

# Question of Genre: An Approach to Recognitions of Clement as a Work of Romance

## Tür Sorgulaması: Recognitions of Clement Adlı Eserin Bir Romans Eseri Olarak Yaklaşım

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### Öz

En eski Hristiyan metinlerden biri olarak *Recognitions of Clement*, Batı edebiyatı içerisinde oldukça önemli bir yere sahiptir. Kesin tarihi ve yazarına ilişkin pek çok soru işareti olan eser, sıklıkla üçüncü veya dördüncü yüzyılda Clement adında biri, büyük olasılıkla Papa I. Clement, tarafından yazılmış olarak kabul edilmektedir. Tür bakımından da eser bazı şüpheler uyandırmıştır. Genellikle bir roman olarak ele alınsa da eser bir romans olarak değerlendirilmek için yeterli unsuru içermektedir. Romans türünün temel öğelerinden biri olarak maddi ve ruhani arayış, *Recognitions* eserinde esas meselelerden biridir. Dahası, romans türünün bir öğesi olarak aşk kavramı, hikâyede merkezi bir rol üstlenmektedir. Bu makale, *Recognitions of Clement* adlı çalışmaya bir romans eseri olarak yeni bir yaklaşım kazandırmayı amaçlamaktadır. Benzer dönemde yazılan bir romans olan *Apollonius of Tyre* ile yakın yönlerini ortaya koyarak, *Recognitions* adlı eseri arayış ve aşk kavramları üzerinden bir romans ürünü olarak ispatlamak hedeflenmiştir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Recognitions of Clement, Apollonius of Tyre, Romans, Arayış, Aşk

### Abstract

One of the earliest Christian texts, *Recognitions of Clement* has a highly important place within the Western literature. A work with many questions as to its certain date and author, it is often accepted to be written in the third or fourth century by one Clement, most probably Pope Clement I. In terms of genre, too, the work has aroused some suspicions. Although it is generally taken as a novel, it comprises enough elements to be handled as a piece of romance. As one of the basic components of romance, physical and spiritual quest is a core issue in *Recognitions*. Furthermore, the concept of love, as an element of romance, has a central role in the story. This article aims to bring a new approach to *Recognitions of Clement* as a work of romance. By displaying its similarities to one of the romances of the time, *Apollonius of Tyre*, it is meant to prove *Recognitions* as a romance through the concepts of quest and love.

**Keywords:** Recognitions of Clement, Apollonius of Tyre, Romance, Quest, Love

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## Giriş

Bringing about a precipitous process of social and cultural transformation as the incipient belief system during the first few centuries in the Common Era, Christianity also led to the emergence of a new mode of writing that is characterized by a keen sense of didacticism. In accordance with this authorial undertaking, the works that are peculiar to this epoch were, particularly, written down in the form of epistles and treatises. However, the homiletic quality of these literary texts coexisted with the tinge of fictionality that is intrinsic to their thematic composition. The presence of such fictional constituents entails further generic classifications for these works while their sermon content raises some complications within this respect. The critical significance of *Recognitions of Clement*, as the prime focus of this article, manifests itself precisely in this context.

*Recognitions of Clement* is a piece of work which is ranked among the earliest Christian texts. Undoubtedly, it is mostly this aspect that has contributed to its importance and popularity within the literary circle. Furthermore, it has been often seen as a text that is important for the understanding of the origin and development of the Apostolic Decree, a quality that adds a religious aspect to its literary importance (Klijn, 1968, p. 305). Nevertheless, the work is a bit problematic in that it is difficult to fit it under a certain origin or period. A professor of the Classics, Benjamin Garstad refers to this facet of *Clementines*: “The *Recognitions* and the *Homilies* are both works of the fourth century, but both are also derived from a common original, now lost, datable to the early third, or possibly the second century” (2009, p. 515).

As stated above, it is quite difficult to come to a certain conclusion about the origin and exact date of the work. Additionally, there is no unanimity regarding its genre. In this parallel there have been different arguments about the issue, but in the general sense, it has been categorized as a novel which dates back to a period ranging from the first to the fourth century. A scholar of the late antiquity, Antonia Tripolitis comments on the work as follows:

The *Pseudo-Clementines* constitute an ancient Christian novel, consisting of a series of writings that recount incidents in the life of Clement of Rome who lived in the late first century C. E. They relate Clement’s conversion to Christianity, his introduction to Peter, his instruction by him and travels with him as a fellow worker on his missions. It ends with the reunion of Clement’s long-lost family members. The novel is preserved in two main versions, the *Recognitions* and the *Homilies*. According to the author, both are fourth-century renditions of a third-century Greek original now lost (1997, p. 891).

