that

[20] For the story of King Nebuchadnezzar see 2 Kings 24, 25; 2 Chronicles 36; Jeremiah 21-52; and Daniel 1-4.

Nebuchadnezzar achieved God's salvation after his ordeal. This stems from the fact that he concentrates only on his painful experience. In psychology, "attention is a gate to our working memory: only the information upon which we focus our attention can access the working memory" (Stigchel, 2020, p. 4); hence, Robert's memory selects only the familiar misfortunes triggering his sorrow, because he repetitively fails when he attempts to remind himself to everyone.

Memory as the Agent of Self-Restoration

In fact, Robert and Nebuchadnezzar undergo similar misfortunes of deprivation and suffering until they regain their position as a result of their being tested by God because of their indulgence into greed by favoring earthly honour and power over God's mightiness. In Robert's case, after his being estranged from his privileges, the restoration is preceded by his repentance; and he is in an effort to re-establish his identity through his insistence on being the king, without any effective struggle to prove this. Although Robert is a self-victimizer due to his hubris and worldliness, he is not his own saviour until he restores his noble status and wealth on account of his self-awareness of his folly. As Andrea Hopkins rightfully expresses, "he [Robert] now knows he is a fool, and worse than a fool, is necessary to bring about the completion of the action and the restoration of Roberd to his former position" (1990, p. 193). Nebuchadnezzar's story becomes a reminiscence of Robert's own pride; and consequent to his remembering Nebuchadnezzar's ordeal, he comes to the self-realization of his being God's fool. This happens just after he recalls his being honoured as the conqueror of every land of Christendom, people's speaking well of him, and describing him as a matchless king. He confesses that "*For that name I [he] hedde pride,*" (Foster, 2007, p. 88, 341), and consequently, "*Now am I [is he] wel lowe ipult, / And that is right that I [he] so be.*" (Foster, 2007, p. 88, 346-347). In other words, he admits that he has already deserved being brought down by God. He feels the heavy burden of his folly once he remembers his mistakes one by one. He realizes that his heart aches as it is full of pain, and he asks for God's forgiveness. He remembers his holding the holy writings in contempt, and he regrets that he has offended God:

> Lord, on Thi fool Thou have pité.
> Lord, I have igult The sore.
> Merci, Lord, I nul no more;
> Evere Thi fol, Lord, wol I be.
> Lord, on Thi fol Thou have pité (Foster, 2007, p. 88, 360-364).

As a consequence of his self-confession, Robert keeps silent, and only thanks God for his grace until the angel (disguised as the king), the Emperor and the Pope are about to leave after five weeks. This duration of silence and Robert's heartfelt submission to God's mercy is the first time of his acceptance of his deserved ordeal. He is psychologically tortured by losing his status as the king and being unrecognized by his people, including his brothers. Yet, such experiences do not erase his memories, but rather, they trigger him to be a repentant by constantly becoming the reminders of his identity and prosperous past. Therefore, before the brothers' departure, he affirms his being a fool when the angel asks Robert what he is:

> "Fool, art thow kyng?"
> "Nay, sire," quath he, "withoute lesyng."
> "What artou?""seide the angel.
> "Sire, a fol, that wot I wel,
> And more then fol, yif hit may be;
> Kep I non other dignité." (Foster, 2007, p. 89, 387-392).

Robert's self-realization becomes a means of his restoration to his noble position and becoming a humble person cleansed of his pride. Upon Robert's declaration of himself as a 'fool', the angel says that God has sent him to teach humility to Robert as he has been brought down because of his misdeed. Following his announcement of God's being merciful to Robert and restoring Robert's appearance, the angel disappears by uttering his last words of "I am an angel, thou art kyng!" (Foster, 2007, p. 90, 414). In a way, Robert's "embodiment of the ideal of knighthood is flawed by his sin, and is improved by his achieving a restoration of his relationship with God, which is mirrored by his own restoration of fortune" (Hopkins, 1990, p. 195). From then on, Robert is restored to his prosperous life, and he regains his noble status that has been left in his memories; nevertheless, his celebration of his strength and position does not comply with his memories. Robert is no more a proud man of his so-called glorious past; but rather, he is weak, humble, and obedient to divine order. The time he spent in the fool's body has helped him think over his memories of his past by which he used to boast about himself. His restoration does not re-establish his memorable past; however, it turns him into a man who loves God and obeys His teachings. His memories do not erase the pain inside his heart; furthermore, all of his memories keep his past near, and hence, make him try to find a rightful and pious way of life. He is convinced that it is worth it all to seek a life build on self-awareness. Instead of holding his

