IX

THE FRINGES OF ARTHURIAN FICTION

Bart Besamusca and Jessica Quinlan

In 1980, Beate Schmolke-Hasselmann published her groundbreaking study *Der arthurische Versroman von Chrétien bis Froissart*.[1] According to its subtitle, the monograph was devoted to the 'Geschichte einer Gattung' (the history of a genre) – an indication repeated in the main title of the splendid English translation of the work.[2] Although *The Evolution of Arthurian Romance* suggests a broad treatment of Arthurian literature, Schmolke-Hasselmann's discussion is in fact limited to French texts. This equation of Arthurian literature with French Arthurian literature has been, as is well known, a widespread phenomenon in international Arthurian scholarship until quite recently. Norris Lacy has termed this emphasis on French texts 'scholarly "gallocentrism"'.[3] The publications listed yearly in the *Bibliographical Bulletin of the International Arthurian Society* convey the impression that the concept of Arthurian literature awakens in the Arthurian community first and foremost associations with the corpus of French romances, and, to a lesser degree, with English and German texts.[4]

While the dominance of scholarship on French narratives is understandable in the light of the position of French literature at the beginning of the genre's history and the sheer size of the corpus, the particular interest devoted to English and German texts over the years can in all

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1 Beate Schmolke-Hasselmann, *Der arthurische Versroman von Chrestien bis Froissart. Zur Geschichte einer Gattung*, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für romanische Philologie 177 (Tübingen, 1980).

2 Beate Schmolke-Hasselmann, *The Evolution of Arthurian Romance: The Verse Tradition from Chrétien to Froissart*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature 35, trans. Margaret and Roger Middleton (Cambridge, 1998).

3 Norris J. Lacy, 'Preface', in *Medieval Arthurian Literature: A Guide to Recent Research*, ed. Norris J. Lacy (New York & London, 1996), pp. vii–xii (p. ix).

4 Cf. Bart Besamusca, 'Introduction: the Pan-European Approach', in *Arthurian Literature* 24 (2007), ix–xiv (ix–x).

probability be explained, at least in part, by the vast number of scholars involved. It is certainly true, however, that the inclusion of Arthurian texts written in the many other medieval languages is a prerequisite for a more balanced view on the evolution of Arthurian romance in Europe. In recent years, Arthurian scholarship has clearly moved in this direction. A case in point is the 'Arthurian Archives' series, which since 1998 has overseen the publication of authoritative editions of medieval texts with facing English translation. Alongside volumes presenting French and German texts, the series currently includes Dutch, Italian, Latin and Scandinavian romances, making a substantial number of texts originating from the lesser known literatures accessible to a wide readership.[5] Further clear signs of the growing interest in Arthurian corpora other than French, English and German texts are issues 21 (2004) and 24 (2007) of *Arthurian Literature*, which are devoted to the Irish and Welsh literature and the European dimensions of Arthurian literature respectively. Finally, the latest publications in the 'Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages' series, which updates Loomis's 1959 milestone, deserve mention.[6] Following the four volumes on Welsh (I), English (II), German and Dutch (III) and French (IV) literature, two further volumes devoted to Latin (V) and Scandinavian and East Slavic (VI) literature were published in 2011.[7]

In line with this trend, the present article seeks to make a contribution towards highlighting the pan-European dimensions of medieval Arthurian literature by turning its gaze expressly to what we have labelled the fringes of Arthurian fiction.[8] The ambiguity of the word 'fringes' is intended. We want to make clear, first, that the fringes of Arthurian fiction are occupied by those literatures which can be said to constitute the edges of the Arthurian tradition by virtue of the small number of romances they comprise. Secondly, 'fringes' indicates that the international Arthurian community has paid limited attention to these literatures (with the notable exception, of course, of the Welsh corpus). Thirdly, the use of the word 'fringes' hints at the fact that the corpora under discussion emanate from

5 See http://www.boydellandbrewer.com/store/listcategoriesandproducts.asp?idcategory=47.

6 *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages: A Collaborative History*, ed. Roger Sherman Loomis (Oxford, 1959).

7 See *The Arthur of Medieval Latin Literature: The Development and Dissemination of the Arthurian Legend in Medieval Latin*, Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages 5, ed. Siân Echard (Cardiff, 2011) and *The Arthur of the North: The Arthurian Legend in the Norse and Rus' Realms*, Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages 6, ed. Marianne E. Kalinke (Cardiff, 2011). The volume dedicated to medieval Italian Arthurian literature, edited by Gloria Allaire and Regina Psaki, is forthcoming.

8 The findings outlined in this article emanate from research carried out within the project *Arthurian Literature: A Pan-European Approach*, funded by the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO) and supervised by Bart Besamusca at Utrecht University from 2004–2008. The authors wish to acknowledge with gratitude their indebtedness to the contributions of Cora Dietl, Martine Meuwese and Sacha Voogd. The database which was developed in the course of this project is accessible at www.arthurianfiction.org.

literary traditions located on the edges of Europe in a geographical sense, which were in some cases subject to a less immediate permeation by the influence of the French courtly culture than the English and German. By using the word 'fiction' we mean that we have disregarded those texts which belong to the pseudo-historical tradition, originating with Geoffrey's *Historia Regum Britanniae*.

The present article does not aspire to present an exhaustive study, but seeks rather to trace the broad outlines of the development of central Arthurian elements on the outskirts of the tradition, examining the role of convention and innovation in responses to Arthurian fiction outside of French, German and English literature. In accordance with our comparative approach, the analysis of individual corpora as separate entities is avoided. Instead, we examine the further development of the well known trajectories of the core Arthurian heroes Erec, Yvain, Perceval, Gawain, Lancelot, Tristan, Arthur, as well as those of newcomers – protagonists exclusive to the fringe traditions – who have been allotted a section to themselves.[9] The literary traditions involved consist of the Belarusian, Czech, Danish, Dutch, Hebrew, Icelandic, Irish, Italian, Latin, Norse, Spanish, Swedish and Welsh corpora. Readers seeking information on the composition of the individual corpora may consult the appendix, where all texts discussed here are listed according to the language in which they were written.

Erec, Yvain and Perceval

The narratives of Chrétien de Troyes enjoyed great popularity in the French-speaking cultural areas, as is shown by the substantial corpus of manuscripts in which his texts are transmitted and the massive influence of his oeuvre on later French authors.[10] Furthermore, as in English and German literature, Chrétien's *Erec*, *Yvain* and *Perceval* were translated in a number of fringe literatures.[11] Outside of the Dutch tradition, in which just one of these narratives was adapted, the renditions of these texts appear in clusters: there is a group of Scandinavian texts and a set of Welsh

9 Merlin, Galehot and Galahad, who seldom appear in the role of primary hero, cannot be viewed as areas of primary interest in the fringe traditions. For this reason, these characters have been excluded from our study.

10 See Keith Busby et al., *The Manuscripts of Chrétien de Troyes*, 2 vols., Faux titre 71–72 (Amsterdam & Atlanta, 1993); *The Legacy of Chrétien de Troyes*, ed. Norris J. Lacy, Douglas Kelly, Keith Busby, 2 vols., Faux titre 31, 37 (Amsterdam, 1987–88); Schmolke-Hasselmann, *The Evolution of Arthurian Romance*.

11 For an overview of these translations, see Michelle Szkilnik, 'Medieval Translations and Adaptations of Chrétien's Works', in *A Companion to Chrétien de Troyes*, Arthurian Studies 63, ed. Norris J. Lacy and Joan Tasker Grimbert (Cambridge, 2005), pp. 202–13.

tales.[12] The existence of the first cluster can be explained by the ambitions of King Hákon Hákonarson of Norway (r. 1217–1263), who wanted to heighten the cultural prestige of his court by commissioning Norse translations of French texts, now known as the *riddarasögur*.[13] The Welsh cluster lacks such an explanation; recently, critics have even doubted that the three texts were perceived as a group in the Middle Ages.[14] What matters for our present purposes, however, is the fact that the portrayal of Erec, Yvain and Perceval in the various traditions frequently deviates from the French tradition.