When the technical term by which Tripolitis refers to this work is taken into consideration, it is apparent that she regards *Clementines* as a work complying with the criteria of novel as a genre. In spite of such implications as the motifs of quest and revelation, she categorizes the work as a novel and takes Clement as a typical hero of its kind. Nevertheless, a close reading of the text reveals that it is more than a standardised novel as it encompasses enough qualities to be classified as an example romance. This study presents an analysis of *Recognitions of Clement* as a piece of romance, and argues that though Clement’s story seems to be an ordinary story of conversion and a kind of historical novella, it includes the necessary elements to be approached as a typical romance. Accordingly, the paper focuses on some of the prominent concepts of romance like quest and love, and tries to put forward the reasons why the work can be classified as a romance.

### 1. What is Romance?

The generic implications of the term ‘romance,’ along with its compositional attributes, have been the subject of much debate in critical studies. Among the many theoretical elaborations formulated to this end, the most pronounced ones contrast the genre with literary realism or other derivative modes of writing: “A fictional story in verse or prose that relates improbable adventures of idealized characters in some remote or enchanted setting; or, more generally, a tendency in fiction opposite to that of realism” (Baldick, 2008, p. 291). The unlikelihood of the unfolding storyline and the idealization of the protagonist are stressed as integral constituents of romance in such descriptions that are of the most basic kind, thus attenuating even the slightest preconception of factual correctness.

The prevailing conception held by the critics is that despite the many attempts at defining what 'romance' is, including the one quoted above, a single and simple definition of the genre cannot be made. Corinne Saunders, as one of the many critics touching on this major issue, accentuates the impracticability of such academic endeavours: "The pervasive nature of romance, however, also means that it is inherently slippery, and the difficulty of compiling a *Companion to Romance* is that the genre of romance is impossible adequately to define" (2004, pp. 1-2). As is evident, 'romance' is a theoretically elusive concept and the long stretch of history as to the evolution of this generic convention adds further drawbacks to an accurate definition. This is precisely the very reason why Northrop Frye defines romance as one of the "four narrative pregeneric elements of literature" that can be denominated as "mythoi or generic plots" in his seminal work, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (1957, p. 162).

The basic premise that 'romance' defies elucidation as a speculative concept, as is already mentioned above, does not invalidate the legitimacy and utility of the inferences drawn regarding the thematic structure of the literary texts that are considered to be the exemplars of this genre. In this respect, literary critics have identified many thematic similarities appertaining to the works of romance. Saunders lists some of these recurring patterns, particularly in relation to the medieval period:

Despite their variety, however, the romances of the Middle Ages are linked by the motifs that echo through the genre: exile and return, love, quest and adventure, family, name and identity, the opposition between pagan and Christian. Such motifs form the backbone of romance (2004, p. 2).

The motifs highlighted in the excerpt are also acknowledged to be inherent in many works of romance written during other periods. The conceptual framework of this article, consisting in the heroic quest for adventure and knowledge, the recognition that is to be experienced by the protagonist, along with its direct correlation with the questions of identity, and love as the central element in the narrative, is determined on the basis of the aforementioned topoi and also in view of the thematic structure of *Recognitions of Clement*.

## 2. A Comparative Analysis of *Recognitions of Clement* and *Apollonius of Tyre* in terms of 'quest'

*Apollonius of Tyre* is considered to be a classical work of romance with a rich literary history the origins of which date not less than the fifth or sixth century A. D. In general terms, the narrative describes Apollonius's separation from his wife and children, and his eventual reunion with them following several journeys. This framework of the story is highly similar to the experiences and adventures of Clement. However, this is not the only parallelism between the two works, which paves the way for categorizing *Recognitions of Clement* as a romance, too.

The inner impulses of the protagonist, Clement, for a quest and the following physical and spiritual exile can be studied as the first issue in this direction. In almost all the romances, there appear some reasons for the hero to set off a journey; it is sometimes a kind of obligation to be executed for the love of the beloved, and sometimes a reluctant one forced by the authority, which is mostly done in an attempt to claim for the love of the hero's beloved or the power that in fact the hero deserves. In any case, yet, the ultimate purpose of the hero is to go through an inner change in parallel with the geographical one and come out with a new identity. Moreover, the physical quest is stirred by the spiritual one most of the time. So, what may the impulses be for a hero to seek for a spiritual quest? As Robert M. Torrance states in his *The Spiritual Quest: Transcendence in Myth, Religion, and Science*, "spiritual quest is continually engendered with uneasiness or dissatisfaction with what is given" (1994, p. 285). It is exactly the case with Clement. His pace of life at the beginning of the work could not be described in a more correct way than with 'uneasiness' and 'dissatisfaction.' In his case, the drive to initiate this kind of feelings is his suspicions about God and the life after death:

Whether there be for me any life after death, or whether I am to be wholly annihilated: whether I did not exist before I was born, and whether there shall be no remembrance of this life after death, and so the boundlessness of time shall consign all things to oblivion and silence; so that not only we shall cease to be, but there shall be no remembrance that we have ever been (Schaff, 2005, pp. 111-112).