memories before his restoration dear to him, he regards them as the reminders of his sinfulness and his sequential comeuppance. Robert eventually discerns his mistaken confidence in temporal power and the infinite power of God. He becomes aware of his self-deception by seeing himself superior to God and hence being caught in sin. This devours what has been left of his pride, and makes him regret that he has been deprived of innocence earlier.

Even if Robert longs for regaining his status while he is in the fool's body, he gives in to God's command until God has mercy on him after his fall. Meanwhile, he is not oblivious to the fact that with time all pain would not fade and through his memory his past would not fade. So, even if no one else knows his being debased to a fool, he still feels, and will forever recall this shame of being humiliated and his inability to resist it. Robert has to learn to live with the memory of his experience which drove him from his wealth and status. Before this experience, as a king, he was proud of his noble status and wealth; yet, now, he acknowledges how futile it is to trust them. Robert's epiphany happens just before the angel's revelation of God's plan to chastise him, and previous to this Robert is unaware of the fact that he is forgiven by God. Henceforth, Robert comes face-to-face with his former impiety and sinfulness. Due to the fact that "memories of wrongdoing and the wrongdoer commonly do linger after the wrongdoer has been forgiven" (Blustein, 2014, p. 71), Robert's writing his own experience before his death is really worth it as a reminiscence of his former fallen self and his renewed self. Once the angel heralds that his death is due, he wants Robert to write how he was tested:

> The angel gaf him in warnyng
> Of the tyme of his diying.
> Whon tyme com to dyye son,
> He let write hit riht anon,
> Hou God myd His muchel miht
> Made him lowe, as hit was riht.
> This storie he sende everidel
> To his bretheren, under his seel.
> And the tyme, whon he schulde dye
> That tyme he diyede as he gon seye.
> Al this is writen withouten lyye,
> At Roome to ben in memorie
> At Seint Petres chirche, I knowe.
> And thus is Godes miht isowe,
> That heighe beoth lowe, theigh hit ben ille,

And lowe heighe, at Godes wille (Foster, 2007, p. 90, 425-440).

Robert's story is expected to be known by his brothers, in addition to its being exemplary for everyone. Once they are written, Robert's memories that lead to his earthly and spiritual restoration become the indicators of God's mightiness. On the other hand, since he cannot forget them, their shame recurs in Robert's mind, and his shame-driven memories cause his self-judgement. As Paul Ricoeur explains, memory is faithful to the past; however, "quilt appeals as an additional component with respect to recognition of images of the past" (2006, p. 285). As for Robert's situation, Robert keeps these memories to himself until the angel bids him to write them. This is either because he wants to torment himself psychological by recurring them in his mind, or he is ashamed of his fallacy of his previous ignorant and impious self. Therefore, no matter whether he punishes himself or feels embarrassed, his personal judgement is for persuading himself that he was sinful and he deserved a punishment.

Conclusion

Robert of Cisyle presents an impoverished king due to his misconduct and heresy of disregarding God's supreme authority. Robert, the king of Sicily's downfall and rising up again in his status in addition to his realization of his ignorance of God is followed by his recognition of his mistake. His memories of his previous arrogant and impious self are combined with those of his later confessor and restored self, and these recollections become precedent for promoting the necessity of memories for self-restoration. Robert, after restoring his status and wealth, recognizes the dichotomy between his ignorant self and his enlightened self, the former putting his trust in the earthly riches and power, the latter realizing their futility. By making him grasp the significance of humility and piety, his memories left from his ordeal remind Robert, and the romance audience, of his limitations and vulnerability. Hence, the memories of the former Robert and the later Robert contribute collectively to heighten and appreciate both his repentance and restoration. Indeed, Robert becomes a peerless king in the world only after his restoration, though he used to believe to be when he was a man of excessive pride. He is remorse-ridden when he discovers that he has failed because of himself; in other words, his being a self-victimizer. Even if his memories are fresh and alive, his being unrecognized by his people and even by his brothers makes him feel alienated and deserted in the crowds. His realization of his weakness, ironically, empowers him due to the fact that it regenerates him. Offended when he is unrecognized, and hence, by devoting