Erec

The Welsh and Icelandic corpora preserve versions of Chrétien's tale of Erec in the romances *Geraint* and *Erex saga*. Modern scholarship holds that *Geraint* was written in the second or third decade of the thirteenth century.[15] The author of this Welsh prose text followed Chrétien's *Erec* fairly closely.[16] After the marriage of Geraint and Enid, however, the Welsh tale presents an alternative explanation for the hero's attitude towards his wife. Geraint mistakenly suspects Enid of planning to be unfaithful to him when he wakes up as a result of her laments, and he explains that by journeying together he will show her that her intended infidelity will not be easy to carry out because of his valour.[17] Due to this difference, Geraint is not portrayed here as a hero who has to find a balance between chivalry and love, like the French Erec, but as a jealous husband.[18]

Erex saga is an Icelandic prose version of *Erec et Enide*. Like *Ívens saga*, it may faithfully transmit a thirteenth-century Norwegian translation of Chrétien's romance. However, it is more likely an Icelandic revision of this translation.[19] Like *Geraint*, *Erex saga* presents a shortened version of the French tale, but the Scandinavian text is much more a rewriting of Chrétien than *Geraint*.[20] The first meeting of Erex and Evida, for example, includes a noteworthy deviation from the French original. Unlike Erec,

12 The Middle Dutch *Perchevael* is treated in the section devoted to Gawain.

13 See Geraldine Barnes, 'Scandinavian Versions of Arthurian Romance', in *A Companion to Arthurian Literature*, ed. Helen Fulton (Malden, MA, & Oxford, 2009), pp. 189–201 (pp. 189–91).

14 See Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan, 'Migrating Narratives: *Peredur*, *Owain*, and *Geraint*', in *A Companion to Arthurian Literature*, ed. Fulton, pp. 128–41 (pp. 129–30).

15 See Lloyd-Morgan, 'Migrating Narratives', p. 139.

16 For an overview, see *Ystorya Gereint uab Erbin*, ed. Robert L. Thomson (Dublin, 1997), pp. xxv-lxiii.

17 See *Ystorya Gereint*, ed. Thomson, ll. 707–30, and *The Mabinogion*, trans. Gwyn Jones and Thomas Jones, introduction Gwyn Jones, preface John Updike (New York & Toronto, 2000), p. 222.

18 Cf. *Ystorya Gereint*, ed. Thomson, pp. lxvii–viii.

19 See *Norse Romances I: The Tristan Legend*, Arthurian Archives 3, ed. Marianne E. Kalinke (Cambridge, 1999), p. viii.

20 See Kalinke (ed.), *The Arthur of the North*, pp. 112–20 (by Claudia Bornholdt).

for whom Enide initially represents a means to engage in combat against Yder, Erex falls in love with the girl the moment he sees her, and 'þá feldi hún allan sinn elskuhuga til hans' ('she fell very much in love with him').[21] With Evida's consent the two are betrothed before dinner takes place.[22] *Erex saga* emphasizes here the love between the protagonists. In addition, the prose version contains a number of episodes which are absent in the French source. Like Dietrich von Bern in *Didreks saga*, Erex fights a flying dragon in order to save the life of a duke, Plato. He also battles against seven evil knights who have captured a number of knights and maidens.[23] This focus on chivalric action places Erex's valour clearly at the centre of narrative interest. The conclusion of *Erex saga* relates, unlike Chrétien's romance, that Erex and Evida ruled their kingdom in peace and had two sons, who became brave knights, an ending in accordance with narrative conventions of the sagas.[24]

Yvain

Chrétien's romance of Yvain gave rise to a Welsh prose tale, *Owain*, and two Scandinavian narratives: the Old Norse prose narrative *Ívens saga* and the Swedish verse text *Ivan Lejonriddaren*. Like *Geraint*, the Welsh text is believed to date from the second or third decade of the thirteenth century.[25] *Owain* presents an abridged version of Chrétien's text, including various deviations, the majority of which reveal a particular interest in the hero's prowess as a knight.[26] At the fountain, for example, Arthur grants Kei the chance to challenge the hero a second time after his initial failure, with the result that the seneschal is unseated twice by Owain.[27] When everybody is defeated except Arthur and Gwalchmei (Gawain), the king's nephew battles against Owain for three days, until Gwalchmei loses his helmet and is recognized by his opponent.[28] The hero's prowess is stressed again at the end of the Welsh tale, where, in contrast to Chrétien's *Yvain*, the reconciliation of the couple is followed by a further episode – the equivalent of the 'Pesme Aventure' section of the French tale – in which Owain defeats Du Traws, the Black Oppressor.[29] The concluding lines

21 *Norse Romances II: Knights of the Round Table*, Arthurian Archives 4, ed. Marianne E. Kalinke (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 217–65 (pp. 226–27).

22 *Norse Romances II*, ed. Kalinke, pp. 228–29.

23 *Norse Romances II*, ed. Kalinke, pp. 246–50. For *Didreks saga*, see p. 219.

24 *Norse Romances II*, ed. Kalinke, p. 258. See also Geraldine Barnes, 'Arthurian Chivalry in Old Norse,' *Arthurian Literature* 7 (1987), 50–102 (62).

25 See Lloyd-Morgan, 'Migrating Narratives', p. 139.

26 For an overview of the differences, see *Owein or Chwedyl Iarlles y Ffynnawn*, ed. R. L. Thomson (Dublin, 1968), pp. xxix–lvi.

27 See *Owein*, ed. Thomson, ll. 499–510, and *The Mabinogion*, trans. Jones and Jones, p. 153.

28 See *Owein*, ed. Thomson, ll. 513–47, and *The Mabinogion*, trans. Jones and Jones, pp. 153–54.

29 See *Owein*, ed. Thomson, ll. 782–817, and *The Mabinogion*, trans. Jones and Jones, pp. 161–62.

relate that Owain was appointed commander (‘pennteulu’, l. 818) of Arthur’s war-band and state that he was always victorious when he had the three hundred swords of his grandfather Cenferchyn and his ravens (which also feature in *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy*) with him (ll. 819–21).[30] The narrator ultimately seems intent on depicting Owain not as a hero who struggles to achieve a balance between chivalry and love, like Yvain (and Erec), but as a warrior of renown.

Ívens saga also presents a shortened version of Chrétien’s *Yvain*. The Norse rendition, which according to the epilogue was commissioned by King Hákon, follows its French source closely.[31] There are, nevertheless, additions discernable, some of which are significant for the portrayal of Íven.[32] When the hero realizes that he has overstayed his leave, he laments his loss of joy, as does Yvain in Chrétien’s romance; unlike the French protagonist, however, Íven adds that he has also lost his reputation, his honour and his freedom.[33] This statement shows him to be a hero whose portrayal is influenced by the indigenous Scandinavian literary tradition.[34]

Completed in 1303, the Swedish translation of Chrétien’s Yvain, *Ivan Lejonriddaren* (or *Hærra Ivan*) is a verse text commissioned by the wife of the Norwegian King Hákon V Magnússon (r. 1299–1319), Queen Eufemia (d. 1312), to celebrate the engagement of her daughter Ingebjörg to Erik Magnusson, a brother of the king of Sweden. While the translator made use of *Ívens saga* in addition to his French source, his text in rhymed couplets is closer in form, length and content to *Yvain* than *Ívens saga*.[35] The Swedish narrative follows its French source without major changes, but repeatedly shifts the emphasis, showing more interest in chivalric activities than in the love theme.[36] Furthermore, the Swedish narrator frequently stresses that Ivan acts under God’s protection.[37] In the passage describing Ivan’s fight against the giant Fiælskarper (Harpin de la Montaigne), for instance, the hero is hit so hard that he almost falls from his horse. Here the narrator remarks: ‘þa halp Guþ hærra Ivan miok, at þæt hug eigh raþelika tok; þy at hafþe þæt skiællikæ takit han, þa vare døþ baþe ørs ok man’ (‘Then God helped Sir Ivan much, so that the blow did not strike so badly; if it had struck him properly, both man

30 See *The Mabinogion*, trans. Jones and Jones, pp. 162–63.

31 See *Norse Romance II*, ed. Kalinke, pp. 33–102 (p. 98). See also Kalinke (ed.), *The Arthur of the North*, pp. 107–12 (by Claudia Bornholdt).

32 See *Norse Romance II*, ed. Kalinke, p. 38.

33 See *Norse Romance II*, ed. Kalinke, pp. 74–75.

34 See Kalinke (ed.), *The Arthur of the North*, p. 111.

35 See Geraldine Barnes, ‘The Lion-Knight Legend in Old Norse Romance’, in *Die Romane von dem Ritter mit dem Löwen*, Chloe 20, ed. Xenja von Ertzdorff (Amsterdam & Atlanta, 1994), pp. 383–99 (p. 386, 392–94). See also Kalinke (ed.), *The Arthur of the North*, pp. 123–44, by William Layher (p. 139).