However, it is important to note that not all the journeys in a general sense have the ability to function in this way.

In this context, a quest, not a journey, is what is needed and it is necessary to differentiate between the two in this context. Nancy Howard states the elements of a journey to be named as a quest in this way:

It is impossible for heroes to blunder into the quest, to make some sort of mistake and find themselves quite suddenly embarked on a difficult journey. Generally, though, something or someone calls the hero to this adventure. The summons can come from any source: a friend, a relative, a stranger, an alluring object, or an impulse within the heroes themselves. If the protagonist possesses the necessary courage and resolve, she or he is off the quest, however fearful or arduous it may seem.<sup>1</sup>

Furthermore, Thomas Pavel makes an emphasis on the concept of 'displacement' when he argues about the qualities of exile, which is the outcome of the heroic quest for sure. According to Pavel, "exile may stand for many things, in particular the pervasive feeling human beings often experience that they do not entirely belong in the sublunary world" (1996, p. 306). The idea of 'not belonging' can be shown as one of the underlying motives that urge Clement to a quest. In this regard, his arduous travels come out to be an attempt to find a place to which he can feel belonging in not only physical but also spiritual sense.

There is no doubt that the quest and following exile that Clement experiences are within the framework that Howard and Pavel draw about the underlying sense of 'quest.' In his case, this 'someone,' whom Howard points, that calls him for the quest is nobody else than Barnabas, who functions as a kind of harbinger of Peter, in fact. As to the feelings of 'uneasiness,' 'dissatisfaction' or 'displacement,' Clement goes through these feelings to the most through his inner and agonising suspicions. Unquestionably, a quest like this involves some elements which make it more than a simple journey, one not for 'everyman,' because as its definition shows, it involves difficulty and challenge above all: "A quest is a long search for something that is difficult to find, or an attempt to achieve something difficult."<sup>2</sup> In this way, Clement comes out to be a hero, who is searching for a really difficult thing, the true belief and true identity, and his journey, in this direction, becomes a heroic quest. It is important that, just as in many romances like *Boeve de Haumtone* or *Romance de Horn*, which are written several centuries later and are unquestionably accepted as works of romance, it is Clement's physical and spiritual exile that provides him with a new and real identity.

On the other hand, the occasion in *Apollonius of Tyre* is rather diverse. Although it is very similar to *Recognitions* in the sense that they both contain historical aspects as well as fictional ones, a quality that leads them to be called as works of pseudo-history, the reason that urges the hero of this story, Apollonius, for an exile is totally different.

The story begins with an incest relationship between Antiochus, the king of Antioch, and his daughter. The reason for this immoral act is nothing but the beauty of his daughter. The story clarifies that the girl is very grieved about the issue, yet the king has struggled against his instinctual drives, as well: "He struggled with madness, he fought against passion, but he was defeated by love; he lost his sense of moral responsibility, forgot that he was a father, and took on the role of husband" (Archibald, 1991, p. 113). It is in this context that the reader meets Apollonius, the king of Tyre and the hero of the story. Antiochus has settled a riddle for the men who want to marry his daughter and he beheads not only those who cannot answer truly but also the ones who know the answer of the riddle: "I am borne on crime; I eat my mother's flesh; I seek my brother, my mother's husband, my wife's son; I do not find him" (Archibald, 1991, p. 115). When he understands that the 'rich young man, a Tyrian by birth,' has found the answer of the riddle, he behaves as if he did not. When Apollonius gets the impression that he will not be left alive by Antiochus, his exile begins. So the reason of his exile turns out to be the beauty of a woman and the cruelty of a father/husband in an ironic way.

It is clear that the motif of quest in *Recognitions of Clement* is not less central than in any other works of romance, *Apollonius of Tyre* being a specific example. What turns both Clement and Apollonius into a hero is nothing but

<sup>1</sup> Excerpt from <https://commons.wvc.edu/nhoward/215/course%20documents/myth%20of%20questf10sf.pdf> accessed on 13 November 2015.

