Introduction

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Throughout the history of Arthurian research, the works of the poet Chrétien de Troyes have repeatedly proved a rewarding area of study. Chrétien was the first to combine a series of Arthurian motifs and episodes into extensive and carefully organized compositions. In addition, he instilled into those composi-tions a new meaning, transcending what was originally conveyed by the individual elements. The literary significance of these first Arthurian romances in both the aesthetic and the historical sphere has earned them world-wide recognition, and an examination of the works of later Arthurian poets cannot diminish this significance; on the contrary, it will become apparent that the findings of the present study include new arguments to support and confirm the importance of the early Arthurian literature for several generations of authors in the thirteenth century and beyond. This study is intended as a contribution to both reception history, examining the medieval response to Chrétien's poetry, and genre history, surveying the evolution of Arthurian verse romance in French. The main objective is to describe the evolutionary changes taking place between Chrétien's _Erec et Enide_ and Froissart's _Meliador_, the first and last examples of the genre. However, it is not very fruitful to assess the works of later Arthurian writers in terms of a reduction in quality by comparison with Chrétien. Consequently it is not the aim of this investigation to confirm yet again the status of Chrétien's works as the unequalled masterpieces of the whole of Arthurian literature. Instead these works should be understood as the starting-point for the history of their genre, which can subsequently be traced over a period of two centuries in the French-speaking world.

A further focus of interest lies in the analysis of the influence of Chrétien's works, although not as hitherto in the sense of a study of sources and motifs. Instead the investigation focuses on the reception of the Arthurian romances within the same genre and specifically on the response of Chrétien's successors within that genre to the first Arthurian poet. The way in which a succession of thirteenth-century Arthurian romances can be seen to strive for innovation calls

1

The evolution of Arthurian romance

for particular attention. At that stage, as the evolution of the genre shows, a tendency towards consolidation was always accompanied by efforts at revitalization. An analysis of the audience for the romances in question and a description of the relationship of the texts to the social and political conditions of the period 1170–1370 form the concluding part of the study.

THE CURRENT STATE OF RESEARCH

Even amongst Arthurian scholars the French Arthurian romances of the thirteenth century are not at all well known. They are usually regarded as the inferior products of several generations of decadent imitators, and are therefore largely excluded from discussions of literary history. They are mentioned with greater frequency only in studies tracing the history of motifs, or when they can shed light on questions of chronology. The proportion of research that has been devoted to them is correspondingly minimal, and until the present study no recent comprehensive evaluation of these romances was available.

Information on the content of post-Chrétien Arthurian literature can be found in the usual works of reference.[1] A sizeable group of studies on the 'post-classical' Arthurian romance appeared around the turn of the century in the form of theses dealing with 'The romance X in relation to Chrétien de Troyes'. They are mainly concerned with the study of style and recurring motifs.[2]

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[1] Gaston Paris, 'Romans en vers du cycle de la Table ronde', in *Histoire Littéraire de la France*, Vol. XXX (Paris, 1888), pp. 1–270; this is still the most important and extensive study. G. Gröber (ed.), *Grundriss der romanischen Philologie*, 2 vols in 4 (Strasburg, 1888–1902), Vol. II.1 (Strasburg, 1902), especially 'Artusepen und Graaldichtung', pp. 495–510, 'Artus- und Graalependichtung nach Crestien', pp. 511–23, and 'Artusepen', pp. 785–91. J. D. Bruce, *The Evolution of Arthurian Romance from the Beginnings Down to the Year 1300*, 2 vols (Göttingen and Baltimore, 1923; second edition, Göttingen, 1928, reprinted Gloucester, Mass., 1958), deals with Chrétien's successors in Volume I, Chapter III.I, pp. 100–28, while Volume II contributes the most detailed available accounts of the content of their romances. The literary history by U. T. Holmes, *A History of Old French Literature from the Origins to 1300*, second edition (New York, 1962), contains accounts of content as well as helpful references to manuscripts and dating. Alexandre Micha, 'Miscellaneous French Romances in Verse', in *ALMA*, pp. 358–92, contains the most recent review of scholarship. The new *Grundriß der romanischen Literaturen des Mittelalters*, edited by H. R. Jauss and E. Köhler (Heidelberg, 1968–), includes an article by A. Micha entitled 'Les romans arthuriens', Vol. IV, *Roman* (1978), C.I, pp. 380–99. Wilhelm Kellermann, 'L'éthique chevaleresque et courtoise dans les romans bretons, et son influence' (unpublished paper given at the Eleventh International Arthurian Congress in Exeter, 19 August 1975), and 'Ritterliches und höfisches Ethos am Beispiel des nachklassischen französischen Artusromans in Versen. Mit einem Blick auf den entsprechenden deutschen Roman' (unpublished paper given to the Germanist Seminar at Vienna University, 19 October 1977).