36 See Tony Hunt, ‘Herr Ivan Lejonriddaren’, *Mediaeval Scandinavia* 8 (1975), 168–86 (170–71).

37 Hunt, ‘Herr Ivan Lejonriddaren’, 182–84.

and horse would have been killed').[38] Similarly, the end of the narrative includes a blessing on the couple, uttered by Luneta: 'A hærra Guþ i himirik mæþ sina sighnaþa naþæ gøme Iþer saman baþæ ok late Iþer hær liva sva þæt I maghin himirikis glæþi fa ok naþer for utan ænda þa Iþer skal døþin hænda!' ('Ah, may the Lord God in Heaven with His blessed grace preserve you two and let you ever live in such a way that you will enjoy the Kingdom of Heaven and grace without end, when death seeks you!').[39]

Perceval

Chrétien's last romance is preserved in the Welsh prose text *Peredur* and the Norse prose romance *Parcevals saga*. The Welsh narrative has come down to us in a short version, which probably dates from the second quarter of the thirteenth century and concludes the tale with Peredur's rule together with the empress of Constantinople, and a long version, which brings the narrative to a conclusion in the Castle of Wonders.[40] *Peredur* differs significantly from Chrétien's *Perceval*: whereas the French romance features a main character who develops into the Grail hero, the hero of the Welsh narrative is destined to be the avenger of his kinsmen. In the first series of Welsh episodes, from young Peredur's stay in the wilderness up to his return to Arthur's court, the hero visits the castles of two of his uncles: the first one, who is lame, advises Peredur never to ask questions, while at the court of the second one he sees a bleeding lance and a head upon a salver being carried in procession. He also meets the witches of Caer Loyw, who train him in horse-riding and knightly combat.[41] The importance of this introduction of the kinsmen and the witches becomes clear towards the end of the Welsh text. The final sequence of adventures opens with the arrival of a loathly lady at Arthur's court, contains a short episode in which Gwalchmei is the main character, and relates how Peredur kills an enormous stag and how he finally arrives at the Castle of Wonders.[42] There, in the company of the lame uncle and Gwalchmei, it is revealed to Peredur that the witches are responsible for laming his uncle and killing his cousin, whose head

38 Marianne E. Kalinke (ed.), *Norse Romance III: Hærra Ivan*, Arthurian Archives 5, ed. and trans. Henrik Williams and Karin Palmgren (Cambridge, 1999), ll. 3457–60.

39 *Norse Romance III*, ed. Kalinke, ll. 6414–20.

40 See Lloyd–Morgan, 'Migrating Narratives', pp. 131–34, 138–39.

41 See *Historia Peredur vub Efrawc*, ed. Glenys Witchard Goetinck (Cardiff, 1976), pp. 7–35, and *The Mabinogion*, trans. Jones and Jones, pp. 164–81.

42 See *Historia Peredur*, ed. Goetinck, pp. 56–70, and *The Mabinogion*, trans. Jones and Jones, pp. 194–202.

was on the salver. By slaying the witches, Peredur avenges his relatives, fulfilling the prophecy.[43]

Unlike Chrétien's *Perceval*, the Norse prose narrative *Parcevals saga*, in all probability written at the behest of King Hákon Hákonarson, consists of two parts. After Parceval's visit to the hermit it is announced that his narrative has come to a conclusion: 'Ok lýkr hér nú sögu Parceval riddara' ('And now here ends the story of Parceval the Knight').[44] The second part, *Valvens Þáttr* ('Valven's Tale'), opens with the statement that the narrative now begins for the second time and will recount the deeds of Gawain.[45] This structural change is one of the many differences between the Norse text and its French source. The opening of *Parcevals saga*, for example, introduces the hero's father, a farmer who had been a brave knight and trained his son in archery and swordplay.[46] At the end of the first part, following the Good Friday episode, Parceval's narrative thread is suddenly rounded off, and the narrator remarks that he lived ever after as a good Christian. He returned to Blankiflúr, married her, ruled over her kingdom and was always victorious in knightly encounters.[47] Like the Welsh hero Peredur, Parceval is a protagonist whose development as a knight is complete at the end of his narrative.

The adaptation and rewriting of Chrétien's romances of Erec, Yvain and Perceval in the Welsh and Scandinavian corpora seem clearly to suggest an interest on the part of these traditions in preserving a body of Arthurian texts. While these heroes are never dissociated from the adventures which determine their trajectories in Chrétien's writings, the openness of the Welsh and Scandinavian authors to innovation is indicative of an approach characterized to a certain extent by the wish to adapt the tales of early Arthurian heroes to the needs of indigenous tradition.

Gawain

Arthur's nephew Gawain appears in the French verse romances as the king's right-hand man and a particular favourite with the ladies, noted and praised for his irreproachable courtesy and his infallible prowess in

43 Cf. also Ian Lovecy, 'Historia Peredur ab Efrawg', in *The Arthur of the Welsh: The Arthurian Legend in Medieval Welsh Literature*, Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages 1, ed. Rachel Bromwich, A. O. H. Jarman, and Brynley F. Roberts (Cardiff, 1991), pp. 171–82, who discusses interpretative problems related to the vengeance theme (pp. 179–80).

44 See Kalinke (ed.), *Norse Romances II*, ed. Kirsten Wolf, trans. Helen Maclean, pp. 103–216 (182–83).

45 *Norse Romances II*, ed. Kalinke, p. 184. The second part breaks off when Gawain has reached the castle of the queens.

46 *Norse Romances II*, ed. Kalinke, p. 108.

47 *Norse Romance II*, ed. Kalinke, p. 182.

deeds of knightly combat. Initially, the role of primary hero is not open to Gawain in these texts, and although he displays fundamental shortcomings from time to time, his virtues are rarely seriously questioned; criticism on the part of the narrator tends to remain implicit or, at most, takes the form of gentle humour, ultimately underlining a quintessentially elusive streak in this figure.[48] Far from the flower of chivalry we encounter in the verse romances, however, is the Gawain of the French prose tradition: here, the son of King Arthur's sister emerges as an embittered, fiercely vengeful and murderous knight.[49] In view of the spectrum of narrative possibilities associated with Gawain from the early years of the romance tradition, it is hardly surprising that he finds favour as a hero with the fringe traditions. Striking here is the particular interest in the development of his positive qualities.

Gawain's Emergence as an Arthurian Knight

De ortu Waluuani ('The Rise of Gawain'), possibly the earliest surviving romance with Gawain as its hero, is of uncertain dating and authorship. It may have been written as early as the mid-twelfth century, perhaps by Robert de Torigni, abbot of the Benedictine community at Mont Saint-Michel.[50] This prose text, which was heavily influenced by Geoffrey of Monmouth, recounts the birth, childhood and education of its hero, culminating in his integration at the Arthurian court.[51] Unlike Geoffrey, however, *De ortu Waluuani* makes the hero the illegitimate son of Anna and Lot, a tradition also reflected in the *Perlesvaus* and the *Enfances Gauvain*. Each of these four texts recounts his upbringing in Rome, but while Geoffrey and the two French authors place him directly in the care of the pope, in *De ortu Waluuani* he is raised initially by the fisherman Viamundus and then by the emperor, who is informed of his identity and acts with the blessing of the pope. Gawain begins his career in this text as a Fair Unknown: as a child, he is the 'Puer sine Nomine' (p. 64, l. 2),

48 For an overview of the development of the Gawain figure, see Raymond H. Thompson and Keith Busby (ed.), *Gawain: A Casebook* (New York, 2006). On his role in the French tradition, see Keith Busby, *Gauvain in Old French Literature* (Amsterdam, 1980) and Stoyan Atanassov, *L'Idole Inconnue: le personnage de Gauvain dans quelques romans du XIIIe siècle* (Orléans, 2000). On the German and Dutch contexts, see Bernhard Anton Schmitz, *Gauvain, Gawein, Walewein : die Emanzipation des ewig Verspäteten* (Tübingen, 2008).

49 See Fanni Bogdanow, 'The Character of Gauvain in the Thirteenth–Century Prose Romances,' in *Gawain: A Casebook*, ed. Thompson and Busby, pp. 173–81; Keith Busby, 'The Character of Gauvain in the *Prose Tristan*', in *Gawain: A Casebook*, ed. Thompson and Busby, pp. 183–207.

