

THE PRESENCE OF THE SULTAN SALADIN
IN THE ROMANCE LITERATURES

Cultural phenomena never exist except in connexion with the agents of human life that make them possible and endow them with their authentic value. Culture is not of itself a fertilising rain—nothing human can be ‘of itself’, an island of abstraction. Literary themes, then, are things that happen in and to someone’s historical life. Their value is manifested to its full extent when the theme that interests us is seen as the expression, through an individual, of a particular people, who, in giving life to the literary theme, achieves its self-realisation in terms of a value structure. We have rather too frequently thought about comparative literature as if its motivating force were always some theme common to several literatures, and as if these literatures were limited to the historico-geographical space in which the migratory theme takes up residence and progressively ‘evolves’. This over-abstract and anti-vital idea leads to another, the notion of the theme in its pure state, the *Urtema*, in many comparative studies.

The actual truth is that a writer chooses his theme, whether that theme be contemporary or remote in time. The theme, ancient or recent, is in its received form simply the possibility for a new creation, and the importance of the new creation lies in its function and power as a generator of values,

not in the formal skeleton that links it with something that is not it. The mere establishing of connective schemes is a scholars' game, nothing more. And I say this not to criticise or oppose anyone or anything. Rather, the present period requires that someone say it—this period in which it has become impossible to gather into one comprehensive embrace the ever more incoherent masses of knowledge about man. We have reached the absurd situation where it is not the unknown but the known that is a problem. How can one learn all that has been found out already about any bit of history? The *terrae incognitae* are not in the shadows of the past but in the libraries that tower around us. Wherefore my interest in looking for *ways of understanding*, rather than new or unpublished facts. It is high time we systematise (as best we can, according to our means) the legacy bequeathed to us by our hardworking, praiseworthy predecessors.

Life is always the expression of a somebody, and this somebody is not an abstract being. It is a concrete human reality—collective or individual—and always a variety. At the same time we are so busy these days repeating Aristotle's dictum that 'being is expressed in many ways', we must also emphasise the equally certain principle that man and his good life consist in an existence as a plurality and difference of expressions. What is important in literature, then, is not the common and *comparable* aspect but those features in each literature that differentiate it and set it in contrast against others. Let me recall for my purposes an idea of Joseph de Maistre's: 'The Constitution of 1795, like its predecessors, is made for Man. Now there is no such thing as man in the world. In my life I have seen Frenchmen, Italians, Russians, etc.; thanks to Montesquieu, I even know that one can be a Persian: but as for Man, I declare that I have never seen him' (*Considérations sur la France*, 1796).

Let us take this as our point of view and have a look at the figure of the Sultan Saladin as it is presented in the Romance literatures of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries in Spain, France, and Italy. Each one of these peoples—Spanish, French, Italian—made use of such news as reached them about the Sultan of Babylon in the same way that a painter makes use of the colours on his palette and the prefigurations waiting in his fantasy. Each people accentuated in this case the aspects and values most pleasing to them, and muted or rejected all that was incompatible with the functioning of their 'vital dwelling place'.¹ History is always the result of the

¹For a further explanation of this idea, see my *La realidad histórica de España*, Mexico, 1954 (translated into English under the title *The Structure of Spanish History*, Princeton, 1954). The present paper was designed to offer a concrete application of the historical method expounded there.

play between the sought for and the rejected—in the last analysis, the play between what each concrete variety of man finds more or less comfortably possible and what he finds possible only with difficulty. By itself the literary matter that makes up the theme of Saladin is like the puppet when the show is over.

There is scarcely a new fact among those I am going to present here. All are to be found in a few well-known publications.² My special interest, rather, is to point out the disparity between the manifestations of Saladin in each of the three great Romance literatures, and, at the same time, the inner coherence that each of the manifestations presents. The forms of Saladin's person and life are not like a river spilling over the various countries of Europe; they have no substance that persists through or beneath their aspects. They are pure inventions without effective historical foundation, without any logic to bind them together. The source of the various structures is the inner process of each literature as it deals with the Saladin theme.

The political and military genius of Islam flashed for the last time in the figure of Saladin (1138–93), Sultan of Egypt, Caliph of Baghdad, and conqueror of the Christian kingdom of Jerusalem in 1187. After the victory of Hittin and the conquest of the Holy City, the crusaders went into decline. Richard I of England and Philip II of France did not succeed in regaining the lost ground. In the course of the thirteenth century the Holy Land once more became a Moslem dominion. Saladin (whose name in Arabic means 'prosperity, integrity of faith') succeeded in reviving and effectively unifying the Islamic Orient, to the sorrow of Christendom. His zeal for his faith led him to exterminate those Templars and Hospitalers who fell prisoners after Hittin, knights who must have represented for Saladin a perverted, Christian version of the bellico-religious virtues of Islam. He also had Renaud de Châtillon put to death for violating a truce, although he spared the life of King Guy de Luzignan, and permitted the Christian inhabitants of the city to leave freely.

Saladin's life is nobly marked by generous, chivalrous features: his soldiers once snatched a baby girl from the arms of her mother and were going to sell her as a slave; Saladin had the little captive returned to her mother, and, according to the chroniclers, the Sultan's tears mingled with

² The most important of the studies in question are: Gaston Paris, 'La Légende de Saladin', *Journal des Savants* (May–August, 1893); by the same author, 'La Parabole des trois anneaux', *Revue des Etudes Juives*, xi (1885); Mario Penna, *La parabola dei tre anelli e la tolleranza del medio evo*, Turin, 1952. These studies contain references to still others which need not be mentioned here.

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those of the happy mother. The grandeur of the Soldan of Babylon (i.e., of Cairo) was praised by Dante and Boccaccio. In the first literary manifestations, to be sure, the portraits of Saladin are very hostile to him (thus, for example, in the *Carmen de Saladino*). Later, the direction of the approach changes, and Saladin looms as an exemplary figure. Each literature, each people, comes to see in him the prototype of the virtues which are most pleasing to it.

The idealisation of such a personage within Christian society was not simply a reflection of Saladin's grandeur, for his whole life spelled the ruin of the crusaders' mission and of Christian power along the routes of expansion toward the Orient. The anecdotes about the Sultan's humane behaviour were pretexts for literary creations whose *raison d'être* has to be looked for in the basic 'disposition' of life as well as the historical temper of certain European peoples. Specifically I refer to a certain critical attitude regarding ecclesiastical customs, and also to the idea that the spirit of God could manifest itself through beliefs that were not Christian. It is not enough to say that there were ideas and sentiments of tolerance in certain European countries during the so-called Middle Ages, because tolerance is a negative attitude with respect to what is tolerated, to what is felt as something that ought not to exist but whose existence, even so, we must allow and endure. In the case of Saladin more than this was involved: it takes more than greatness for a man to be converted into a prototype of great virtues. (Genghis-Khan did not filter into the wells of literary expression in Europe.)

