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Music in *Der Minne Regel* by Eberhard Cersne of Minden (1404)[*]

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1.1 Introduction

Eberhard Cersne is familiar to music historians primarily for his four extant songs composed in the Minnesang tradition[1] transcribed and edited first in 1860 by Wilhelm Ambros[2], and later in 1981 by Helmut Lomnitzer[3]. Less well known is his treatise on love (*Der Minne Regel*), to which the poet appended sixteen further love poems without melody. Reinhard Strohm has rightly observed that *Der Minne Regel* constitutes an important source of information on the musical practice of that period, which was particular fond of music-making in the garden[4]. Although music is not the sole concern of the sense and purpose of *Der Minne Regel* (nor is it in other texts of this type), it remains a very important element of the work. The aim of the present article is to show the 'musical' part of this work in the somewhat broader context of the literary tradition of this epoch.

1.2 Courtly love

One of the principal themes of European literature of the second half of the twelfth century was love, in which a keen interest was shown by poets and Christian theologians alike. There are generally considered to have existed two fundamentally different 'systems' of love: one developed within the sphere of Christian philosophy[5] and the other, known as 'courtly love', arising in the domain of poetry. The origins of this phenomenon, regarded by some scholars as one of the most crucial components of Western spiritual culture during the age of the Crusades[6], has been the subject of dispute for many decades. The term itself is absent from medieval literature devoted to love, and was not coined until the nineteenth century, by Gaston Paris[7], to define the relationship between Lancelot and Guinevere in Chrétien de Troyes's tale *Le conte de la charette*[8]. The love described in this prose romance is the love for a married woman, to whom the man is an obedient servant, performing for her and in her name a variety of chivalrous deeds. Paris linked the origins of this phenomenon, which was contrary to the religious and social norms of the period, to the influence of the poems of Ovid, to the poetry of the troubadours of Provence, and also to the 'courts of love', by which he referred to the literary salons in which the doctrine of courtly love was allegedly cultivated. The main centre from which the theory and practice of courtly love was supposedly diffused across the whole of Europe was the entourage of Countess Marie de Champagne, the protectress of Chrétien de Troyes.

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A profound and erudite work by C. S. Lewis[9] established the interpretation of Gaston Paris for some time to come, although a wide variety of often contradictory hypotheses on this question also appeared. Many of Lewis's theses were later called into question, particularly those which situated courtly love within the realities of life among medieval societies; emphasis was placed on the significance of the institution of wedlock, increasingly reinforced from the eleventh century onwards, the strict interdiction of adultery on the part of the wife[10], and the lack of historical sources confirming the existence of 'courts of love' prior to 1400[11]. Therefore, courtly love may have existed — so it was argued — as a literary theory, but not as a model of life, and not as an actual social phenomenon. Literary scholars, for their part, undermined the thesis of the exceptional and original character of the troubadours' poetry as a conduit of a new doctrine of love. According to Peter Dronke, this poetry displays features that are universal to the poetic expression of love in general, and not only in Europe, but also in non-European cultures[12]. One firm opponent of the concept of the existence of the phenomenon of *fin amor* in medieval life and literature is D. W. Robertson, who states that the two main works which present the conventions and rules of courtly love, namely *De amore* by Andreas Capellanus and the aforementioned *Le conte de la charette* by Chrétien de Troyes, are essentially an ironic and humoristic parody of that love[13].

1.3 *Der Minne Regel*

In spite of attempts to remove courtly love from life and literature, its spirit pervades a variety of twelfth-century literary genres drawn on by Andreas Capellanus, author of *De amore*[14] (1185/7) — a work of crucial significance to our understanding of mediaeval conventions in the sphere of love. The subject literature is dominated by a quite generalised conviction that Andreas Capellanus, who refers to himself as the 'royal chaplain', wrote his treatise for Marie de Champagne. However, we do not know if this was indeed the case, as we possess no knowledge of her reaction to the work; we do not know whether she saw it or even if she was literate in Latin. What we do know is that the instructions contained in the treatise were addressed neither to Marie nor to any other lady, but to a certain Walter, of whom we have no information, and who may be simply a fictitious character. Be that as it may, the introduction to the treatise leaves us in no doubt as to Walter's situation. He has just been struck by the arrow of Love (Amor), and has lost control over the reins of his 'horse', symbolising, in this case, his senses and body. So Andreas teaches the young man that it is improper for a prudent man, who distinguishes good from evil, to involve himself in such 'hunting'. Next he explains to Walter the nature, rules and practice of love, in a scholastic style, embellished with poetical debates between couples of different social background[15], Latin verse, narratives derived from the romance repertory[16] and also numerous motifs taken from the poetry of the troubadours of Provence[17].