50 *De ortu Waluuani nepotis Arturi,* ed. and trans. Mildred Leake Day, in *Latin Arthurian Literature*, ed. and trans, M. L. Day, Arthurian Archives 11 (Cambridge, 2005), pp. 56–121. For an overview of research on the difficulties surrounding the date and authorship of this work, see Day's introduction to her text edition in *Latin Arthurian Literature*, pp. 2–11.

51 On the sources of *De ortu Waluuani*, see *Latin Arthurian Literature*, ed. and trans. Day, pp. 12–18.

while subsequent to his knighting he becomes known as the 'Miles cum tunica armature' ('Knight of the Surcoat', p. 64, ll. 35–36), and it is by this name that he introduces himself when he arrives at the Arthurian court as an emissary of the emperor, entirely unaware of his relationship with the king.[52] While Arthur for his part has been made privy to the fact that the outspoken new arrival is in fact the son of his sister, he awaits the accomplishment of some extraordinary exploit on the part of the hero before welcoming him as a member of his court (p. 112, ll. 34–38). Gawain's opportunity to impress his uncle will emerge when word arrives of the plight of the lady of the Castle of Maidens, heralding the first Arthurian adventure to be fought by the hero. Gawain responds scathingly when all efforts undertaken by Arthur and his men to defend the lady fail, but on Arthur's piqued invitation to join the battle, he quickly turns events with an extraordinary display of prowess.[53] While the narrator elaborates at some length on the ferocity of the combat, he is careful to stress that this hero, in keeping with his image in verse romance, does not engage in violence without reason: 'neminem quidem lesit nisi quem sibi fortuna resistentem obtulit' ('He injured no one except those who offered him resistance', p. 116, ll. 25–26). In view of the particular devotion to damsels in distress for which Gawain will become famous in later texts, it is also noteworthy that, while the beleaguered lady's beauty attracts the unwanted attention of the pagan king who besieges her, it is of little importance to the hero. The significance of this adventure seems to rest entirely on the reward which the delighted king bestows upon Gawain on successful completion: the public acknowledgement of his nephew and the collective initiation of the latter as a member of his court (p. 120, ll. 10–11).

The question of how Gawain came to enjoy his position of particular privilege at the court of King Arthur is answered in a different way by the later Irish prose romance *Eachtra an Mhadra Mhaoil* ('The Story of the Crop-Eared Dog').[54] The oldest manuscript of this text, whose indebtedness to the Irish tradition is unquestioned in scholarship, dates from 1517.[55] While Gawain, known here as Balbhuaidh de Cordibus, is depicted

[52] On the implications of Gawain as a Fair Unknown character in this romance, see Siân Echard, *Arthurian Narrative in the Latin Tradition*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature 36 (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 131–58 (p. 135).

[53] See *Latin Arthurian Literature*, ed. and trans. Day, pp. 116–18.

[54] *Eachtra an Mhadra Mhaoil. Eachtra Mhacaoimh–an–Iolair / The Story of the Crop-Eared Dog. The Story of Eagle-Boy. Two Irish Arthurian Romances,* ed. and trans. R. A. Stewart Macalister (London, 1998, originally 1908).

[55] William Gillies, 'Arthur in Gaelic Tradition. Part II: Romances and Learned Lore', *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies* 3 (1982), 41–75, and Joseph Falaky Nagy, 'Arthur and the Irish', in *A Companion to Arthurian Literature*, ed. Fulton, pp. 117–27, comment on this tendency as a general feature of Irish Arthurian romance. Bernadette Smelik, '*Eachtra an Mhadra Mhaoil*. Ein richtiger Artusroman?' in *Übersetzung, Adaptation und Akkulturation im insularen Mittelalter*,

from the beginning of the romance as a member of the household of King Arthur, there would appear to be some uncertainty regarding the nature of his relationship to the king.[56] In the text of the manuscript London, British Library, Egerton 128, dating from 1748, the king addresses the hero as his foster-son, whereas in the older manuscript, London, British Library, Egerton 1782, Gawain appears as Arthur's nephew. In any case, the close relationship between the hero and King Arthur is clearly underlined from the opening episode. In the course of a hunt in the Dangerous Forest, all of the knights of Arthur's court are enchanted and left fettered by the Knight of the Lantern, who promises to behead each and every one on his return. Gawain is at this point a young boy, not yet a knight – and by virtue of this very deficit the only one to have escaped challenge by the Knight of the Lantern and the only one now in a position to aid the king.[57] Arthur refers to the young hero fondly as 'an t-aon-dhuine is annsa liom d'fhearaibh an domhain' ('the one man dearest to me of the men of the world', pp. 10–12, ll. 162–63), and in an emergency knighting ceremony, Gawain is equipped with the king's own armour and accorded the title 'Sir Gawain'(p. 12, ll. 171–73). With the aid of the crop-eared dog – a further victim of the Knight of the Lantern – the young hero indeed succeeds in saving the royal retinue, and subsequently embarks on a series of adventures which will lead to the downfall of the Knight of the Lantern and the return of the crop-eared dog to human form. Gawain's primacy among the knights of the Arthurian court is finally confirmed by the narrator's remark that he ultimately succeeds King Arthur himself as lord of the Fort of the Red Hall (p. 72, ll. 44–45).

Gawain as Lover

A number of texts in the fringe traditions reveal a clear intention to dispel the criticism suffered by Gawain in the Old French tradition on the grounds of his incorrigible philandering. A noteworthy example in this context is the *Roman van Walewein* by Penninc and Pieter Vostaert, an indigenous Middle Dutch verse romance dating from around 1250, which paints Walewein in an unequivocally positive light.[58] This favourable view of Walewein appears all the more remarkable in the light of the elements in this romance borrowed from the *Queste del Saint Graal*,

ed. Erich Poppe and Hildegard L. C. Tristram (Münster, 1999), pp. 145–59, discusses the problem in detail with particular reference to this romance.

56 Macalister's translation of the hero's name as *Galahad* is now accepted as erroneous. See Gillies, 'Arthur in Gaelic Tradition', 45, footnote 15, and further, for a discussion of possible sources of the form *Bhalbhuaidh*, 60–61. In the translated passages quoted here, *Galahad* has accordingly been replaced by *Gawain*.

57 See Smelik, '*Eachtra*', p. 149.

58 *Dutch Romances I: Roman van Walewein,* Arthurian Archives 6, ed. and trans. David F. Johnson and Geert H. M. Claassens (Cambridge, 2000).

in which worldly knighthood is condemned and the Gawain figure slips into the role of vengeful and ignominious villain; the *Walewein* authors clearly reacted to the *Queste* by taking deliberate steps to undo this degradation of Arthur's nephew, depicting him at once as an exemplary figure of knightly virtue in the worldly sense and as a decidedly Christian hero.[59] Even if the hero does not shed every trace of imperfection which invites the mild criticism typical of his treatment in the Old French verse tradition, the narrative decision to do away with all doubt concerning his credibility as an irreproachable lover is unmistakable.[60] Walewein and the young woman whom he has promised to fetch as a bride for King Amoraen fall hopelessly in love. The depth of Walewein's feelings for Ysabele is accentuated by the fact that, when he voices them for the first time, it is in a prayer uttered aloud to God and the Blessed Virgin (ll. 7689–7733). In his love for the woman he was meant to win as a bride for another man, the hero of the *Walewein* also implicitly refers to the Tristan tradition, and here it is noteworthy that in his commitment to his beloved, Walewein outshines his famous counterpart.[61] Instead of fleeing when the lovers are discovered in one another's arms, as Tristan does, Walewein assures Ysabele that he would rather die with her than save himself and leave her, trusting that God will not abandon the lovers to such a fate (ll. 8118–19). The narrative ultimately spares Walewein from the consequences of the dilemma caused by his love for Ysabele and his responsibility towards Amoraen, for by the time the hero returns with the lady to surrender her as promised, the latter has passed away, leaving the two lovers to return to the court of King Arthur. It is surely with a wink to the Old French verse tradition that the narrator concludes by pleading ignorance on the question of whether 'die ridder fier' ('that brave knight', l. 11170) eventually marries his love or not.

The *Wrake van Ragisel*, a Dutch verse adaptation of the French *Vengeance Raguidel*, was probably written in the early decades of the thirteenth century.[62] It survives in a number of manuscripts in fragmentary form and is preserved in a complete, but abridged version in the *Lancelot* Compila-

[59] See Bart Besamusca, '*Walewein:* A Middle Dutch Antidote to the Prose *Lancelot*', *BBIAS* 47 (1995), 301–10.