Actually, the figure of Saladin provided a means of expression for pre-existing situations that people were interested in showing forth, and which gained prestige by being set in the frame of an illustrious personage, remote and exemplary. This figure was, after all, no less fabulous than that of Prester John of the Indies; for it was not established fact but hearsay and invention that were at work here. Above all, this intercultural activity was favoured by the harmony that had existed between Christians and Moslems since before the thirteenth century, the result of which was evident in the military orders, the holy war, and the codification of religious tolerance in the *Partidas* of Alphonse the Learned (cf. *The Structure of Spanish History*, Chap. VII). But it was not in Spain that the figure of Saladin made its first appearance. Rather, it was in Italy and France, and, to be sure, in forms that were never accepted by Castilian literature. In this connexion it is important to remember the forty-two years of the reign of Frederick II of Swabia (1208–50), the great emperor of Sicily and

Germany. Frederick had a Moslem's command of Arabic, and, if the occasion arose, he could embellish his discourse with quotations from the poets. His friendship with Saladin's son Al-Kamil, the Sultan of Egypt, made possible his peaceful occupation of Jerusalem in 1229, even if only for two days, thanks to the brief of excommunication issued against him by Pope Gregory IX. Gregory preferred to lose the Holy City for Christendom rather than yield in the contest of ambitions which had got him on such bad terms with Frederick. The violent criticisms of the papacy that certain French works put into Saladin's mouth may have been an echo of that incredible situation. What happened between Frederick and Sultan Al-Kamil (a struggle, after all, between men who respected and admired each other) can be understood if one bears in mind that that world was one huge chivalric *koiné*, within which it was possible, at least for knights, to cross over the religious barriers. E. Kantorowicz says: 'The norms of the chivalry of the nobility were traced out in the Orient before they were in Europe, as is evident from the epic of Firdusi and other testimonies.'³

For many contemporaries, beginning with the Pope, Frederick was an unbeliever. They even attributed to him the authorship of the non-existent *De tribus impostoribus*. It would be imprudent and anachronistic to apply nineteenth-century criteria to Frederick, as Renan and others have done. The reality was that Islam offered the opportunity for certain attitudes that we today would call deistic, but without the consequence that the Moslem, or certain rather Islamicised Christians, should therefore reject everything not demonstrable by reason or science. Ibn Hazm of Cordova wrote, in the middle of the eleventh century, that some people think 'there must undoubtedly be among all the religions one that is authentic, but it has not manifested itself evidently and clearly, and therefore God has imposed on no one the obligation to profess it'. This, after all, was what the Koran said: 'If your Lord had wished it, verily all the people in the world would have had the same belief'. In our own times, a man who finds religious beliefs inadmissible puts them aside and accepts in their place the dogmas of science or a political or social creed. In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries this could not be done, since there was no place for souls to rest outside the realm of the traditional beliefs. It was thus possible to move about within this realm without ceasing to be a believer. Emperor Frederick longed to know what the nature of this world was as well as that of the other. To satisfy his curiosity he asked questions

³ *Kaiser Friedrich der Zweite*, 1927, p. 174.

of both Christians and Moslems (and, I imagine, of Jews). These questionnaires have been preserved, as has the answer to one of them by a young sage of Ceuta who permits himself no little hauteur in his dealings with the emperor. The great Frederick would not have been interested in finding out about the system of justice in hell if he had not believed in the possibility and the existence of hell. His intellectualist position is formally analogous to the emotional situation of his famous contemporary, Ibn Arabi of Murcia: 'My heart can take on any form, for its name means "change" . . . The variety of its feelings is due to the variety of the Divine manifestations that appear to its inmost ground.'⁴ Or again, as he says: 'My heart can take on any form: it is a pasture for gazelles and a monastery for Christian monks. A temple for idols, and for the Kaaba of the pilgrims, and for the tables of the Torah, and for the book of the Koran. I follow the religion of love: whatever the direction of the camels of my love, my religion and my faith are there.'⁵

For those chosen souls, God had not fenced off his fields, and the gazelles of a faith infused with hope could chase from one to another of them, breathless with longing. Had anyone taken proper account of this vital situation—and of the position of each people within it—the theme of Saladin, the theme of the three rings, and others of the same sort would have become historically comprehensible. What ought to be done is to situate these themes not only in a time, but, above all, in the lives of those who evoked them and found in them meaning and solace. If the figure of Frederick had one foot in Islam and the other in Rome, Saladin might well have been seen as his double, with his Mohammedanism but one step from Christian spirituality. In this, as in many other cases, the most naïve reflections might now be the most fruitful. It must be remembered that never before had two sections of humanity confronted one another with such great and durable strength, a strength that was both spiritual and political: Christian Europe and the Islam of the fighting caliphs. Each of these forces was a part of the other's vital horizon, in a relationship that in no way resembled the earlier ones between Rome and Greece or between Rome and Germany. And this relationship was six hundred years old in the thirteenth century.

I do not know how the Moslems of the Orient regarded the figure of Frederick of Swabia, or what reflections that wizard, who got into Jerusalem without drawing his sword, may have found in their literature. We

⁴ *The Tarjumán Al-Ashwāq*, tr. R. A. Nicholson, London, 1911, p. 69.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

do know, on the other hand, how the Christians felt about Saladin and how they conceived him. The Italians saw in him a great lord no less liberal than Alexander: 'Who is not thankful in his heart for Alexander's royal benefits? Who does not still remember the good king of Castile, or Saladin . . .?' (Dante, *Convivio*, IV, ii). The liberality of the generous lord made possible the magnificence, the great spectacle of life conceived as a work of art—in which Italy was the guide and master of uncouth Europe. Dante's praise of liberality is not that of a beggar, of a writer greedy for any surplus wealth that might come his way. Rather is he thinking of the regal and illustrious character of those exalted lords, whose line was to be continued by the Medici. Saladin was the only Moslem to be spared eternal punishment. Dante places him in limbo along with the heroes of Antiquity.

And I saw Saladin, alone, apart.