his attention to his former prosperous days often, Robert mostly longs for these days; however, once he realizes how conceited he was then, they fall from his favour. Considering his former self and whom he has become, Robert has a unified recollection of good and bad memories of his both statuses as the king and as the king's fool. By combining the memories of these worlds apart, with the medieval tendency to draw a moral lesson, the romance poet presents that Robert achieves a full complement of himself as an ideal king and an imperfect, vulnerable human being cleansed of his hubris, and consequently he is restored as a rightful king and a pious Christian.

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Summary

As a Middle English romance classified in the religious romance corpus, *Robert of Cisyle* consists of the characteristics of both medieval romance tradition and didactic literature since it combines the secular and religious contents harmoniously. With its exemplary story of a conceited king who is chastised after withstanding all suffering and humiliation, the romance presents Robert as an irreverent and impious man who deserves a divine punishment. This punishment is required for his realization of his sinfulness, and more importantly, crucial for his restoration of his noble status and spiritual awakening. By enduring humiliation as the king's fool after he is replaced by an angel, Robert is dispossessed of his throne and dignity until his turning from the world to God. Within this process of humiliation and deprivation, Robert longs for his prosperous days when he was recognized and regarded by everyone; however, he has to remain low to be exalted again.

Robert's memories of his days of prosperity and power help him recognize the fact that his pride and impiety are the reasons for his well-deserved victimization. Despite his attempts to remind himself to his people and brothers, he fails, and then he consents to his being a self-victimizer due to his hubris and ignorance of God. He remembers another impoverished king's, Nebuchadnezzar's submission to his ordeal, and he likens himself to the unfortunate king who has lost his everything. Indeed, his recollection of his past days of prosperity and power helps him realize his mistake of having excessive pride in himself. Therefore, Robert's memory functions as a tool for his recognition of his arrogant and sinful self, and it initiates his earthly and spiritual restoration.

Once Robert remembers his past, he recognizes the fact that he has not sought himself before, and hence, he has not recalled his lack of faith and modesty. His dependence on the earthly power and claim of invincibility are, indeed, hinderances to his self-apprehension. His previous assumption was the celebration of his name as a peerless king by his people; yet, after being taken on by the angel, Robert's memory is confused as he remembers himself yet he is unrecognized by the others. Although he still insists on being the king and strives for being recognized as the king, he is condemned to eat with the dogs, supervised by an ape, and scorned as the king's fool. Once he becomes hopeless to regain his status and accepts that he has fallen from grace, he understands his mistake

after his comprehension of his past self and his present self. This realization which comes after his retrospection of his previous arrogant and ignorant self helps him get rid of his disappointment and causes his self-reproach. Robert notices the futility of the worldly privileges and the necessity of piety; hence, he gives up reasserting himself as the king. He consents to his downfall and repents for his favouring the earthly power and status previously. In order to get rid of the emotional burden on him, Robert confesses his sins and asks for God's forgiveness. After the angel's restoring Robert to his appearance and announcing him as the king, Robert is no longer the proud and impious king. From then on, Robert is a repentant, mature, pious, humble man cleansed of his burdens. His memories of his past do not fade away, and furthermore, they will insistently remind him of his failed-self. In addition to this, Robert's memories as a fool will be constant reminders of his restored-self.

At the very end of the romance, the angel bids Robert to write what he has experienced. Even if they are ridden with shameful experiences for a king, they are exemplary and noteworthy to promote the virtues of humility and piety. Hence, *Robert of Cisyle*, through its eponymous hero edifies the medieval audience to better themselves by comprehending the essence of the Christian virtues, and the possibility of worldly and spiritual restoration after a heartfelt repentance. Robert's memories of his unrepentant and repentant selves together conduce to not only his earthly and spiritual restoration but also contribute to the idea that there is always the possibility of redemption for the corrupt Christians.