[60] For a succinct outline of Gawain's weaker moments in this romance, see Norris Lacy, 'Convention and Innovation in the Middle Dutch *Roman van Walewein*', *Arthurian Literature* 17 (1999), 47–62 (48–49). On the portrayal of Gawain as ideal lover in the *Walewein,* see Bart Besamusca, 'Gauvain as Lover in the Middle Dutch Verse Romance *Walewein*', in *Gawain: A Casebook*, ed. Thompson and Busby, pp. 231–37.

[61] See Walter Haug, 'The *Roman van Walewein* as a Postclassical Literary Experiment', *Arthurian Literature* 17 (1999), 17–28 (26–28).

[62] *Die Wrake van Ragisel,* in *Dutch Romances III: Five Romances from the Lancelot Compilation,* Arthurian Archives 10, ed. and trans. David F. Johnson and Geert H. M. Claassens (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 50–195. On the dating of the two surviving versions of this text, see the introduction of Johnson and Claassens, p. 9.

tion, a text collection of ten Middle Dutch Arthurian verse romances that came into being in Brabant around 1320.[63] If the French original depicts a Gawain easily distracted and comically frivolous in love, the Dutch adaptation in the Compilation deviates from its source in a clear effort to put the criticism endured by Gawain in the French text in perspective. To that end, a new episode is inserted, in which the concerned lover Walewein, against the better judgement of all characters he consults en route, dedicates himself to a cause which seldom worried his French counterpart: that of understanding women. Far from portraying the amorous behaviour of women as the subject of a rare and difficult form of wisdom, however, the text disappoints Walewein by revealing the fair sex as inherently lecherous and faithless. This, in turn, has the effect of excusing any minor imperfections which the hero himself might display with regard to matters of love.[64]

In the *cantare* of the *Ponzela Gaia*, a verse text which survives in a fifteenth-century Venetian manuscript, the Italian tradition offers a portrayal of Gawain as a knight capable of remarkable commitment in affairs of the heart.[65] The romance begins with what would appear to be an image of Galvano as the slightly comical figure and notoriously frivolous lover we know from the Old French verse tradition. Having bet his head with another knight that he will return from the hunt with the finer trophy, the hero sets out into the woods only to become entangled in a violent struggle with a hideous serpent. The fight does not end well for Galvano, who voluntarily dismounts from his horse to beg for death, while the serpent gently tells him to take heart and entreats him with a level of courtesy somewhat surprising in a monster to divulge whether he belongs to the company of the Round Table (stanza 6, ll. 6–8). Galvano answers in the affirmative, only to learn that the odious creature is in fact much impressed by the fight he put up – she calls him the flower of those she has fought to date (8, 8) – and even cautiously optimistic that he might be the man with whom she is in love. When the serpent asks him openly to identify himself – 'O sire, in cortexia, / dime lo tuo nome e non me lo zelare' ('Oh Sir, in courtly grace, tell me your name and do not conceal it from me', 10, 1–2) – we might expect Gawain, as is typical of

63 See the Lancelot section for a discussion of the *Lancelot* Compilation.

64 See W. H. Jackson and S. A. Ranawake (ed.), *The Arthur of the Germans. The Arthurian Legend in Medieval German and Dutch Literature*, Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages 3 (Cardiff, 2000), pp. 187–228 (207–8), (by Bart Besamusca).

65 See *Ponzela Gaia,* ed. Roberta Manetti, in *Cantari novellistici, dal Tre al Cinquencento*, ed. Elisabetta Benucci, Roberta Manetti and Franco Zabagli (Roma, 2002), vol. 1, pp. 407–48. The English translations are our own. On the transmission and dating of this text, see Maria Bendinelli Predelli, 'Monstrous Children of *Lanval:* the *Cantare* of *Ponzela Gaia*' in *Courtly Arts and the Art of Courtliness. Selected Papers from the Eleventh Triennial Congress of the International Courtly Literature Society. University of Wisconsin-Madison, 29 July–4 August 2004*, ed. Keith Busby and Christopher Kleinhenz (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 543–51.

him in French texts, to respond with pride that he always utters his name without hesitation. Whether humiliated by his defeat or perhaps mindful of his reputation as a lady-killer and wary of becoming the object of the affections of this horrible beast, the hero, in this case, chooses to identify himself as Lancelot. When Galvano is finally reduced to admitting to his identity, it is with a most unusual reluctance that he does so – 'molto umele e piano' ('very humbly and quietly', 12, 2). In this variation of the *fier baiser* motif, it is the revelation of the hero's name alone that brings about the transformation of the beast into a woman of overwhelming beauty, the fairy daughter of Morgan; Galvano is not required to kiss her until she stands before him as a 'donzela dilicata' ('delicate damsel', 13, 4).

The theme of reputation and the loss and renewal of identity proves a leitmotiv in this text describing Gawain's harsh apprenticeship in loyalty of the heart. In a sequence clearly reminiscent of the adventures of Lanval, Gawain wins the love of the fairy on the basis of his public image, only to lose it again by breaking his promise to her when he rises to the challenge of the spiteful Guinevere and brags at court of his new-found love, a misjudgement for which the *Ponzela* suffers when she must endure the punishment meted out by her mother.[66] Like Yvain and Tristan before him, Galvano will spend years roaming in search of his beloved, isolating himself from courtly society by refusing to eat at table or cut his beard, and travelling incognito as the Poor Knight ('lo povero cavaliero', 82,1), in order to avoid the malice of all who have heard of the suffering he has caused the unfortunate *Ponzela*.[67] When he tries to redress the damage to his reputation by claiming to be a friend who holds Galvano in high esteem, he is set upon by no less than one hundred knights (stanza 66–67). On finally locating the *Ponzela Gaia*, Galvano first attempts to enter her mother's fortified city disguised as a merchant, but to no avail. It is not until he disguises himself as a woman, Morgan's sister, that he succeeds in penetrating the stronghold, captures Morgan and can finally bring his beloved home to Arthur's court (stanza 108). This text, therefore, ultimately describes the development of Galvano from the foolish young knight who risks his life in a quest for meaningless honour and proves unequal to the responsibilities associated with loving the *Ponzela* to the hero who fights relentlessly, even sacrificing his identity, to win back the love of the woman he lost. This, we sense at the end of the romance, is a Gawain figure capable of long-term commitment indeed.

66 On the analogies with *Lanval* and other texts, see Bendinelli Predelli, 'Monstrous Children', pp. 546–47, and Marie–José Heijkant, 'The Transformation of the Figure of Gauvain in Italy', in *Gawain: A Casebook*, ed. Thompson and Busby, pp. 239–53 (p. 245).

67 On the damage to Gawain's reputation and his suffering as a result, see Heijkant, 'The Transformation', p. 247.

Gawain as Exemplary Knight

The hero's behaviour as a lover is not the only object of narrative interest in texts seeking to extol Gawain's virtues. The exemplary status associated with his aptitude for courtly conduct proves an equally productive element. The short Italian poem entitled simply *Morale* and dating in all probability from before 1410 depicts 'il buon messer Chalvano' (l. 2) in an adventure strikingly similar to his encounter with the imperious host described in the first episode of the thirteenth-century French verse romance *Le Chevalier à l'épée*.[68] Chalvano finds himself stranded in a land where neither food nor drink is available and seeks the hospitality of a castellan who, as a 'vilano' explains, is well known for his kindness towards guests during their stay and the brutal beating to which he subjects them on their departure (ll. 8–13). While the text stresses that Chalvano (unlike his counterpart in the French text) attaches not the least significance to the concerns voiced by the 'vilano', it is interesting to note that he is not portrayed as a paragon of courage, but rather as a man of pragmatic concerns: the hero responds candidly that he is more than willing to endure severe bodily harm if he is first given the opportunity to eat his fill (ll. 14–16). At the castle, Chalvano is treated to an irreproachable courtly welcome and an equally exemplary send-off. Bewildered by the discrepancy between his own experience and the content of the warning uttered by the 'vilano', the hero finally returns to enquire of his host as to the reason for this unprecedented friendliness. The castellan responds that the beatings are the lot of those guests who seek to prevent him from being lord in his own hall – 'mi vol singnioregiare' ('[everybody] seeks to lord it over me', l. 58), he complains of his other guests – mentioning in particular the misdemeanours of trying to hinder or even outdo him in acts of courtliness. Chalvano is congratulated by his host on his particular ability to achieve balance in courtly behaviour, where all others have failed.