(*Inferno*, IV, 129)

The desire to christianise Saladin plays no part here, nor in any of the references to him in Italian literature, where the approach, in this regard, is secular and earthly. (A German, Wido von Bazoches, characterises Saladin as '*Princeps quidam, nisi foret extra fidelium gregem, egregius*'.⁶

Later, Boccaccio was to elaborate, as we shall see, on the theme of magnificence and social splendour. First, however, other aspects must be observed. For the Italians, the Sultan of Babylon was sceptical, or, rather, indifferent in matters of religion: 'Little did he value its laws and commandments', Boccaccio says of him in the Dante commentary, for the mere pleasure of saying so; for Saladin was the zealous defender of Islamic orthodoxy. A person who in certain other peoples evoked the image of a Saladin on the brink of conversion, is seen in this case as cold and critical, devoid of emotional warmth. The virtues brought into relief are sagacity and astuteness, and such was the approach to his figure in *Le cento novelle antiche*, or the *Novellino*. 'Saladin was a most noble sultan, a lord illustrious and generous.' On one occasion he ordered that someone be made a present of 200 marks; his treasurer made a mistake and wrote 300; the Sultan then made him write 400 so that the pen would not be more generous than he was. But what follows in this narrative is even more meaningful. During a truce, Saladin noticed the Christians' manner of eating: the lords at tables and the poor on the ground. 'This he rebuked and censured sharply, for the friends of the Christians' Lord were eating in

⁶Johannes Hartmann, *Die Persönlichkeit des Sultans Saladin im Urteil der abendländischen Quellen*, 1933, p. 100.

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a mean and base fashion.' Later the Christians came and observed the customs of the Saracens and found them eating on the ground. Saladin put up a splendid tent and spread out rugs which were covered with a multitude of crosses. The Christians trampled on the crosses and spat on them. Then the Sultan rebuked them for despising the Cross, and for loving God more with gestures and words than with works. The truce was broken and hostilities were resumed. At the heart of the little story is the deviously ingenious scheme and the clever way of setting a trap for the enemy.

On another occasion, Richard Cœur de Lion and Saladin are fighting. The English king fights dismounted, and his adversary offers him a horse so that such a noble man shall not go on foot. The king is suspicious and turns the horse over to a squire. The horse turns out to have been especially trained, and breaks away at full gallop for Saladin's camp. Although this anecdote is to be found in French chronicles, the important thing is the predominance of this kind of motive in Italy. In certain versions in the *Livre de la Terre-Sainte*, Saladin offers the horse without any malice; in others, with malice. Astuteness does not displace the same volume in France as in Italy; and above all, it has not the same function.

Italy presents a characteristic treatment, in this respect, of the well-known theme of the three rings—the symbol of the three religions—Christianity, Mohammedanism, and Judaism. A father bequeathes to his sons three rings, each one having an apparently precious stone. Two of the stones are false, although the difference between them and the true one is not to be detected at first glance. How is one to tell the difference between them? Those who have studied this story up to now have believed they could disregard the historical personality of those who treated the story and establish a chronological order for the various versions. Others have tried to explain the differences between one version and another on the basis of practical motives—of defence, among the Jews; of missionary proselytism, among certain Christians; of reaction against the Inquisitorial laws, in Italy; etc. The question, in my judgement, is at once simpler and rather more complex. One only has to notice the complete absence of the parable of the three rings in the literatures of the Iberian Peninsula to realise that we are faced in such problems with modes of human behaviour conditioned by the disposition of the several 'vital dwelling-places' in each European group, and not with narratives in the service of practical motives, or produced by the free and capricious play of fantasy.

There were a number of narratives or tales about the magic power latent in a precious stone and about the puzzle arising from the fact that of

three stones one possessed virtues absent from the others. Thus in the first story of the *Novellino* it is told how Prester John of the Indies sent Emperor Frederick II three gems of the greatest value. The Emperor accepted the gift without suspecting the marvellous properties of one of the stones. Prester John then tried to get them back. One of his lapidaries managed to get a look at them. One stone, he told Frederick, was worth a city; another, a province; the third, a whole empire. He squeezed it in his fist, became invisible, and returned to the court of his lord. The story's interest centres in the astuteness of the shrewd lapidary and in Emperor Frederick's lack of perspicacity, even though he was the 'epitome of the world in speech and manners, and a master of the subtleties of the art of giving wise answers'. A high degree of astuteness has always been one of the virtues most prized by the Italian, while the unwary and the dull-witted have frequently been the types he has chosen to represent human inferiority.

In other cases the stones symbolise the three religions, and no one can tell from their appearance which is the best, the authentically divine one. One version, collected by the Spanish Jew Salomón Aben Verga in *Shebet Yehuda*, is a work composed in the fifteenth century and containing (as is usual in Moslem and Jewish works of this kind) traditions of much earlier date. King Peter I of Aragon (1094–1104) asks a Jew which of the two religions is the true one, the Christian or the Jewish? The Jew answers with a parable: 'A neighbour of mine set forth on a journey about a month ago, and to console his two sons, he left each of them a precious stone. The two brothers came to see me and asked me to tell them about the nature of the stones and the difference between one and the other. "Who can know better than your father?" I answered them. "He is an expert lapidary. Ask him and he will tell you the truth." For giving this answer, they beat me and insulted me.' The king praised the cleverness of the Jew and grasped the meaning of his parable. He could grasp it thanks to a situation in which different beliefs intermingled harmoniously in the common life of the inhabitants of the Iberian Peninsula. (This was not a situation of mere tolerance.) In an appendix of *The Structure of Spanish History* I have quoted a passage from a fourteenth-century chronicle in which God appears as a vertex of justice where Christianity and Mohammedanism converge.

But a real situation is one thing, and taking one's distance from that situation and expressing the idea implicit in it is quite another. The Spaniards *lived* the reality of their history without producing a theoretical

expression of its significance. The Moslems could do this (Ibn Hazm and Ibn Arabi come to mind as examples), and also certain Hispano-Hebrews, such as the anonymous author of the last parable; and one way or another they always injected into their expression a note of personal feeling. The Italians saw in this theme a triumph for the subtlety of the mind and a justification of their tendency not to let themselves be carried away by excessive enthusiasm, that is, not to fight spontaneously and epically for the destruction or the defence of a belief. The Spaniards on the other hand, were delighted by battles—collective or individual—*pro Deo et Ecclesia*.