<sup>2</sup> Excerpt from <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/quest> accessed on 13 November 2015.

the quest they dare to go on. As it has been clarified, the heroes have different urges for their physical and spiritual quest, though. While Apollonius's quest begins with his being exiled by the typical cruel father of the beautiful lady, Clement's is more about his own scepticism relating the existence of God or the after-life. Nonetheless, whatever the motives are, both characters have to undergo a quest to overcome their physical and/or spiritual uneasiness and come up with a spiritual revelation.

### 3. The Recognitions of the Heroes

One of the most prevalent motifs of romance as a literary genre is the recognition. Referred as "anagnorisis" by Aristotle in his *Poetics*, the term means the revelation of a secret or a divine truth by the protagonist (Heath, 1996, p. xxx). This pattern is an inseparable part of the plotline presented in the works dealt in this study.

Even though Clement and Apollonius begin with different impulses, what make their quest a common theme are the recognitions that they experience through the process of their exiles. After his arrival in Cæsarea, Clement enjoys a lot of recognitions one after another. First of all, Peter finds out that the beggar woman in Aradus is in fact nobody else than Clement's mother. As he has listened to Clement's family story before, he makes the connection when he hears the beggar woman's narration:

Being born of noble parents, and having become the wife of a suitably powerful man, I had two twin sons, and after them one other. But my husband's brother was vehemently enflamed with unlawful love towards me; and as I valued chastity above all things, and would neither consent to so great wickedness, nor wished to disclose to my husband the baseness of his brother, I considered whether in any way I could escape unpolluted, and yet not set brother against brother, and so bring the whole race of a noble family into disgrace. I made up my mind, therefore, to leave my country with my two twins (Schaff, 2005, pp. 268-269).

After Clement comes together with his mother, Matthidia, in this way, the recognitions go on. When they leave Aradus and come to Laodicea, Niceta and Aquila meet them. At this point, Peter begins to narrate the story of the beggar woman and the following recognition. As the story dissolves, it turns out that Niceta and Aquila are actually Faustus and Faustinus, the twin sons who got lost together with their mother, Matthidia, on their journey to Greece: "We are Faustinus and Faustus: and even at the first, when you began this narrative, we immediately fell into a suspicion that the matters that you spoke of might perhaps relate to us" (Schaff, 2005, p. 274). Now that Clement has regained his lost mother and twin brothers, there is only one person missing in the family: the patriarch. Their meeting with this figure is the most interesting one, though. When Peter and the three brothers go into a secret place for praying after bathing in the sea, they notice that an old workman is observing them. Later on, it is revealed that he is a strict believer of 'genesis' and condemns them for believing in God and praying for Him:

Therefore, pitying your error, I waited till you came out that I might speak to you, and instruct you not to err in an observance of this sort; because there is neither any God, nor any worship, neither is there any providence in the world, but all things are done by fortuitous chance and genesis, as I have discovered most clearly for myself, being accomplished beyond others in the discipline of learning. Do not err, therefore: for whether you pray, or whether you do not pray, whatever your genesis contains, that should befall you (Schaff, 2005, p. 280).

At first, the old man appears to be a new challenge for Clement because he poses danger for his hard-earned faith. His beliefs regarding the genesis and God present a contradiction with those of Clement, who he has just cleared up his suspicions about God and after-life, and has found spiritual and mental ease. However, as the acquaintance advances, the old workman comes out to be the lost father, Faustinianus, about whom Clement has heard nothing since he went Greece to look for his lost wife and twin sons. Henceforth, Clement feels a responsibility for converting his father into Christianity, which he succeeds after a great struggle. In this sense, the confrontation stands for an evidence of Clement's faith because he overcomes this hardness, as well, and he is not only able to keep his credence but also he can convince his father of the superiority of Christianity over the idea of genesis.

Apollonius experiences similar recognitions during his adventure, as well. When he manages to arrive at the shore of Pentapolis after a storm in the sea which has perished all his men, an old fisherman advises him to wear like a poor man and go to the city with the hope that he may find somebody who will take pity on him, and thus gives Apollonius his own cloak. In the gymnasium, he meets with Archistrates, the king of the city, who is highly affected by Apollonius's skills and speed in a ball game. When Apollonius's expertise in massaging and servicing the king is added, the king invites him for dinner where the king's daughter sees him and falls in love with him. After they marry, Apollonius learns through a helmsman that "the cruellest King Antiochus has been struck by God's thunderbolt as he was lying in bed with his own daughter. But his wealth and his kingdom are being kept for King Apollonius" (Archibald, 1991, p. 137). Apollonius and his wife, pregnant at that time, set sail for the city of Antioch for this reason. His wife gives birth on the way and is thought to be death. Apollonius makes his men make a coffin 'adorned with royal finery' and puts his wife in it with a message:

Whoever finds this coffin, which contains twenty thousand gold sesterces, I beg him to keep ten thousand, but to spend ten thousand on a funeral. For this corpse has left behind many tears and most bitter grief. But if he does not act according to this grief-stricken request, may he die as the last of his line, and may there be no one to give him burial (Archibald, 1991, p. 139).