In spite of its heterogeneous contents, the structure of the treatise is clear, and displays the direct influence of Ovid, who in the three books of his *Ars amatoria* instructs the reader how to win a woman (1), how to keep her (2) and how to win a man (3). *De amore* is similarly divided into three books, of which the first analyses the nature of love and its effects, and the second teaches how love should be nurtured and how to recognize its decline and inevitable end. The third, meanwhile, titled ‘Condemnation of Love’, is of a misogynous character; it is aimed against secular love and against women, in contradiction of the views expressed in the first two books.

The first German-language adaptation of Andreas Capellanus’ treatise was *Der Minne Regel*, by Eberhard Cersne. Cersne represented a type of love poetry (*Liebesdichtung*) closely related to Minnesang, from which it differed chiefly with regard to its conception of love, which loses here its idealistic dimension. This is neither a higher love (*hohe Liebe*) nor the service of love (*Liebesdienst*). Sentiment devoid of tension and conflict is usually disturbed by someone from the outside; for example, a third person appears, and enters into a relationship with one of the lovers. Once divided, the lovers are seldom reunited[18].

Of the life of Eberhard Cersne we know only that he came from a family with knightly traditions, originating from Zersen, near the town of Oldendorf in Hesse, between Rinteln and Hameln. Eberhard’s ancestors were minstrels at the courts of lords in the area around Minden, and in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries members of his family held secular and ecclesiastic office in Minden. A document held in the archives of the municipal museum in Minden, bearing the date 1 May 1408, shows that Eberhard (Evert) von Cersne was a canon, and studied in Erfurt, as is confirmed by the list of students from the spring semester of 1395, on which the name Eberhard de Czersen appears as a student of the liberal arts. In 1397 Everhardus de Mynde gained the title of Bachelor of the Arts, but he did not continue his studies. He subsequently worked in St John’s church in Minden as a canon[19].

The first part of Eberhard Cersne’s treatise, adhering to the fourteenth-century convention of treatises of love, is relatively independent of *De amore*. Spurned by his unfaithful fiancée, a despairing poet sets off in search of consolation and succour. He reaches the gates of the garden of love. There he meets Consolation (*Trost*), to whom he recounts his story. Convinced of the poet’s honesty and innocence, Consolation admits him into the garden and leads him before the Queen of Love (*Koenigin der Minne*), who takes pity on the unfortunate poet and decides to acquaint him with the rules of love (*Regel der Minne*).

The second part of the treatise, much more expansive (lines 811–3910), contains thirty-eight questions which the poet addresses to the queen, together with her replies. This constitutes the central part of the work. Beginning with the sixth question, the text is an adaptation of the second book of *De amore*, in particular chapters six and seven, plus the first five chapters in abridged form. In addition, there are clear links between Eberhard's first five questions and some passages from Andreas' first book, chiefly its sixth chapter.

In the third and final part of *Der Minne Regel*, the hero is cured of his former love, falls in love with the queen and asks for her hand. She, however, sends him to the court of King Sydrus (Andreas has Arthur) for the book that contains the thirty-one rules of love (Minneregel). The expedition is a success: the hero obtains the rules, as well as a hawk (Andreas: sparrowhawk), from King Sydrus' court. He returns to the queen and becomes her husband and deputy, and also the heir to her fortune. Freed from the earthly suffering of transient love, he becomes an advocate of true love.

The third part of the work (lines 3911–4735) constitutes an adaptation of the eighth chapter of Book Two of *De amore*. Eberhard translates quite faithfully, mostly literally, the thirty-one rules of love which Andreas sets out towards the end of Book Two of his treatise, and at the end he copies out in the original Latin the definition of love that appears at the beginning of Book One of *De amore*.