In story LXXIII of the *Novellino*, the Soldan (that is, Saladin) needs money. His counsellors tell him to have recourse to a certain ruse and thus trick a rich Jew out of his money. In this way a theological problem is posed, but in cold and calculating terms, as a battle of wits. Only in Italy is the question presented in this fashion. The Jew senses the danger at once: if he says that his own religion is the best, the Soldan will be offended and will punish him; if he says that the Moslem religion is the best, he will be asked why he is a Jew. Then the sagacious Hebrew tells the famous parable of the three sons and the three rings. 'Each one thought he owned the good one, and no one knew which it was except the father. The same I say to you about the religions, which are three. The Father which is in heaven must know which is the best; and among the sons, which are ourselves, each one believes that his is the good one.' The Soldan had nothing to say and let the Jew go in peace. The presence of Saladin in this case is a faint echo of the legend of the monarch who was tolerant and somewhat uncertain in matters pertaining to religion. It is not a question here of scepticism or of Renaissance spirit, cheap and false formulas that evade the historical reality. In Italy the religious problem was coldly and distantly regarded as an interesting curiosity. The impassioned deism of the Moslems and the Jews has been resolved into a formal scheme merely by the process of objectification, by being detached from the person. This is indeed the road to atheistic rationalism. But neither the author of the *Novellino* nor Boccaccio is an atheist or a sceptical analyst of the religious phenomenon. That is yet to come.

The three rings reappear in the *Venturoso Ciciliano*, by Bosone da Gubbio (beginning of the fourteenth century), in a spirit like that of the *Novellino*. But it is in the *Decameron* (I, 3) that the story acquires its maximum degree of literary relief. The matter is discussed once more by Saladin and a Jew (named Melchizedec in this case), so that Christian sensibilities will not be

affected by the final answer. According to Boccaccio, Saladin has recourse to the Jew because his treasury has been exhausted by the cost of his magnificence and his wars. The Sultan does not attempt to expropriate the Jew's wealth but rather to borrow from him: Melchizedec 'lent money at usurious rates in Alexandria'. But the conclusion is the same as in the other two Italian versions: 'Each people believes it must cling to its own heritage, to its true Law and the commandments thereof; but as in the case of the rings, it is an open question whose is really true.'

As an Italian of the upper class, Boccaccio was captivated by the spectacle of intellectual daring—which is not the same as being intellectually daring. This great Italian saw life as a contest between human desires on the one hand and the means found for resisting them on the other. Desires in conflict take up the entire reality of the figures of the *Decameron* (rather as if we knew nothing of a pair of wrestlers save what might be revealed about them in the course of a match). These personified impulses have no 'beyond' that transcends them, nor any kind of perspective leading to the troubled inwardness of their consciences. These figures are pure activity, directed toward the achievement of an immediate end over such obstacles as the art of Boccaccio can make us feel to be justified within the 'polemical zone'. One of the antagonists is usually defeated under circumstances that are sometimes very comical. This art is beautifully transparent but almost entirely lacking in feeling as it makes perceptible the powerful game of a greater agility of mind against a lesser one, or against pure stupidity. The organisation of spectacles and the admiration of intellectual subtlety have always been among the greatest sports for the Italians.

It is quite understandable that Boccaccio should, in a sharply drawn, very elegant sketch, give new life to the image of Guido Cavalcanti, Dante's '*amico primo*', and 'one of the world's best logicians and an excellent natural philosopher'. He had a merry disposition and was well-spoken. He knew better than anyone how to do the things expected of a gentleman. Besides, he was very rich and sought to pay highest honours where they were due. Betto Brunelleschi, the leader of a gay company of Florentine youths, tried but failed to bring Guido into his group. The logician was more interested in keeping to himself and engaging in speculation. 'Because he shared somewhat the opinions of the Epicureans, it was said among the common people that the object of his speculations was to see if he could find a proof that God did not exist.' Strolling one day, as was his custom, he came to the Church of San Giovanni, and he stopped behind the marble sarcophagi at the entrance. His friends saw him and

began to tease him: “‘Guido, you don’t want to be one of us; but, tell us, when you have discovered that God does not exist, what will you do?’” On seeing himself thus surrounded, Guido replied crisply: “‘Sirs, in your house you may say anything you please to me.’” That is, since you dwell with the dead, you may speak to me like dead men—like idiots and know-nothings. ‘Thereupon he put his hand on one of the sarcophagi, which were very high, and nimbly vaulted over it to the other side, and, separating from them, went his way.’ From then on the tricksters tricked regarded Guido as a subtle and intelligent gentleman.

Daring agility of mind, complexity and intricacy in discourse, elasticity and resilience in body are combined in this ideal figure of a man—a *summum* of Italian values. We do not know how Guido’s audacious (averroistic)⁷ reflections turned out, nor whether the whole affair was merely a street rumour or something more. It is enough, in the present case, that Boccaccio has set up one of his characteristic conflicts, this one between an elegant recluse, a devotee of logical reflection, and a group of merry-makers fond of staging fine parties and spectacles ‘whenever any joyful news of victory or anything else reached the city’. I should consider it quite meaningless to call this a manifestation of the Renaissance in the fourteenth century. This would be like speaking of *seicentismo* in the *Trecento*. I prefer to think that in Boccaccio’s work we have revealed in very pure state the aims and impulses of the ‘functional structure’ (*vividura*) of Italian life. Seen in terms of this functional structure, the themes of the *Decameron*, among them the theme of Saladin, take on meaning. Problems considered under the cold light of reason (no vital integralism here), sharpness of wit, clever schemes and tricks, comedy, the ordering of social life into an aesthetically pleasing hierarchy—in one way or another, all this is found in the Italian versions of the parable of the rings and in the tale so characteristic of Boccaccio, *Saladin and Messer Torello di Pavia* (x, 9).

When he hears that a new crusade is being prepared, Saladin, ‘most valiant lord, and at that time Soldan of Babylon’, decides to go and have a close look at the enemy’s preparations. He tells his people that he is going on a pilgrimage to Mecca, but actually he sets out for Italy, disguised as a merchant and accompanied by a reduced entourage of faithful friends. His object is to spy on the Christians. He meets Messer Torello, who ministers

⁷See B. Nardi, ‘L’averroismo del “primo amico” di Dante’, in *Dante e la Cultura medievale*, 1949, p. 93. To question the survival of individual souls does not necessarily mean to deny God’s existence.