In the thirteenth-century Middle Dutch verse romance *Walewein ende Keye*, preserved in the *Lancelot* Compilation, Walewein's status as the ideal knight is unquestioned from the outset.[69] The problems he must overcome here are difficulties associated with the burden of perfection, for the hero is faced with the task of defending himself against the jealousy of Keye, who falsely accuses him of arrogant boasting.[70] The

68 For an edition of the poem, see Pio Rajna, 'Intorno a due canzoni gemelle di materia cavalleresca', *Zeitschrift für romanische Philologie* 1 (1877), 381–87. The English translations are our own. Rajna discusses the question of dating on p. 382.

69 *Walewein ende Keye,* in *Dutch Romances III*, ed. and trans. Johnson and Claassens, pp. 368–523.

70 On arrogance and humility in knightly conduct in this romance, see Marjolein Hogenbirk, '*Walewein ende Keye:* hoogmoed ten val gebracht', in *De kunst van het zoeken: studies over 'avontuur' en 'queeste' in de middeleeuwse literatuur*, ed. Bart Besamusca and Frank Brandsma (Amsterdam, Münster, 1996), pp. 89–111.

disturbance to Arthurian harmony, which functions as the catalyst to set the action in motion, issues in this romance, therefore, from within the court, prompting both knights to ride out in search of adventure. While Keye will heap disgrace upon himself in an ignominious and ill-fated bid to outdo Walewein, the latter succeeds in a series of adventures in the course of which he not only solves problems of various kinds, but also defeats knights whose arrogance is clearly reminiscent of that of Keye. Equally striking is the fact that while Walewein himself does not develop a love interest in this romance, he reconciles two broken couples.[71] One of these concerns a variation on the action surrounding the Pucelle de Gautdestroit in the *Vengeance Raguidel* and in the *Wrake van Ragisel*. In the Raguidel romances, the lady harbours an erotic obsession with Gawain, prompting her to devise a sophisticated plan to assassinate him with a view to keeping him by her side forever, and as a result she refuses to accept the love of another knight. Gawain barely succeeds in escaping from her clutches. *Walewein ende Keye* features a lady who demands of her lover that he give her Gawain's head in a reliquary. When Gawain defeats the knight and learns of his unfortunate promise, the hero is only too happy to oblige by placing his head for a moment in the reliquary and withdrawing it again (ll. 745–64). He masters the situation with a degree of poise unthinkable for the hero of the Raguidel texts and succeeds at the same time in drawing the two lovers together.

The thirteenth-century *Lanceloet en het hert met de witte voet* ('Lancelot and the Stag with the White Foot'), the shortest of the interpolated verse romances in the Middle Dutch *Lancelot* Compilation, offers Gawain the opportunity to excel in the role of the perfect friend, a function which seems to reflect the place as companion to the hero frequently occupied by Gawain in the French tradition.[72] In this romance, which bears clear similarities to the *Lai de Tyolet*, the knight who brings back the white foot of a certain stag will win the hand of a young queen in marriage. It is Lanceloet who successfully sets out to win the foot, where all others – most notably, needless to say, Keye – have failed miserably (ll. 70–134). Unlike Tyolet, Lanceloet is not in a position to rejoice at this prize, for the prospect of marrying any queen but the one 'die hi minde lude ende stille' ('whom he loved ever and always', l. 830) is insufferable to him. The hero's success in the quest surrounding the stag foot, therefore, opens up a serious problem, allowing Walewein to step into the breach. Arthur's nephew shines on a number of counts in this text. Firstly, he rides out to retrieve the hero Lanceloet, who has been left for dead by a villainous

[71] On the use of intertextuality in these scenes, see Marjolein Hogenbirk, 'Gauvain, the Lady, and her Lover. The Middle Dutch *Walewein ende Keye* and Old French Romance', *BBIAS* 48 (1996), 257–70.

[72] *Lanceloet en het hert met de witte voet,* in *Dutch Romances III*, ed. and trans. Johnson and Claassens, pp. 524–61.

knight who robbed him of the stag's foot, seeking to pose as the successful knight and thereby win the hand of the lady. It is significant that Walewein finds Lanceloet without the aid of the dog that led Lanceloet to the stag; Walewein seems guided by none other than the will of God: 'Hi sat doe op onvervaert / Maer hine wiste waer wart / Dat was dat hi varen soude. / Maer alset selve God woude / Reet hi onthier ende hi vernam / Dat hi vorden foreeste quam' ('He mounted valiantly but he did not know in which direction he should ride. But as God himself desired it he rode until he perceived that he stood before the forest', ll. 493–8). Subsequently, he prevents the marriage of the queen to the impostor, exposes the latter and kills him in a duel. Most important, however, is the fact that, thanks to the diplomatic skills of Walewein, the potentially disastrous situation into which Lanceloet has manoeuvred himself by virtue, one could say, of excessively heroic behaviour, is ultimately salvaged. In this romance, it is undoubtedly Walewein who saves the day – and it is curious that he should do so by bringing mastery of the tasks allocated to the secondary hero to a new level of perfection.[73]

The *Lancelot* Compilation also preserves a Middle Dutch verse adaptation of Chrétien's Grail romance, one in which King Arthur's nephew is promoted from secondary to primary hero.[74] In *Perchevael*, the childhood of Perceval and his visit to the Grail castle are omitted and the action, beginning with the arrival of the loathly lady at the court of King Arthur, concerns the adventures of Walewein, interlaced with episodes featuring other knights. In this romance, it is Walewein who visits the Grail castle, and he comes a good deal closer to success than Chrétien's hero. Unlike Perceval, who remained silent at the crucial moment, Walewein seems to ask all the right questions here, and although he cannot reunite the pieces of the broken sword, the Grail King explicitly holds out hope that he might yet succeed: 'Gine moges noch verdinen wel' ('You might well achieve it yet', l. 4616). The romance ends with Walewein defending himself heroically against Ginganbrisiel and Dyandras simultaneously, who finally despair of defeating the hero and choose to avail themselves of Arthur's offer to act as a mediator in settling the conflict, enabling Walewein to return to the Arthurian court in glory (ll. 5123–5449). It has been argued that the radical modifications to the *Perceval* plot in this romance should not be viewed exclusively in the light of the problems

[73] Cf. Roel Zemel, '"Hoe Walewein Lanceloet bescudde ende enen camp vor hem vacht." Over *Lanceloet en het hert met de witte voet*', in *De ongevalliche Lanceloet. Studies over de Lancelotcompilatie*, ed. Bart Besamusca and Frank Brandsma (Hilversum, 1992), pp. 77–97.

[74] See Jackson and Ranawake (ed.), *The Arthur of the Germans*, pp. 205–06 (by Bart Besamusca). For an edition, see Soetje Ida Oppenhuis de Jong, *De Middelnederlandse Perceval–traditie. Inleiding en editie van de bewaarde fragmenten van een Middelnederlandse vertaling van de Perceval of Conte du Graal van Chrétien de Troyes, en de Perchevael in de Lancelotcompilatie* (Hilversum, 2003), pp. 66–101, 211–27 (edition). The English translations are our own.

which would have ensued if Perceval had been introduced as a Grail hero in this cycle, whose structure is determined by texts drawn from the tradition of the Prose *Lancelot*. The fascination with Walewein which dominates so many of the romances inserted in the *Lancelot* Compilation could represent an equally important factor in his choice as hero for this text.[75]

While the major appeal attached to King Arthur's nephew in the French verse tradition can be argued to lie in the failings barely concealed behind a skin-deep façade of perfection, the fringe corpora, and in particular the Dutch tradition, show a distinct preference for a genuine exploration of Gawain's exemplary qualities. His affinity for the *amour flirt* gives way to commitment and good sense, his suitability as a primary hero has become a foregone conclusion and the humour which so often surrounds him in the French verse tradition, if not abandoned completely, can hardly be said to occupy a central position in his depiction.

Lancelot

There is no evidence that Chrétien's *Lancelot* was translated into any other medieval language. Were patrons and authors outside France unaware of the existence of this narrative? Did they reject the story because they perceived its content as immoral? Although we cannot exclude the possibility that Chrétien's *Lancelot* was neglected for these reasons, a third explanation seems far more likely: the romance was superseded by another text soon after its completion. This text, the early thirteenth-century Old French prose trilogy *Lancelot-Queste-Mort Artu*, not only incorporated Chrétien's romance, it also provided the main character with a full biography, including his failure in the Grail quest. It is in the context of this narrative and of the Prose *Tristan* that Lancelot gained his great European popularity.[76] He is the main character of a number of renditions of (parts of) the large French prose texts and of various short tales. While the north of Europe would appear to have favoured Chrétien's heroes Erec, Yvain and Perceval, Lancelot attracted a great deal of attention in Spain, Portugal and the Low Countries.