1.4 The garden as an allegory of love

One of the most interesting sections of Capellanus' treatise is the fifth dialogue of Book One, in which a nobleman addresses a noblewoman, reticent towards love and everything connected with the service of Venus. The dismayed noble tells her that all good deeds have their origins in love, and so the lady should enter the court of Love. She, however, demurs, comparing the court of love to hell, from which no-one who crosses its threshold can ever leave. The nobleman then describes to the lady the palace of Love, which, he says, has four sides and four gates. Love herself stands by the eastern gate; by the southern gate stand those women who choose their men very carefully; by the western gate stand those who accept all without selection; finally, by the northern gate stand those women who never let anyone in. When the noblewoman says that she would most willingly stand by the northern gate, her aspirant tells her the story of his journey to the world beyond, ruled by the mighty King of Love.

The narrative set forth by Andreas is an adaptation of the Breton tale *Le Lay du Trot*: a rich knight from King Arthur's court meets a group of ladies who faithfully served love while alive. As a reward, after death they ride on magnificent horses, are beautifully dressed, and are served by the most eminent knights. Next he sees women who were disdainful of Amor, and as a punishment must ride bareback on miserable nags, are poorly dressed, and are deprived of the protective company of knights[20].

In Andreas' version, all women after death make their way to the Realm of the King of Love, which is shaped like a perfect circle; it is an isolated place surrounded by odiferous fruit trees and consisting of three concentric zones: Siccitas, Humiditas and Amoenitas. The outermost zone, Siccitas (Aridity), is a sun-scorched wilderness, whilst Humiditas (Humidity) is a swamp filled with icy cold water. Amoenitas is the seat of the King, who has created there an idyllic microcosm in the image of both Eden and heavenly paradise. The good fortune of residing in Amoenitas is granted to women who are modest and well-disposed to love during their lives. From Amoenitas, the King of Love judges all the dead and rules over the other two zones, where terrible punishments are endured by women who opposed the rules of love while alive[21].

The garden in the tale recounted by Andreas Capellanus is one of the earliest examples of the use of a new poetic topos[22], defined by Kenneth Kee as the topos of the paradise of love (*paradis d'amour*)[23]. The *paradis d'amour* where the God of Love reigns is a garden modelled on the earthly paradise of Eden, which usually contains the Tree of Life at its centre, an abundance of flowers and fruits, and also fountains, streams and singing birds. As a metaphor and the scene of the amorous adventures of their protagonists, the *paradis d'amour* was employed very often by the poets of those times, the most elaborate example of which is the garden of love from *Le roman de la rose.*

1.5 The singing of birds in the garden

Also present in the Amoenitas of Andreas Capellanus is music ('All kinds of jesters paraded their art, performing for them music, and all musical instruments could be heard'), although its description in the fifth dialogue of *De amore* is rather laconic. More elaborate musical scenes, fulfilling a crucial function in the symbolical structure of gardens of love, appear somewhat later; the unparalleled exemplar here is the aforementioned thirteenth-century *Le roman de la rose* by Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun[24]. Whilst remaining quite faithful to the original in producing his adaptation of Capellanus' treatise, Eberhard passed over the description of the garden of love from the fifth dialogue of *De amore* in favour of a depiction from a poetical tradition closer to his own times[25], in which music is now an obligatory component, particularly as performed by the multitude of birds gathered in the garden. One very probable model for Eberhard here, although doubtless not the only one, is the above-mentioned garden of the nobleman Déduit from *Le roman de la rose.*

The garden described by Eberhard takes the form of a very large perfect circle, surrounded by a wall. It is the realm of the Queen of Love, who is to teach the poet the rules of love, just as the King taught the hero of Andreas' tale. This garden is a place of unimaginable beauty in which angelic melodies could be heard ('I heard the pleasant song of angelical hosts and believed that Tubal still lived. So sweet and well composed was this music.') and in which there grew all kinds of beautifully scented and coloured flowers, herbs, vegetables and fruits, a great abundance and variety of trees, and also lush green grass fed by crystal clear water from a centrally situated fountain.