to the strangers and gives them lodging, though he conceals for the moment the fact that he has taken them to his own house. He installs them in chambers 'most richly appointed; they were served an abundance of fine foods with great and beautiful ceremony'. Saladin is surprised to be treated as an emperor, for Messer Torello is a 'citizen and not a lord' (the Italians took pride, and quite rightly, in the fact that it was really their *bourgeoisie* who taught the monarchs of Europe how to live like kings). The appearance of the mistress of the house is given a spectacular treatment: 'Most beautiful and noble in body, and adorned with rich garments, between her small sons, who seemed two lambs, she came forth before them, and made them a pleasing greeting.' The Sultan-merchant receives gifts that fill him with wonder. The travellers depart. The Christians undertake their new crusade, and among them is Messer Torello, who has made a compact with his wife that in case he does not come back, she will wait for him one year, one month and one day after she has received the last news of him. Then she may marry again. Messer Torello falls prisoner. The Sultan recognises him and heaps splendours upon him. Such sudden glory makes him forget somewhat his affairs in Lombardy. In the meantime, the news has reached Messer Torello's house that he has died, and his wife prepares to marry again. When the prisoner learns of this, he is desperate. But Saladin and his magician are there to save the situation. They give him a narcotic, lay him on a sumptuous bed, bedeck him with jewels, and gird him on a sword set with precious stones. And that is not all. 'On each side of him they put two huge golden basins filled with gold coins; and many strings of pearls and rings and girdles, and other things, which it would take long to recount, [Saladin] caused to be put around him.' Just as in the earlier case of Guido Cavalcanti modern readers could see anticipations of the Renaissance spirit, here Messer Torello and his portentous bed will probably make some people think of the ornamental abundance of the so-called Baroque. It would be more correct, however—and I insist on this again—to say that both phenomena express moments of axiological tension within the functioning of the Italian *vividura*, in perfect and beautiful accord with the preferences and possibilities of that process.

The introduction of the magician makes it possible to mount a scene of *opera buffa*. The sumptuous couch, carrying the still sleeping Messer Torello, comes to rest in the Church of San Piero in Cieldoro, in Pavia. The sacristan is terrified when, the next morning, he discovers the unexpected catafalque. To his own panic is added, in a crescendo of comedy, that of the abbot and his friars, who flee in terror as they cry '*Domine ajutaci*'.

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Amidst this uproar, Messer Torello awakens, very happy to find himself where he had asked Saladin to have him transported. Thus he once again praises Saladin's magnificent power. He calls the abbot, who is his uncle, by his name, only to increase the panic, for the uncle has thought his nephew dead. Yet the uncle ends up by recognising him in spite of his long beard and his Arabic garments. The tale ends with everybody happy.

From what I have pointed out it can be seen that the pleasing and meaningful element in these narratives is what Italian genius put into them—not the schematic and generic theme of Saladin. And the two aspects must not be regarded as on a level of equality, for they are heterogeneous. The latter is possibility, the former fulfilled reality. The themes that certain comparativists talk about are devoid of artistic and vital *style*.

When we get into the literature of France, a Saladin quite different from the Italian one emerges at once. First of all, in the French version of the parable of the three rings neither Saladin nor the Jew is involved, and this is a negative feature that ought to have been noticed but has not. The relationship between the Frenchman and his religious faith was not the same as the Italian's. The Frenchman felt himself the executor of a mission expressed in the eleventh century by the incisive phrase *Gesta Dei per Francos*. In this phrase the *gest*, the crusading, epic impulse, figured in the foreground. The activist, practical Frenchman directed his great energy towards extremely precise goals. As early as about the year 1000 a French king arrogated to himself the divine power to cure scrofula, as well as the right to pass this miraculous virtue on to his descendants. Religion provided a support for royal and feudal power in France somewhat as the devotion to the monarchy provides a foundation for political organisation in England today. The French were not interested in static thought about the uncertain validity of the three religions, nor in charting subtle lines of argument that would lead to inconclusive positions. This problem, fruitful in other ways, interested Jews and Italians, or the Mallorcan (not Castilian) Raymond Lully.

When a Frenchman takes up the question of the three rings, he thinks that one must be the true one. Thus proceeded the Dominican Etienne de Bourbon, in the first half of the thirteenth century, in a *Tractatus de diversis materiis praedicabilibus*. He says right off in the preface that 'actions speak louder than words', according to a phrase which he appropriates from St. Gregory, for Christ '*primo docuit factis quam verbis*'. The parable is this:

A certain rich man owned a ring, and set in it was a precious stone endowed with the power to heal all sicknesses. The wife of this man bore him a legitimate daughter, and later, *corrupta a lenonibus*, she had others that passed for legitimate daughters of her husband. He knew this, and before his death, he drew up a will declaring that he bequeathed the ring to his legitimate daughter, and that his inheritance would go to the owner of the ring. The other women, when they found this out, had similar rings made for themselves. When the will was opened before the judge, each one showed her ring and claimed to be the legitimate daughter. The judge, a wise man, tested the virtue of each of the rings. When he found none at all in the other rings, he adjudged legitimate the ring that had demonstrated its virtue, and declared the others illegitimate.

The question concerning the three religions, a concrete, historical question known to everyone, has disappeared. In its place has appeared the abstract question of one truth as opposed to multiple error. In the seventeenth century Corneille took as his model Guillén de Castro's *Cid*. 'The milk I sucked as a babe is still white upon my lips, yet this shall not keep me from mixing it with the red of your blood.' So goes the rich metaphor of the Spanish, even when thinned down into prose. For this Corneille says: 'Courage is not measured by the number of one's years'. On the one hand, the integration of abstract concept and concrete felt experience; on the other, striking conceptual clarity. In the French text of the story of the rings, the sentiments, passions, and modes of human conduct (suspicion, envy, astuteness) have disappeared. The parable has become a case at law in which certain illegitimate daughters impugn a will made in favour of the legitimate daughter. A test of legitimacy is made, and the judge renders his opinion. Of the marvellous there is present only the indispensable minimum to give the judge's opinion the appearance of legality.

The other French versions have the same unity of tendency which, after their own fashion, the Italian ones displayed. Adolf Tobler published, in 1884, a short poem of the thirteenth century entitled *Li dis dou vrai aniel*. It is quite significant, to begin with, that we have the word *vrai* in the title of a parable that had been conceived amidst vacillations and uncertainties of an Oriental character, foreign to France. In this *fabliau* a father has three sons, the two older ones wicked, the youngest one virtuous. The father owns a ring with the well-known virtue. Seeing the perversity of two of his sons, he orders from a jeweller two rings externally the same as his own. He then calls each of the sons to him separately, and gives the older ones the rings with the false stones. To the youngest he gives the good one, explaining to him what he has done with the other two. When

the father dies, each of the brothers says that his is the legitimate ring. But after all rings are put to the test, the youngest son proves to be right. The others mistreat him and spoil his ring—they drive him out of his own land (Palestine). In view of this, the author of the *fabliau* exhorts the Christians to go and redeem the Holy Land.