[2] Without the groundwork carried out in these studies, which emanated predominantly from Göttingen, the present investigation would have encountered serious difficulties. The Romance

2

Introduction

Hitherto the texts have sometimes been arranged in sequence according to content or approximate chronology, but they have always been studied in isolation from each other. A brief account of the plot would be followed by lists of motifs that also occur in other romances, indications of the episodes and verbatim passages borrowed from Chrétien, a discussion of the possible date and some sort of value-judgement, for which Chrétien's works were the yardstick, even if the writers were sometimes prepared to be benevolent to the extent of acknowledging some ability in a later poet when faced with a particularly nice scene or a witty dialogue.

This individual treatment of the texts has so far prevented any scrutiny of the common ground between examples of the genre, or of what is conveyed by the texts as a sequence. The method applied in the present study has therefore been designed to scan all texts in the category of Arthurian verse romances in search of their persistent shared features, which do indeed exhibit a continuity sufficient to group the texts as a genre.[3] The definition of a particular genre in terms of content can only be derived from a scrutiny of the individual texts for typical elements which can then in turn serve as the basis for generalizations. Only a group of characteristics elicited in this fashion can enable us to define the genre appropriately. The prime concern is thus not to classify but to describe.[4]

Seminar at Göttingen was even able to make available a number of the texts used by former research students, complete with their pencilled annotations, which were particularly stimulating for the current project.

[3] C. Cormeau, 'Wigalois' und 'Diu Crône': zwei Kapitel zur Gattungsgeschichte des nachklassischen Aventiureromans (Zurich and Munich, 1977), pursues goals comparable with those of this investigation, and he achieves similar results in many respects. There is an extensive correlation between the generic characteristics of German post-classical Arthurian romances and those of the French romances. For the German writers of the thirteenth century the works of Hartmann von Aue and Wolfram von Eschenbach fulfil the same role in their system of references as Chrétien's romances do in France (pp. 68 and 105). In his first section Cormeau deals with questions of generic theory in great detail. In the preface and the introductory chapter he gives notice of a more comprehensive study of the remaining German Arthurian romances not included in his current investigation, and it is to be hoped that this project will soon be realized. Only a complete survey of both French and non-French Arthurian romances in the context of the history of the genre will open the way for an understanding of their more far-reaching links and interrelationships, and of the spread and consolidation of constant elements within the broad supranational genre of Arthurian romance.

[4] The presentation of this material is also intended as a small contribution to a history of the complete network of medieval literary genres. For this reason comparisons and references are introduced whenever possible to other related or contemporary genres and to links with non-French Arthurian literature. See E. Köhler, 'Gattungssystem und Gesellschaftssystem', Romanistische Zeitschrift für Literaturgeschichte 1 (1977), 7–22, and H. R. Jauss, 'Theorie der Gattungen und Literatur des Mittelalters', Grundriß der romanischen Literaturen des Mittelalters, edited by H. R. Jauss and E. Köhler, Vol. I (Heidelberg, 1972), pp. 107–38.

The evolution of Arthurian romance

THE TEXTS TO BE STUDIED

With the help of the reference works mentioned above it is possible to draw up a list of texts to serve as the basis for the following study. An element of difficulty arises from the fact that some scholars may characterize a work as Arthurian where others deny it this quality. Even the editors of texts sometimes lead us on a false trail. Thus on the one hand many works are termed *roman d'aventure* which could more clearly and precisely be labelled *roman arthurien*, while on the other hand one comes across the subtitle *roman arthurien* in places where this scarcely seems justified, for example in the case of *Le Roman de Silence*. Gröber also classifies *Brun de la Montagne* and *Cristal et Clarie* amongst the Arthurian romances. However, the use of a few Arthurian names and locations or an exceedingly tenuous link between the plot and the Arthurian court does not automatically turn a romance of adventure into an Arthurian romance, if individual examples of the genre are assessed on the basis of their group characteristics. For this reason the above-named texts are disregarded here, as also are romances like *Blandin de Cornouailles*, which has nothing in common with the Arthurian world except the Cornish setting.[5] The metre alone of *Brun de la Montagne* (3962 decasyllabic *laisses* in Meyer's edition) is a clear enough indication that it does not belong to the genre. Similarly, the *Roman de Silence* names King Arthur at the beginning (Thorpe's edition, line 109) and Merlin several times at the end, but there is no other indication of Arthurian connections. The eponymous heroine, Silence, is a woman. This too is un-Arthurian, since the Arthurian romance remains throughout its history a romance of chivalry and must therefore inevitably revolve around a male hero.