The Trilogy Tradition

The case of the Iberian peninsula is striking because it is only here that we find renditions – at least in part – of *both* great Arthurian prose cycles, i.e.

75 *De Middelnederlandse* Perceval–*traditie,* ed. Oppenhuis de Jong, pp. 135–38.

76 See Mathilda T. Bruckner, 'Refining the Center: Verse and Prose Charrette', in *A Companion to the Lancelot–Grail Cycle,* Arthurian Studies 54, ed. Carol Dover (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 96–105, and Glyn S. Burgess and Karen Pratt (ed.), *The Arthur of the French: The Arthurian Legend in Medieval French and Occitan Literature*, Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages 4 (Cardiff, 2006), pp. 274–324 (by Elspeth Kennedy *et al*.).

the Old French Vulgate trilogy *Lancelot-Queste-Mort Artu* and the Post-Vulgate *Roman du Graal*.[77] The Vulgate *Lancelot*, that is the *Lancelot propre*, was translated faithfully, most likely by a Galician-Portuguese author. Written around 1300, his text, the *Lanzarote del Lago*, survives in a fragmentary Castilian translation dated to 1414. The extant portion shows that the translator accentuated the hero's prowess by adding, in addition to his Vulgate material, a number of episodes concerning Lancelot's quest for Tristan.[78]

Critics assume that the French Post-Vulgate cycle, written before 1235–1240, was translated into Castilian by Brother Juan Vives (or Bivas) around 1313.[79] As is well known, the French source is extant in fragments only and has been reconstructed with the aid of Hispanic texts. It is accepted today that the Post-Vulgate *Roman du Graal* was a tripartite cycle in which Lancelot's role was strongly reduced in comparison to the Vulgate version. The first part of the Post-Vulgate (the *Estoire del Saint Graal*) and the second part (the *Suite du Merlin* section) were *not* followed by a version of the Vulgate *Lancelot*. The gap between the cycle's second and third part (the Post-Vulgate *Queste-Mort*) was bridged by a number of episodes, some of which were of the author's own invention, others derived from the last part of the Vulgate *Lancelot* and the (first version of the) Prose *Tristan*.[80] Following the *Roman du Graal*, therefore, Vives omitted most of the Vulgate *Lancelot*. In the extant episodes featuring Lancelot, the sinful nature of his love for the queen is stressed and the terrible consequences of this illicit relationship are underlined.[81]

In the Low Countries, the popularity of the Vulgate trilogy *Lancelot-Queste-Mort Artu* gave rise to a number of independent Middle Dutch translations dating from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.[82] Around 1260, an anonymous Flemish author penned *Lantsloot vander Haghedochte* ('Lancelot of the Cave'), a verse adaptation of the Vulgate

77 For an overview, see Rafael M. Mérida Jiménez, 'La "Materia de Bretaña" en las culturas hispánicas de la Edad Media y del Renacimiento: Textos, ediciones y estudios', *Revista de Literatura Medieval* 22 (2010), 289–350 (292–300).

78 See *Lanzarote del Lago*, ed. Antonio Contreras and Martín–Harvey Sharrer (Alcalá de Henares, 2006). Cf. William J. Entwistle, *The Arthurian Legend in the Literatures of the Spanish Peninsula* (London and Toronto, 1925; reprint New York, 1975), pp. 193–97, and *The New Arthurian Encyclopedia*, ed. Norris J. Lacy (New York and London, 1991), pp. 268–69, 426 (by Harvey L. Sharrer).

79 Entwistle, *The Arthurian Legend*, pp. 172–81; Lacy (ed.), *The New Arthurian Encyclopedia*, p. 426 (by Sharrer).

80 See Fanni Bogdanow, 'The Post–Vulgate *Roman du Graal*', in *The Arthur of the French*, ed. Burgess and Pratt, pp. 342–52, and Fanni Bogdanow, 'The Vulgate Cycle and the Post-Vulgate *Roman du Graal*', in *A Companion to the Lancelot-Grail Cycle*, ed. Dover, pp. 33–51.

81 See Burgess and Pratt (ed.), *The Arthur of the French*, pp. 348–49 (by Bogdanow).

82 See Frank Brandsma, 'The Lancelots of the Lowlands', in *A Companion to the Lancelot-Grail Cycle*, ed. Dover, pp. 205–18.

Lancelot, which is preserved in fragments.[83] The text deviates from its French source in its intensified focus on courtly conduct.[84] Even more than in the Vulgate *Lancelot*, Lancelot and his fellow-knights are presented as models of ideal behaviour. A further verse rendition, also written by a Flemish poet and dated to approximately 1280, was used by a compiler from Brabant around 1320 to form the core of a text collection consisting of ten Middle Dutch verse narratives.[85] This *Lancelot* Compilation is preserved in a single manuscript, which, according to a note on the last page of the codex, was owned by the Brabantine author Lodewijk van Velthem (*c*. 1270–1330). The compilation depicts Lancelot in various lights. In *Moriaen*, for instance, Lancelot acts as the trustworthy companion of the young hero. However, in other texts, such as the *Queeste vanden Grale*, he is depicted in a less favourable light. The ambivalence towards Lancelot in the Compilation is resolved in *Arturs doet*, the translation of the *Mort Artu*. This text is preceded by a short religious treatise on the art of praying, which promotes the idea that prayer is of crucial importance for the eternal salvation of humankind.[86] This view is confirmed by the last stage of Lancelot's tale: the four years which he spends praying and fasting save his soul, which is carried to heaven, as in the *Mort Artu*.[87] This parallel between the message of the treatise and Lancelot's destiny contributes strongly to the finally positive characterization of Lancelot in the *Lancelot* Compilation.

The Queste *Tradition*

In two fringe traditions, the Welsh and the Irish, the middle part of the Old French prose trilogy *Lancelot-Queste-Mort Artu* was transmitted without the two accompanying romances. Near the end of the fourteenth century the Welsh *Y Seint Greal* was composed, in all probability at the behest of the noblemen Hopcyn ap Thomas, who is also thought to have been the patron of the Red Book of Hergest.[88] The Welsh prose text is a rendition

[83] *Lantsloot vander Haghedochte: Fragmenten van een Middelnederlandse bewerking van de Lancelot en prose*, ed. W. P. Gerritsen (Amsterdam, 1987).

[84] See F. P. van Oostrom, *Lantsloot vander Haghedochte: Onderzoekingen over een Middelnederlandse bewerking van de Lancelot en prose* (Amsterdam, 1981), pp. 127–59.

[85] *Roman van Lancelot (XIIIe eeuw)*, ed. W. J. A. Jonckbloet, 2 vols. ('s-Gravenhage, 1846–49). For an overview of the Compilation, see Bart Besamusca, *The Book of Lancelot: The Middle Dutch Lancelot Compilation and the Medieval Tradition of Narrative Cycles*, Arthurian Studies 53, trans. Thea Summerfield (Cambridge, 2003).

[86] *Roman van Lancelot (XIIIe eeuw)*, ed. W.J.A. Jonckbloet, vol. 2, pp. 187–89.

[87] See Bart Besamusca and Orlanda S. H. Lie, 'The Prologue to *Arturs doet*, the Middle Dutch Translation of *La Mort le Roi Artu* in the *Lancelot Compilation*', in *Medieval Dutch Literature in its European Context*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature 21, ed. Erik Kooper (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 96–112 (pp. 103–4).

[88] See Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan, 'Perceval in Wales: Late Medieval Welsh Grail Traditions', in *The Changing Face of Arthurian Romance. Essays on Arthurian Prose Romances in Memory of*

of two Old French narratives whose contents seem mutually exclusive to the modern reader: the translation of the *Queste*, referred to as the first part of the Grail, is followed by a second part that is a translation of the *Perlesvaus*, which features Perceval – in spite of his death at the end of the *Queste* – instead of Galahad as the Grail hero and has a religious spirit that is far more militant than that of the *Queste*.[89] The Welsh translator announces the second section as that of *Gwalchmei*, Gawain, and connects the two parts by stating at the end of the *Queste* rendition that the Grail was never seen on earth again except once by Gwalchmei.[90] Since both Old French sources were translated fairly closely, Lancelot appears in *Y Seint Greal*'s first section as a sinner and a failure. In both parts he is unsuccessful in the Grail quest because of his love for the queen, but in the second section he is, more importantly, very positively portrayed as an outstanding servant of the New Law, i.e. as a Christian crusader, who fights the heathens and converts them to Christianity. In addition, Lancelot's loyalty to Arthur never flags, even when the king mistreats him under the influence of the treacherous adviser Brien des Isles. *Y Seint Greal*, therefore, shows a mixed view of Lancelot: fairly negative in the first section, very positive in the second part.