The poet's objective, that is, the crusade, led him to reduce the numerous rings of the version analysed before (the legitimate daughter and her half-sisters). Nevertheless, the scheme is the same: absence of ambiguity, epic and activist intention. In the *fabliau*, though, there is an echo of the Moslem belief that the variety of religions is a consequence of the divine will. Still, the accent is on the goodness of one religion as opposed to the illegitimacy of the other two.

The absence of Saladin in the French versions is also significant: his presence in the Italian stories was linked with the form of the *dénouement*, where the question which of the three religions is the true one is left undecided. The image, valid for certain Christians, of a Saladin who was vacillating and ambivalent with respect to religious belief provided a basis for the irresolute attitude toward the three religions—an attitude which I would call expectant, deistic, rather than sceptical. The sceptic, when he really is a sceptic, leaves no room in his thinking for the question of the existence of God. Guido Cavalcanti seemed to be moving in this direction. But the Jewish and Italian versions of the parable expressed a different sort of preoccupation. And since this preoccupation did not exist among the French who treated the theme of the rings, it was perfectly natural that they should make no mention of the Soldan of Babylon.

When we situate the Saladin theme within the context of its vital connexions and against the historical horizon to which it belonged, we can give real meaning to what has hitherto been nothing but amusing anecdote. In the Italian versions of the parable of the rings, Saladin provided a basic organising element; in the French versions, he had no function. Therefore he does not appear in them. From the social and literary point of view, in France God was like a constitutional monarch, secure and imperturbable, but compatible with the free play of reason, of a kind of reasoning that has had, in France, ample room in which to extend itself before crossing the border-line of atheism. Religious and secular interests have gone hand in hand for centuries without damaging each other. Cluny and Cîteaux were agents of French imperialism in the West just as the Templars and Hospitalers were in the Holy Land. And even in the twentieth century a Charles de Foucauld has succeeded in harmonising a

moving Christian asceticism (more rigorous than the Trappist life he left behind) with political and scientific activities that were a great help in the imperial expansion of his fatherland over the deserts of Africa. *Gesta Dei per Francos*.

France knew the legend of a Saladin disposed to adopt the Christian faith: '*Catholica fidei leges et dogmata Christi/Legit et audivit Saladinus*' (so reads a poem of c. 1215, quoted by Gaston Paris, *op. cit.*, p. 294). The bad part of it was that, notwithstanding his desire to let himself be bound by 'the Catholic chains', he refrained from doing so after seeing the corruption of the Church, her '*Luxuriam, fraudem, invidiam, scelus atque rapinam*', etc., etc. Without these priests, cries the poet, 'the empire of Christ would grow and spread far and wide'. The work of the Crusades came to nought not through the fault of Saladin but because of ecclesiastical wickedness. It was known in France that the Christians, freed by the Sultan when he took Jerusalem, were robbed and mistreated when they got back to Christian lands. The idea of a possible *entente cordiale* with the enemy was to be given substance later, when Frederick II entered Jerusalem by using his wits rather than his arms. The stubborn ambition of Gregory IX nullified this victory, and the Emperor left Palestine, pursued by a mob that insulted him and literally threw mud at him and his knights. A poem of the fourteenth century has Saladin say these words (in jest or in seriousness): 'You adore a man [the pope] who is like me, or like anybody else' (Gaston Paris, *op. cit.*, p. 195).

In spite of everything, whenever the comparison of the three religions came up in France, Christianity would succeed in showing its superiority. In a *Chronique d'Outremer* (thirteenth century), it is told that 'Salchadins', on the point of death, did not know which religion to choose—although this did not keep him from giving the Christians the best part of the riches he had conquered. In a compilation of Latin works of the same period, Saladin is shown as listening to a discussion, just before he dies, between Jews, Saracens, and Christians; at the end he decides in favour of the Christian religion: 'I choose it because I judge it better' (Gaston Paris, p. 298). I find support here for my idea that the conclusion favourable to Christianity in Etienne de Bourbon's version of the parable of the three rings is to be explained not only by the fact that the author is a Dominican: it was the only conclusion acceptable to a Frenchman, Dominican or not.

In certain poems of the fourteenth century (Gaston Paris, p. 429) Saladin comes to France not to spy on the preparations for war but to observe 'the nobility and attitude of the Christians'. He brings with him

his uncle Jean de Pontieu because the French have given the Sultan a French family tree in their epic zeal to attract the East to the West—as in an ideal crusade, so to speak. In his entourage there is also the figure of Huon de Tabaric, who has dubbed him a knight. When he gets to Saint-Omer, Saladin saves, through single combat, an unjustly accused daughter of the house of the Counts of Pontieu. We are very far indeed from the merchant of the *Decameron*, not because of the difference between epic poetry and fiction, but because the vital situations and ways of facing the world peculiar to the Italians and the French, respectively, resulted in, or were expressed by, the different literary genres cultivated by the two peoples in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

To the French Saladin's epico-knightly activities must be added his triumphal adventures in love, unknown to the literatures of Italy and Spain. While he is being feted by King Philip II, the queen takes a fancy to the Sultan. Later, in Palestine, this love affair is continued. The queen says she wishes to go and see Saladin to convert him—one more echo of the motif of religious ambiguity. The king accedes to her request, though he has the troubled lady accompanied by André de Chauvigny, a hero of the third crusade. The object of the interview, it turns out, is not precisely religious, as Chauvigny quickly realises when he observes Saladin's conduct with the beautiful visitor. The queen does not want to return to Acre, and states her reasons firmly and clearly, with neither malice nor reticence: '*Je suis venue pour besongnier avoec Saladin . . . si ne me partiray d'icy tant que ma voulenté aury accomplie, deusse je perdre vostre compaignie, de laquelle je suis trop mal contempte*' (Gaston Paris, p. 434). It makes no difference to the argument that the poet-chronicler has confused the virtuous wife of Philip II of France with Louis VII's feather-brained Eleanor of Aquitaine. The point is that Saladin is used as an ingredient in such a situation that unfolds thus: The queen's guardian goes away with his entourage, but returns later, alone, on horseback. Saladin and the queen are talking peacefully in the palace when Chauvigny stops outside beneath their window. He calls to the queen to come down and tell him what message he should take to the king to avoid being punished for his negligence. The queen comes close to the horse, Chauvigny hoists her up on to it violently, and carries her off at a gallop 'as a butcher carries a ewe in front of him'. The scene recalls Gaiferos and Melisenda, in the *Romancero*, with the difference that this Melisenda is riding much against her will.