A further problem occurs with the prose romances. Nobody can deny their Arthurian character, but if one postulates a wider category of 'Arthurian romance' it soon becomes clear that the form (verse or prose) is a decisive criterion, such that one has to distinguish at the very least between two sub-groups, if not indeed between two separate genres, the verse romances and the prose romances. The verse romances adhere to principles of structure and meaning different from those of the prose romances, even if both sometimes have the same protagonists, similar sequences of *aventure* and much the same length, as well as having their origins during the same period. The concerns of the prose romances are completely different, the mood is serious and the outcome tragic. The inevitability of fate manifested in the death of the king and his knights, a pronounced element of symbolism, the guilt and failure of the heroes in their quests, the admonitory tone of the narration with its call to

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[5] R. Lejeune, 'The Troubadours', in *ALMA*, pp. 393–9, classifies *Blandin de Cornouailles* as an Arthurian romance.

4

Introduction

self-examination in the face of the fateful events described—these features
constitute the essential nature of the prose romances. The interpretation of the
narrative as reflecting the process of salvation is seen to place overriding
limitations on human individuality, and to leave no room for it to unfold freely
in the way that is central to verse romance. The verse romances like the prose
romances lay claim to truth, but this is manifested in a different form as a general
and exemplary truth in place of the literary and theological interpretation of
events.

Further differences in the respective characteristics of prose romances and
verse romances can be found in the following pairs of opposites, although this
still cannot claim to be a comprehensive list:

Prose	*Verse*
Progression of time and ageing of the characters.	Spiritual maturity without ageing process. Progression of time solely with regard to prescribed goal.
Strong element of symbolism.	Symbolism largely avoided.
Lineage has religious significance.	Lineage of secondary importance.
Narrative time-span covers several generations.	Narrative time-span of one to two years.
Prophetic dreams as omens of impending disaster.	Prophecies serve to glorify the hero.
The reader is moved to fear, emotion and compassion.	The reader is moved to admiration and pleasure.
Lancelot, Guinevere, Morholt, Galahad, Bohort and Perceval are important protagonists.	These characteers are of no significance in the verse romances.
The heroes are predestined to perform deeds of deliverance.	The motif of predestination is largely eliminated.
General avoidance of romantic involvement for the protagonists; love is seen as a harmful force.	The protagonists' love-relationships are central; love is always seen in a positive light.
References to Geoffrey and Wace, and to historical models outside the genre.	References to prototypes within the genre (Chrétien).

The distinctive groups of characteristics make it possible to describe the
Arthurian verse romances in isolation from the Arthurian prose romances.

5

References to the latter are therefore intended to serve merely as points of comparison and as illustrations of the tendencies postulated for the verse romances.

It is not possible to be so unequivocal with regard to whether the *Perceval* Continuations have to be taken into account on the basis of their metrical form, which is identical with that of the verse romances. The romances that are not continuations are characterized by their not touching on the Grail quest in any way, and even the protagonists of the *Perceval* Continuations (apart from Gawain) play only a minimal part or none at all in these other romances. Here too we see that the concerns and aims of the Continuations differ from those of the verse romances; they set out to extend or conclude a given plot begun by Chrétien and this determines their inner structure. By contrast, the verse romances that are not continuations and are independent of the Grail romance are distinguished, like Chrétien's early romances, by their inherent completeness and their purposeful structure. On the other hand, late verse romances like *Escanor* and especially *Claris et Laris* with their sheer bulk, the multiple threads of the plot which can be dropped and picked up again at any time (the technique of *entrelacement*) and also their particular protagonists, are once again so close to the *Perceval* Continuations that it is not possible to effect a rigid separation. However, we are clearly dealing with two different manifestations of the genre of Arthurian verse romances, where the *Perceval* Continuations are to be seen as a specialized off-shoot from the main body of Arthurian verse. The further ramifications of both groups of texts culminate in the prose romances. This assessment of their position accounts for the fact that the Continuations are mentioned only peripherally, albeit repeatedly, in the course of this study.

These fundamental considerations leave us with a genre incorporating the following texts.

The five Arthurian romances by Chrétien:

> *Erec*
> *Cligés*
> *Lancelot*
> *Yvain*
> *Perceval.* [6]

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[6] Quotations will be taken from the editions by Roques (*Erec, Lancelot* and *Yvain*), Micha (*Cligés*) and Roach (*Perceval*). Where line numbers are given the additional figures in square brackets refer to the corresponding lines in the editions by Foerster (*Erec, Cligés, Lancelot* and *Yvain*) and Hilka (*Perceval*). Full details of all these editions are given in the Bibliography.