Her coffin is later found at the shore of Ephesus by a doctor and she is found out to be alive by a student of the doctor, which is followed by her adoption by the doctor as a daughter. Meanwhile, Apollonius goes to Tarsus with his daughter. He entrusts his daughter to a couple named Stranguillio and Dionysias, former friends, and wants them to name her Tarsia and grow her like their own daughter. This story sets the background for the later recognitions. As a result of Dionysias's envy, Tarsia is captured by the pirates and taken to the city of Mytilene where she is sold to a pimp called Leoninus. She is able to keep her chastity for fourteen years by telling her customers the misfortunes she has experienced, which has been able to create enough pity on the customers. After fourteen years, Apollonius goes to Tarsus and learns his daughter is dead. Then he sets sail in agony and by God's grace, the storm drags his ship to the shore of Mytilene where he is noticed by the king of the city, Athenagoras, for his unhappiness and grief on a day of fest and joy. It is for this reason that he calls for Tarsia to come and cheer Apollonius, a process during which the first recognition comes to the surface, as Tarsia comes out to be the lost daughter of Apollonius. When they set sail to go back to Tarsus and then to his own land, he dreams an angel-like being telling him to go to Ephesus, which he complies with. It is here, in the temple of Diana, that the second recognition takes place; "While Apollonius was recounting this and other things of the same sort, his wife gave a great cry and said: 'I am your wife, the daughter of King Archistrates'" (Archibald, 1991, p. 175).

#### 4. The Central Role of 'Love' in both Works

The other theme that qualifies *Recognitions* as a work of romance and makes it a parallel to *Apollonius of Tyre* is the concept of love that has a central role in both pieces. In the first work, the hero is after love, which is apparently a spiritual and divine one in his case. As it begins with his suspicions about divinity in general, it goes on with his acquaintance with the power of Divine with the help of first Barnabas and then of Peter. The more he learns about the true belief, the deeper he goes into love. The importance of Peter comes to the front exactly at this point. He guides Clement to find the true belief and make away with his inner suspicions. He is in fact a kind of Christ-like figure for the role he has in the work. He functions as a saviour for Clement and helps him to find his new and real identity. He is a kind of 'mestre,' which has a lot of connotations as well as the one for an educator, in the words of Judith Weiss, since he meets Clement when he is in a condition of suspicions with an unstable character, like a child, and makes him realize the reality about the sentimental values surrounding him, and thus become a mature person (Weiss, 2008, p. 27). It is by his help and Clement's devotion that the recognitions take place, that is, the happy ending of the story is based on the divine love that Clement has found and understood.

Apollonius, on the other hand, experiences a different kind of love. As opposed to Clement's divine love, he goes through a secular one. In fact, his desire, not love, for beauty causes his exile at the beginning. Afterwards, the story and the theme of love in the story evolve around his accession to love, his loss of love, and his happy reunion

with his wife, the daughter of King Archistrates. It is important that only after the long and exhausting exile can he find the true love. His lust at the beginning turns into a real love, and his exile has a crucial function for his regaining love and the resulting happy ending.

### **Conclusion**

*Recognitions of Clement* is a work that has caused many arguments as to its original date and exact genre. The scholars have not been able to reach a conclusion about the exact date, which has led the work to be viewed as a piece that might have been produced in a period ranging from the first to the fourth century.

When it comes to the question of genre, even though it is often viewed as a novel, it would not be wrong to argue that *Recognitions of Clement* can be taken as a work of romance due to its several similarities with another contemporary romance, *Apollonius of Tyre*. First, the physical and spiritual quests the main characters go through, which is a result of suspicions about divinity for Clement and a chase for beauty for Apollonius, make the works parallels for one another. The recognitions both heroes experience through their quests strengthen this parallelism. Then, the notion of love comes out to be another common point between the two works. Clement's divine love corresponds with Apollonius's secular love; yet, love is the ultimate determinant for the character development and the eventual maturation of both protagonists

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