Let us not bother with the sources and authenticity of the anecdote. Rather must we underline the natural tone, unmarked by humour, in

which the explosion of an erotic transport is expressed. The queen calmly and calculatingly plans her adulterous diversion with the Sultan. With the same natural directness Jean de Meun later describes the sexual act in the last verses of the *Roman de la Rose*. French life has been a tension between the polarities of reflection and hedonism, between 'le bon sens' and 'la bonne chère'. Between the poles, an ideal of 'mesure', of 'bon goût', of compromise between violence and restraint. 'Tout est perdu fors l'honneur'.

Without going into details that would change nothing of what I have said, I find it beyond doubt that the French Saladin is more French than Saladin. The pictures and situations in which he appears give him his vital tonality: epic and combative impetus (in one case the great Moslem prepares to attack England); clear and decided judgment in matters of religion; triumph over woman as a knight and as a male. Just as happens in the other two literatures, a certain ideal image of man together with movement along a line of preferences toward the realisation of certain values has performed the treatment of the literary figure. It is more urgent to keep this in mind than it is to establish connexions of an abstract type external to the authentic literary reality, external, that is, to a value-expression in a certain form and of a particular way of life, of a *vividura*.

If we now probe into the grave Castile of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, we shall see that there too the 'matter' of Saladin gave rise to works linked vitally to certain assumptions, assumptions which I have tried to lay bare in my book concerning *The Structure of Spanish History*. Things Islamic were known and talked of more in Spain than in any country in Europe, but, in spite of this, literary reflections of Saladin there are at a minimum, and do not correspond to those in the other Romance literatures. It is thus once again evident that the reality of the history of a people becomes visible and understandable only by determining the tension between what that people has done and what it has not done. The story-parable of the rings circulated in the ghettos of Spain, for Salomon Aben Verga speaks of it in the fifteenth century and fixes its origin in the court of Peter I of Aragon, 400 years earlier. Contrary to every expectation in such a case, the story has left no traces in the literature of Spain—just as no traces were left by the science, philosophy, and mysticism of the Moors and Jews in the period during which, abstractly thinking, correspondences of expression between the various castes of the Peninsula should have been most widespread. In certain areas of life, interpenetrations had indeed taken place—such, for instance (to recall a random example), as

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the participation by Jews, as godfathers, in the baptism of Christian children, and the participation of Christians in analogous capacity in similar Jewish ceremonies (circumcision, etc.). The Jews organised supplications *ad petendam pluviam*, taking up where the Christians left off. Moors took part in the collection of tithes and first-fruits for the Church. Etc., etc. But in spite of all this, that which happened in everyday life was not expressed consciously, in objectified, *thought-out* form. The structure of each life—of a person or of a collectivity—is like a screen or filter which lets some things pass through and keeps back others. The English-speaking peoples do not speak casually of the fact, for instance, that babies suck. Spaniards and French do.

Saladin did not come to Spain to spy on the Christian forces, or to undertake adventures of chivalry, because tales like those of the *Novellino* and poems like those of Chrétien de Troyes did not flourish in the Spanish fantasy. It was unthinkable for a Castilian even to set up the question, in writing, of the relative value of the three religions that enclosed his existence. If he had been capable of standing aside and reflecting about the world in which he moved, the Castilian would have written on theology and philosophy, which he did not do in the period when the Saladin theme was commanding attention. The Boccaccio who was interested in Guido Cavalcanti's theological doubts was a compatriot of Thomas Aquinas. It was not a Castilian but the Mallorcan Raymond Lully who wrote the book of *The Gentile and the Three Sages*—first in Arabic and then in Catalan. For reasons which I have explained at length elsewhere, it was possible for a Catalanian to be attracted by the example of the Sufi mystics. For the same reason, Lully could leave open, without cutting it off dogmatically, the question as to which of the three religions was the true one. Lully aspired to attract the Moslems by loving and persuasive preaching, and in this task he lost his life. But even today, this gentle discourse (extremely rare) of Raymond Lully is excluded from the Spanish edition of his literary works.

The Castilian regarded Saladin as an example of moral consciousness that would serve as the basis for the fashioning of serenely heroic personalities, for a heroism in outward actions and in the restraint of forbidden appetites. The troubled Saladin, the Saladin surrounded with all kinds of splendour, the Saladin given to sensual pleasures or to magic—this Saladin traced no course in the Spain of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. In this case the Spanish version of an international theme serves to measure the immense distance separating Spain from the rest of Europe.

But before we come to the really literary texts, it will be useful to look at *La gran conquista de Ultramar*, a thirteenth-century work (left out of account by the Saladin scholars) based on French texts, which are sometimes translated very freely. This chronicle relates that when the Moslems entered Jerusalem in October of 1187, they 'tore down a great crucifix and a cross that were high up in the temple'. They dragged the cross about and broke it up into splinters in the midst of great mockeries. 'But', comments the chronicler, 'that was not ordered by Saladin.' The Sultan went into the temple and 'gave thanks to *our Lord God*, because He had given him power and dominion in His house' (p. 574). That is, Saladin's God and the God of the Christian chronicler are one and the same, a fact which is in accord with what Alphonse the Learned wrote about synagogues as places where God is also worshipped. A chronicle of the fourteenth century (as I have pointed out elsewhere) admits that it is just, under certain circumstances, for God to give the victory to the Moors and not to the Christians. This is the situation tinged with deistic sentiment, to which I referred above, the effect of which, in this case, is to allow Saladin to appear as behaving justly towards the Christians and their religion. For example, on a certain occasion several clerics come to convert Saladin, and his counsellors order him, in the name of Mohammed, to behead the Christians. The Sultan replies: 'I desire to go against that commandment of our law.' He lets the clerics go in peace, after offering them 'gold and silver and precious cloths', which they *do not accept*, for they have come to win Saladin's soul, not his wealth (p. 626). These are the grave notes caught by the Castilians, or added on their account.

Contemporary with Boccaccio is Don Juan Manuel, St. Ferdinand's grandson and author of the collection of tales entitled *Libro del conde Lucanor*. The principal interest of these narratives lies neither in the happenings therein recounted nor in the spectacular or decorative element. The author's attention is concentrated chiefly on the moral consciousness of his characters, and he projects his narrative from this starting point. Don Juan Manuel does not describe the duel between two clever disputants, as Boccaccio does. He is concerned, rather, to make the just and the noble prevail, and to combat falsehood: 'I shall speak in this book', he says, 'of the things that I understand can be of profit to men for the salvation of their souls as well as for the improvement of their bodies and the upholding of their honour and their estate.' Saladin's appearance, therefore, will now be in terms of moral conduct, without reference to his religious

vacillations or his knightly adventures. He will be simply the giver and receiver of wise counsels.