Introduction

A further fifteen romances (in alphabetical order):

L'Atre périlleux
Beaudous
Le Bel Inconnu
Li Chevaliers as deus espees
Claris et Laris
Durmart
Escanor
Fergus
Floriant et Florete
Hunbaut
Meliador
Meraugis
Les Merveilles de Rigomer
La Vengeance Raguidel
Yder
(Jaufré).[7]

The romance of *Jaufré* has been included in the study despite being composed not in French but in Occitan. In my opinion *Jaufré* does not represent a reworking of a lost Old French original, but is an independent composition. The only truly Arthurian romance to emerge from Occitania is so closely related to the texts from northern France that it has a persuasive case for being allocated to the same genre, albeit with some reservations. The reasons for such a close relationship may lie in the strong cultural and political connections between south and north in the thirteenth century. It will become clear that *Jaufré* shows the same group characteristics as the other Arthurian romances dealt with here; it can even be seen as an especially typical example of the genre.[8]

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[7] For editions see the Bibliography. As a rule the quotations will be taken from the older editions, unless the more recent ones offer fundamental editorial improvements, as for example in the cases of *Beaudous, Chevalier à l'épée, Mule, Durmart, Cor* and *Mantel*. [In this translation, quotations from *Beaudous* have been taken from the published edition by Ulrich rather than the unpublished dissertation by Lamarque. Quotations from *Fergus* are taken from the edition by Frescoln, which was not available at the time of this study but is now much more accessible than the two nineteenth-century editions and has the advantage of continuous line-numbering.]

[8] Gaston Paris rightly includes *Jaufré* in his survey in 'Romans en vers', pp. 215ff. In the following study the individual romances will be dealt with at very different levels of intensity. This would seem sensible and indeed necessary in cases where numerous pieces of research have already been carried out (as for example with *Le Bel Inconnu* or the lays of *Cor* and *Mantel*), or where the specific line of inquiry in this study rules out any more detailed work on those texts which contain no significant material relevant to the chosen points of focus.

In addition, there are five fragments to be included:

> *Les Enfances Gauvain*
> *Gogulor*
> *Ilas et Solvas*
> *Le Vallet a la cote mautaillie*
> *(Melior).*[9]

As far as we can judge, these fragments all appear to be the remains of longer romances. In so far as we are able to extract coherent information from them, they can shed important light on the frequency of particular scenes and motifs, and this helps to highlight what may be regarded as typical. For this reason they are included in the study to supplement those texts that have been transmitted in a more complete form.

We shall also be taking account of the lays and shorter Arthurian narratives, and this involves a group of eight texts:

> *Le Chevalier à l'épée*
> *Lai du cor*
> *Lai du cort mantel*
> *Gliglois*
> *Lanval*
> *La Mule sans frein*
> *Tyolet*
> *Melion.*[10]

However, given that Chrétien's romances are taken as the point of reference, the other full-scale romances occupy the bulk of the analysis, since they offer the only chance to observe the evolution of the genre in all its different aspects. Nevertheless, the Arthurian lays and shorter narratives are often cited to illustrate certain tendencies within that evolution and to highlight various themes and motifs. Although their more limited scope renders many of them unsuitable for the elaboration of characteristic structural patterns, the shorter

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[9] For editions see the Bibliography. In the case of the fragment *Melior* it is doubtful whether we are really dealing with an Arthurian romance: a queen (Guinevere?) is here unjustly accused of the murder of the king (Arthur?); Melior offers to defend her in a duel. The fragment seems to belong to the beginning of the romance, but in that position the motif would be absolutely unique as the opening of an Arthurian work.

[10] These narratives range in length from 595 lines (*Cor*) to 2942 lines (*Gliglois*). In this study they are distinguished from the verse romances on the basis of their structure, which differs in being limited to one central adventure, with the narrative presented in a concise manner and no sub-plots. For editions see the Bibliography.

Introduction

texts can still be regarded in many respects as very 'pure' examples of Arthurian narrative.[11]

The working hypothesis of this study is that all the texts listed above belong to a group that we would wish to call a genre. They are united by a series of standard features: the metre, a comparable structure, the shared subject-matter, characteristic plots and themes, similar circumstances of composition and finally their position with respect to other genres.[12] The dominant category of the French Arthurian verse romances, with its fringe groupings of Arthurian lays and Continuations, has a further advantage to offer when studied in terms of the evolution of the genre, for it can be observed as a historical phenomenon, with the first and last examples of the genre spanning a lengthy period of time.[13] The term 'genre' can therefore be understood as a category with a historical role.