The garden in *Der Minne Regel* is filled with birds whose mating symbolises, on the one hand, the laws and harmony of Nature and, on the other, the innocence of the Paradise lost. The perfection of the universe, according to Thomas Aquinas, comprises an ordered multitude of things, which is symbolised by a group of birds singing harmoniously together. In the garden of the Jester from *Le roman de la rose*, for example, numerous birds were gathered, singing harmonious melodies:

> Then I entered into the garden [...] Believe me, I thought that I was truly in the earthly paradise. [...] There were many singing birds, collected together, throughout the whole garden. In one place were nightingales, in another jays and starlings; elsewhere again were large schools of wrens and turtledoves, of goldfinches, swallows, larks, who were tired out from singing in spite of themselves; there, too, were blackbirds and redwings, who aspired to outdo the other birds in singing. Elsewhere again were parrots and many birds that, in the woods and groves where they lived, had a wonderful time with their beautiful songs.
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> These birds that I describe to you performed a lovely service: they sang a song as though they were heavenly angels. [...] The little birds were intent on their singing, and they were neither unskillful nor ignorant[26].

In Song 28 of Purgatory from Dante's *The Divine Comedy*, the poets enter the garden of paradise. A light breeze is blowing, and the air is suffused with the scent of flowers; the voices of birds can be heard all around:

> The branches quivering at its touch all bent
> Spontaneously in the direction where
> The holy mountain casts its shadow first;
>
> Yet the trees weren't so swayed from standing straight
> That little birds among the topmost boughs
> Had to leave off the practice of their art,
>
> But with their song they welcomed, full of joy,
> The early morning hours among the leaves
> Which kept up an accompaniment to their rhymes,
>
> As sound accumulates from branch to branch
> Through the pine forest on the shore of Chiassi
> When Aeolus lets the Sirocco loose[27].

The song of birds in consonance with the sough of the wind is the most important element of the gardenscape depicted by Geoffrey Chaucer in his *The Parlement of Foules*:

> By a river in a green mead, where is evermore sweetness enough, I saw a garden, full of blossomy boughs, with white, blue, yellow and red flowers; and cold fountain-streams, not at all sluggish, full of small shining fish with red fins and silver-bright scales. On every bough I heard the birds sing with the voice of angels in their melody. Some busied themselves to lead forth their young. The little bunnies hastened to play. Further on I noticed all about the timid roe, the buck, harts and hinds and squirrels and small beasts of gentle nature. I heard stringed instruments playing harmonies of such ravishing sweetness that God, Maker and Lord of all, never heard better, I believe. At the same time a wind, scarce could it have been gentler, made in the green leaves a soft noise which accorded with the song of the birds above[28].

Similarly, Eberhard Cersne's garden of love resounded to the warbling of a great variety of delightful birds. Their sound was sweeter than a masterful solfeggio (*selfyseren*), than a part-song in counterpoint, their song much lovelier than the sound of the dulcimer (*cymbel*), harp (*harffe*), pipes (*svegil*)[29] monochord (*Schachtbret monocordium*), triangle (*stegereyff noch begil*), crotals (*rotte*), clavichord (*clavicordium*), [?] (*medicinale*)[30], or portative (*Portitif*), than the psaltery (*psalterium*), hurdy-gurdy (*figel sam cannale*), lute (*lute*), harpsichord (*clavicymbolum*), gittern (*quinterna*), violin (*geige*), fidel (*videle*), lyre (*lyra*), rebec (*rubeba*), fife (*phife*), flute (*floyte*), shawm (*schalmey*) and the most various sonorous horns (*horner*)[31].

Having presented the instruments of his day, Eberhard 'introduces' the reader to some aspects of musical practice, which he sets out in brief in poetical form, by means of mnemonic rhyming musical notions. Firstly, he refers to the words descant, flat, semitone and tenor ['I heard them sing descant (*discant*), flat (*bymol*), semitone (*semiton*) and tenor (*tenor*)], which in lines 422 and 423 are not joined into any discernible whole. In the next line (424) the poet makes probable reference to the hexachordal system ('one section of the avian choir sang a natural (*naturalen*) [hexachord], the other a hard (*B duralen*) [hexachord], equally sweetly'). He then (lines 425 ff.) admires the two-part descant singing of birds: 'The tenor ground (*tenor in gravibus*) was sung by one sex, with the other performing the ornaments (*flores*), in fifths, fourths, thirds and octaves. No errors whatsoever could be heard.'