A Count of Provence goes to the Holy Land as a crusader and is taken prisoner by the Sultan, who makes him the object of great honours, and consults him as to how he should proceed in all his acts. The Countess, meantime, does not know what to do about choosing a husband for their daughter, sought by the 'sons of kings and other great men'. A message is sent to the Count asking his opinion. The Count consults Saladin who, since he does not know the suitors, limits himself to this unadorned expression of opinion: 'My advice is that you marry your daughter to a man (*con omne*).' The Count writes for details concerning the several suitors. The one that stands out among them is the son of a nobleman, not 'of very great power', but seeming to be 'the best man and the one of greatest attainments'. Saladin prefers this candidate, because a man is 'more to be esteemed for his works than for his wealth or the nobility of his lineage'. The man chosen in this way by the family to marry the Count's daughter believes at first that they are joking with him. They explain to him, however, that he has been chosen 'because he is a man'. He then asks to be given all the Count's revenues, and in great secrecy he arms a large number of galleys. The marriage is celebrated, but not consummated, and the husband leaves his bride to go and perform a 'manly deed' (*fecho de omne*) before taking possession of his wife and county. He departs for Armenia, learning the language and the customs of that country. He is told that Saladin is very fond of hunting, so he goes to see him with good birds and fine dogs, leaving one of the galleys in each of the ports. As soon as he comes into the Sultan's presence, he is very well received, 'but he does not kiss his hand'—that is, he does not promise loyalty to the Sultan. He wins Saladin's confidence and they go out hunting. The Count's son-in-law has arranged things in such a way that one day he and Saladin find themselves alone near one of the young man's galleys, and he takes Saladin prisoner. So that he would be able to do this with all propriety, he had not sworn the loyalty to Saladin that a knight owes to his lord. Under such circumstances, Saladin has to ransom himself by freeing the Count of Provence, and he gives thanks to God for having given the Count such good advice. 'Then the Sultan gave the Count and his son-in-law many very rich gifts.'

In another instance, Saladin is also vanquished, but in a purely moral way, and not by a man but by the wife of one of his knights, a woman he had fallen in love with. As a condition that must be met before she will

give herself to the Sultan, the woman requires his promise to do whatever she demands of him. He agrees, and she requires him to answer the question, 'What is the best thing that a man can have within himself, which thing is the mother and chief of all excellences?' Saladin cannot find the answer, nor can any of his counsellors. He then crosses the sea and goes to the court of the pope, 'where all the Christians gather together', and he still cannot find the answer. He goes to the house of the king of France, he asks all the kings, and the result is always the same. He finally gets a satisfactory answer from an old man, who 'because of his great age could not see and could not leave his house', but who 'was full with wisdom'. The sought-for answer is this: 'shame (*vergüenza*), for through shame man suffers death, which is the gravest thing that can be, and because of shame man desists from doing all the things that do not seem right to him, no matter how great his desire to do them'.

Saladin grasps the mystery concealed in the question and its answer, and renounces his carnal love for the wife of his knight; rather, from then on, does he love 'with an ideal and true love, which the good and loyal lord must have for all his people'.

The shame (*vergüenza*) spoken of here has an active meaning; it is not merely the repression of an immoral impulse: 'Shame makes a man brave, forthright, loyal, of good custom and demeanour; it makes him do all the good things that he does.'⁸ This meaning of *vergüenza* is characteristically Spanish. Although the word is Latin, there are Arabic overtones in it that I have pointed out elsewhere.

The Spanish Saladin does not correspond to the Saladins of the other Romance literatures. His grandeur has been seen from an eminence that dominates him and subordinates him to principles of moral sublimity, the Spanish idea of the 'essential man', as the fifteenth-century phrase had it. This ideal man is not affected by the presence of any power external to the person: the 'man in himself' (*omme en sí*), in the words of Don Juan Manuel, is a human quality which does not depend on wealth or nobility of caste. Out of this mould Lope de Vega was to fashion the figure of his Peribáñez, Calderón the figure of the Mayor of Zalamea, Unamuno the figure of his *Nada menos que todo un hombre* (Nothing less than a man). From this absolute, monolithic, dominating position the Spaniard has kept at a distance the world of nearby things; or else, he has made them his own, he has brought them into the functioning of his own life. This is

⁸ '... la vergüenza face a omne ser esforzado e franco e leal e de buenas costumbres e de buenas maneras e facer todos los bienes que face.'

what the Count's son-in-law and the lady Saladin was wooing did with the person and the behaviour of the Soldan. Here the great Sultan of Babylon turns like a satellite around stars greater than himself.

Don Juan Manuel's stories contain a host of Oriental reminiscences. The household of this great lord, this Infante of Castile, was full of Jews, whose advice was followed in the bringing up of the Infante's children. I do not know the sources of the Saladin who lives in Armenia, and the Castilian tone and meaning of the narrative would in any case not be changed by such knowledge. There are echoes of Saladin the traveller, of Saladin the lover, of the low esteem in which pontifical Rome was held—matters which in other forms and for other purposes are to be found in non-Spanish versions. In the Spanish ones, the theme is the imperial and imperious unfolding of a personal will, the subordination of the good things of this world to the grandeur of one's own conscience.

The point of what I have said here should be clear enough. Saladin as a literary theme is inseparable from the historical lives of the peoples who have expressed themselves through that theme. By inverting the usual perspectives of comparative literature, I believe that I have reclothed the phenomena with their authentic form—the form of each people's life, in a moment of artistic tension. The finest artistic achievements here have been Boccaccio's and Don Juan Manuel's, for giving unity of structure and style to a shapeless mass of anecdote. Each of them from his own position conceived Saladin as a literary figure who realises himself through contrast with another figure—Melchizedec, Messer Torello, the Count of Provence's son-in-law, the knight's wife. The character's deeds are thus referred to his person, and not the other way round, as is the case with the actions in the French works, in which events are more important than Saladin's personality. (No great French writer was attracted by the Saladin theme.) The French narratives, at that historical moment, represented the epic genre in decay. The character tale foreshadowed, on the other hand, novelistic description, with greater vital profundity to be found in Don Juan Manuel than in Boccaccio. In Boccaccio's Saladin stories, the characters have no inwardness, of which there are suggestions in Don Juan Manuel's stories.

Literary work of high quality is always the result of the authentic possibilities latent in the historical life of a people, and of the unpredictable art of persons who have known how to utilise such possibilities. The inner disposition of a literary creation is not separable from the inner form underlying the language and the history in and within which it exists.