THE EVOLUTION OF THE GENRE

Gustav Gröber spoke of the 'Arthurian epic' as a type of narrative poetry already exemplified in the works of Chrétien, its first proponent:

> The individual poems are of roughly similar length, and have a constant metre, standard motifs, characters and groups of characters, and distinct levers and devices to advance or retard the plot, while they deal with the supernatural even more freely than the Tristan poems... The standard characters of these epic poems are the Welsh King Arthur, his wife Guinevere, his nephew Gawain and the steward Kay, who with other elect knights such as Yvain and Lancelot amongst others constitute the king's Round Table... The knights of the Round Table do not normally differ in their fundamental nature but only in degree, and one of them is usually the protagonist of the plot. The poems will recount episodes of his life if he is deemed to be well known (episodic epics), or will present his life and deeds in full if they are only now being made known (biographical epics). The Round Table with Arthur and his court form the background to these works. The plot is made up of adventures, *aventures*, which

[11] The lays of *Cor* and *Mantel* are variations on the theme of the chastity test, just as the lays of *Lanval* and *Melion* represent variations on the theme of fairy mistresses.

[12] Additional characteristic and constant features will be brought to light in the later course of this survey, amongst them for example the signals at the beginning of a romance that indicate its generic grouping, and also the particular political and ideological overtones of the genre.

[13] 'A genre like courtly romance, where the starting-point, the spread and the milieu are so clearly defined, can thereby offer an excellent opportunity for understanding the creation of a literary tradition, not only in terms of individual relationships between authors, but as a wider literary process that transcends individuals and builds on the interplay between authors and their public. Such a study can also help lead to perceptions which have a relevance beyond the individual historical genre.' (Translated from Cormeau, *'Wigalois' und 'Diu Crône'*, p. 1.)

9

The evolution of Arthurian romance

> may be embarked upon at random, or follow upon a departure undertaken for
> a particular purpose, or be deliberately sought. They serve to highlight the
> courage and courtly nature of the knight errant, revealing him as a worthy
> member of the ideal company of knights at Arthur's court.[14]

Chrétien's works reflect at least two different strands of tradition. The first is the written tradition from the British Isles of Latin and vernacular history, which in turn incorporates in its Arthurian sections elements from popular tradition and legend, as in the *Life of Gildas*. Meanwhile an oral tradition of Arthurian story-telling must be postulated for the regions of Celtic settlement. Chrétien combines both strands in his poetic *conjointure* and is thus the first to bring about a change of function or direction in both traditions.[15] From this twofold transformation emerge his verse romances: *Erec, Cligés, Lancelot, Yvain* and *Perceval*; thus Chrétien becomes the innovator of a new genre. It is clear, however, that in the course of his literary development Chrétien adopted a succession of different routes in his quest for a *conjointure* of individual Arthurian elements. After *Erec* he experiments with a completely different kind of structure in *Cligés* (the story extending over two generations, the oriental setting, the dissociation from *Tristan*), while in *Yvain* he returns to the *Erec* pattern. *Lancelot* differs from the previous romances in its new approach to love and in its unprecedented introduction of a second hero who also sets out to seek Queen Guinevere, even if he remains permanently in the shadow of Lancelot, the chief protagonist. When compared with the *Conte du Graal*, all these works are still characterized by unity of action and by the absence of any mystical or religious transcendental dimension. Chrétien's last work combines Arthurian material with the Grail theme, while the division of the action between two protagonists, already foreshadowed in *Lancelot*, becomes a new structural principle.

In terms of literary history Chrétien's romances form the prototypes of a genre; the abundant possibilities contained within them ensure the survival of the genre throughout nearly two centuries. Furthermore, Chrétien's works set the basic pattern that becomes the starting-point for a network of relationships inherent in the genre. The Arthurian romances of the thirteenth century supply variants to this basic pattern, although generally without exploiting extreme situations or speculative elaborations, a tendency recently postulated for the

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[14] Translated from Gröber, *Grundriss der romanischen Philologie*, Vol. II.1, pp. 495–6. Gröber uses the misleading term 'Artusepos' (Arthurian epic); however, he intends it to refer to the epic narrative style rather than to a particular genre.

[15] For more on these concepts compare the studies by Jauss, 'Theorie der Gattungen und Literatur des Mittelalters', and Köhler, 'Gattungssystem und Gesellschaftssystem'.