In lines 440–455, Eberhard turns to the simple rules governing the construction of the basic intervals (perfect consonances?). Eight birds sing as follows:

‘the first *ut*, the second *sol*, the third *re*, the fourth *la*. These notes produce two fifths. The fifth bird sings *mi*, the sixth *b durum*, and thus is formed the third fifth. The seventh bird sings *fa* together with [the third] *re* and [the fourth] *la*. Then the sixth bird sang in a most sweetly sounding voice octaves of these notes: *ut*, *re*, *mi*, *fa*, *sol*, *la*. All the fifths, thirds and octaves sounded beautifully. And it gave me pleasure.’

Finally, Eberhard writes of the master of music (*Mus meyster hoch in musica*), who devised the nine intervals, which the poet calls melodies (*Wysen*), from which all songs (*carmina*) are composed: unison (*unison*), minor second (*semiton*), major second (*ton*), double whole tone, i.e. major third (*dyton*), minor third (*semiditon*), octave (*dyapason*), fourth (*diatessaron*) and fifth (*dyapente*). These intervals and melodies give rise to true harmony (*armonyen*).

1.6 Conclusion

In the sixteenth century, the *paradis d’amour*, the favourite setting for the amorous peripeteia of protagonists in a variety of literary genres, had already gained a stable, recurrent structure, in which music, and the singing of birds in particular, was an inseparable part. Eberhard’s garden is also filled with birds, which behave like humans, performing human music. The mediaeval anthropomorphisation of birds has deep historical roots, grounded in the tendency — quite frequent in many cultures — to perceive these creatures as a society after the fashion of human societies.

> [...] Birds form a society independent of our own, yet due to this independence it appears to us as both different and homological to that in which we live; the bird loves freedom, it builds itself a home where it lives with its family and where it feeds its young, it often enters into social relationships with other members of its species, with whom it communicates through acoustic means resembling articulated speech. And so all the objective conditions are there for us to conceive of the avian world as a human society in the figurative sense[32].

In Eberhard’s garden, harmonious bird-song fills the entire poetical space, lending it the dimension of a sacred space. Eberhard Cersne’s paradise of love resounds with a perfect, heavenly, angelic music, which, in accordance with the poet's didactic intentions, humans should learn from the birds. And herein would appear to lie the essential significance of this tableau, which is at once both a human dream of the world and its heavenly model.

Notes

1 Reinhard Strohm, *The Rise of European Music 1380–1500* (Cambridge University Press, 1993). See also Walter Salmen, *Gartenmusik. Musik-Tanz-Konversation im Freien* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 2006).

2 Eberhard von Cersne, *Der Minne Regel*, transcribed and ed. A.W. Ambros (Vienna: Wilhelm Braumüller, 1860).

3 Eberhard von Cersne, *Der Minne Regel. Lieder*, ed. D. Buschinger and H. Lomnitzer (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1981).

4 Reinhard Strohm, *The Rise of European Music...*, op. cit., p. 318.

5 Johan Chydenius, 'The Symbolism of Love in Medieval Thought', *Commentationes Humanarum Litterarum*, 44/1 (Societas Scientiarum Fennica, 1970).

6 See, e.g. Mircea Eliade, *Histoire des croyances et des idées réligieuses*, (Paris: Payot, 1989); Denis de Rougemont, *L'amour et l'occident* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1956).

7 Gaston Paris, 'Etudes sur les romans de la Table Ronde. Lancelot du Lac. II. Le conte de la Charette', *Romania*, 12 (1883), pp. 459–534.

8 Chrétien de Troyes, *Le conte de la Charette*, ed. William W. Kibler, orig. with Engl. trans. (New York: Garland Library of Medieval Literature, 1981).

9 C. S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love. A Study in Medieval Tradition* (Oxford University Press, 1958).

10 John F. Benton, 'Clio and Venus: An Historical View of Medieval Love', in: F.X. Newman (ed.). *The Meaning of Courtly Love* (State University of New York Press, 1968), pp. 19–43.

11 The first known 'court of love' (*cours d'amour*) was established on 14 Feb. 1401 at the Hôtel d'Artois in Paris by Philippe le Hardy, Louis Bourbon and King Charles VI. See John F. Benton, 'The Court of Champagne as a Literary Center', *Speculum*, 36 (1961), pp. 580–82; id. Clio and Venus . . . ; also Johan Huizinga, *The Autumn of the Middle Ages*, trans. Rodney J. Payton and Ulrich Mammitzsch (University of Chicago Press, 1996).

12 Peter Dronke, *Medieval Latin and the Rise of European Love-Lyric*, 2 vols. (Oxford University Press, 1965).

13 D. W. Robertson, Jr., 'The Concept of Courtly Love as an Impediment to the Understanding of Medieval Texts', in: F.X. Newman (ed.), *The Meaning of Courtly Love* (above, no. 11), p. 3; id. *A Preface to Chaucer. Studies in Medieval Perspectives* (Princeton University Press, 1962).

14 *Andrea Capellani regii Francorum De Amore Libri tres*, ed. E. Trojel (Copenhagen, 1892; repr. Munich, 1964). This work does not have an established title. Manuscripts of different periods give various titles, the most common being *De amore*, with variants including *Tractatus de amore*, *Liber de amore* and *Liber amoris*. See P.G. Walsh, *Andreas Capellanus on Love*, ed with Engl. trans. (London: Duckworth, 1982).

15 These debates bring to mind the *tensons* appearing in Provence in the mid 12*th* c., in particular the *partimeny* documented by sources for the years 1170–80.

16 The clearest influence is from Chrétien de Troyes's *Le chevalier de la charette*.

17 In addition, scholars point to the possible filiation with the theological discussions on the subject of love that appeared in profusion during the 12*th* c.: Hugo of St Victor, William of St Thierry, Bernard of Clairvaux. See P.G. Walsh, *Andreas* ... (above, no. 15), p. 25.

18 Burkhard Kippenberg, 'Minnesang', entry in: Stanley Sadie (ed.), *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, xii (London: Macmillan Publishers Limited, 1980).

19 Elisabeth Hages-Weissflog (ed. and 'Commentary'), *Die Lieder Eberhards von Cersne* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1998).

20 See E. Margaret Grimes, 'Le Lay du Trot', *Romanic Review*, 1935, pp. 313–329.

21 See Patricia Trannoy, 'Le jardin d'amour dans le De Amore d'Andre le Chapelain', in: 'Vergers et jardins dans l'univers medieval', *Senefiance*, 28 (1990), pp. 375–388.

22 Appearing in poetry textbooks after 1170. See Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton University Press, 1973).

23 Kenneth Kee, 'Two Chaucerian Gardens', *Mediaeval Studies*, 23 (1961), pp. 154–162.

24 Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, *The Romance of the Rose*, trans. Charles Dahlberg (Princeton University Press, 1971). The first part of the story was written in the years 1225–1230, the second in the years 1268–1282.

25 According to Robertson, the image of the garden as 'the most fruitful complexes of related things' acquired a mature form in the 14*th* c. D. W. Robertson, Jr. *A Preface to Chaucer . . .*, op. cit., p. 386.

26 Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, *Le roman de la rose*, op. cit., pp. 39–40 (lines 635–677).

27 Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, trans. James Finn Cotter (Stony Brook: Forum Italicum Publications. Center for Italian Studies, 2000), lines 10–21.

28 Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Complete Poetical Works of Geoffrey Chaucer: Now First Put into Modern English*, trans. John S. P. Tatlock and Percy MacKaye (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1912).

29 According to Ambros this is the pipe and tabor (*Schwegel*), in Eberhard von Cersne, *Der Minne Regel . . .* (above, no. 3).

30 An unidentified instrument.

31 See Walter Salmen, *Gartenmusik* ... (above, no. 2), p. 32.

32 Claude Lévi-Strauss, *La pensée sauvage* (Paris: Plon, 1962).