The *Lorgaireacht an tSoidhigh Naomhtha* ('Quest of the Holy Grail') dates from the middle of the fifteenth century. This text, the only long medieval Arthurian narrative in Irish, is a close translation of the Old French *Queste*, using an English rendition as its immediate source.[91] The incomplete prose narrative lacks its beginning: the text starts with the introduction of Galahad, who is called Galafas, at Arthur's court.[92] Lamsaloit, as Lancelot is named, is portrayed in accordance with the French source, although the Irish text uses different wordings now and then. In the famous passage where the hero, unable to see the Grail, is condemned by a heavenly voice, Lamsaloit is despised, as in the *Queste*, for being 'harder than stone' and 'barer than the fig-tree'. The third French disqualification, 'bitterer than wood', is replaced, however, by the significantly more graphic comparison 'isat morccaigti na bethadach marb' ('you are fouler than a dead beast').[93]

Cedric E. Pickford, Arthurian Studies 16, ed. Alison Adams *et al.* (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 78–91 (p. 80).

89 See *Y Seint Greal, being the adventures of King Arthur's Knights of the Round Table, in the quest of the Holy Greal, and on other occasions*, ed. and trans. Robert Williams (London, 1876).

90 *Y Seint Greal*, ed. Williams, pp. 169–70.

91 See Joseph Falaky Nagy, 'Arthur and the Irish', in *A Companion to Arthurian Literature*, ed. Fulton, pp. 117–27 (pp. 119–20).

92 *Lorgaireacht an tSoidhigh Naomhtha: An Early Modern Irish Translation of the Quest of the Holy Grail*, ed. Sheila Falconer (Dublin, 1953).

93 See *La Queste del Saint Graal. Roman du XIIIe siècle*, ed. Albert Pauphilet (Paris, 1949), p. 61, ll. 16–17, and *Lorgaireacht an tSoidhigh Naomhtha*, ed. Falconer, l. 1304 and p. 210. We would like to thank Peter Schrijver for helping us understand the Irish phrase.

The Mort Artu *Tradition*

Like the *Queste del Saint Graal*, the *Mort Artu* was also transmitted in other languages without the two accompanying parts of the trilogy. The *Chantari di Lancellotto*, an Italian verse narrative dating from around 1400, presents a very condensed version of the events of the *Mort Artu*.[94] The text consists of seven *cantari*, composed in the customary eight-line stanzas (*ottava rima*), which show minor deviations from the French source details and in the order of events.[95] The view of Lancelot we find in the *Chantari di Lancellotto* runs parallel with that in the *Mort Artu*, but in the Italian text he is, in addition, blamed by Camelot's inhabitants for the unhappy events following Mordred's treachery.[96] That the subject of the *Chantari di Lancellotto* was not to everyone's liking is indicated by the narrator of the *Cantare dei Cantari* (1380–1420), who states that he is willing to read, tell or sing of any subject, with a single exception: the recitation of the 'conto' concerning 'la tavola distruger' ('the tale [about] the destruction of the Table') displeases him as much as his audience.[97]

Melekh Artus ('King Artus') is a Hebrew prose narrative that came into being in 1279, according to its prologue.[98] The text circulated among Italian Jews, who were in close contact with Christian culture and very interested in secular literature in the thirteenth century.[99] The remaining fragment begins with a rendition of a part of the Vulgate *Merlin*, which was accessible to the translator in an Italian intermediate.[100] This section, which relates Uther's love for Igerne and the birth of Arthur, is followed by the *Mort Artu* part, which opens with the return of Bohort to Arthur's court after the quest for the *tamchuy*, or dish – obviously the Grail is meant here, but the inherently Christian nature of this object is eliminated. The narrative breaks off in the middle of the Winchester tournament. *Melekh Artus* is a modern title; the narrator calls his tale at the beginning of his prologue 'the book of the destruction of King Artus' Round Table'.[101] This sombre characterization of the Arthurian world is corroborated by the Jewish view of Lancelot, which was damning. At the beginning of the *Mort Artu* part, for example, the narrator comments as follows on the love of Lancelot and Guenevere: 'this evil desire was the

94 *Li Chantari di Lancellotto*, ed. E.T. Griffiths (Oxford, 1924).

95 See Edmund G. Gardner, *The Arthurian Legend in Italian Literature* (London, 1930), pp. 265–69.

96 See Donald L. Hoffman, 'Lancelot in Italy', in *A Companion to the Lancelot-Grail Cycle*, ed. Dover, pp. 163–72 (p. 168).

97 See Pio Rajna, 'Il Cantare dei Cantari e il Sirventese del Maestro di tutte l'Arti', *Zeitschrift für romanische Philologie* 2 (1878), 220–54, 419–37 (434, stanza 47). See also Gardner, *The Arthurian Legend in Italian Literature*, pp. 270–72 (p. 272).

98 See *King Artus: A Hebrew Arthurian Romance of 1279*, ed. and trans. Curt Leviant (Assen, 1969), pp. 8–9.

99 See *King Artus*, ed. and trans. Leviant, pp. 53–55.

100 See *King Artus*, ed. and trans. Leviant, pp. 5–6.

101 *King Artus*, ed. and trans. Leviant, pp. 8–9.

cause of the destruction of the Table, the death of King Artus, and the ruin of the entire Kingdom, as you will see further on'.[102] This statement will not have come as a surprise to Jewish readers, who were familiar with the Old Testament theme that a sin may be the cause of destruction on a grand scale.[103]

Short Tales of Lancelot

A number of short tales, some of which are connected to the Vulgate tradition, feature Lancelot as the main character. The fifteenth-century *Lanzarote y el ciervo del pie blanco* ('Lanzarote and the Stag with the White Foot'), also entitled *Tres hijuelos habia el rey* ('The King had Three Sons'), contains the motif of the hunt for the white-footed stag that is also present in the *Lai de Tyolet*.[104] The Spanish ballad is an enigmatic text: the opening lines, which describe a king who curses his three sons, are followed by an unrelated section concerning Lancelot which unexpectedly breaks off.[105] In the extant segment, the hero goes in search of the white-footed stag at the request of the lady of Quintañones, who declares that she will marry him if he returns successfully, and is warned by a hermit that his life is in danger. The hermit's words create the impression that the search for the stag is not set up as a test to select the best knight, as is the case in the *Lai de Tyolet*, but as a trap to kill Lancelot.

In the fifteenth-century Spanish ballad *Nunca fuera caballero de damas tan bien servido* ('Never Was a Knight so well Served by Ladies'), also entitled *Lanzarote y el Orgulloso* ('Lancelot and the Proud Knight'), Lancelot's wish to defend the queen's honour triggers the action. She tells him that an arrogant knight claims that he will make love to her in spite of Lancelot. The hero reacts by fighting his self-appointed rival and decapitating him.[106] The popularity of this text with Spanish audiences is confirmed by Miguel de Cervantes's Don Quixote. The hero quotes the beginning of the ballad, states that the text is well known and praised in Spain, and characterizes Lancelot's ballad as 'the sweet and gentle tale of his feats of love and of valor' (Part I, Chapter XIII).[107]

Just a section of the *Mort Artu* narrative is the subject of one of the short prose tales which form the late thirteenth-century Italian collection that is now known as the *Novellino* or *Cento novelle antiche* ('Hundred

102 *King Artus*, ed. and trans. Leviant, p. 29.

103 See *King Artus*, ed. and trans. Leviant, p. 29, note 41.

104 See Bart Besamusca, 'Tyolet, Lanceloet and Lanzarote auf der Jagd nach dem Hirsch mit dem weißen Fuß', in *Vom Verstehen deutscher Texte des Mittelalters aus der europäischen Literatur. Hommage à Elisabeth Schmid*, ed. Dorothea Klein (Würzburg, 2011), pp. 359–73.

105 See *Spanish ballads*, ed. C. Colin Smith (Oxford, 1964), pp. 189–91 (number 58).

106 *Spanish ballads*, ed. Colin Smith, pp. 188–99 (number 57).

107 Miguel de Cervantes, *Don Quixote*, trans. Edith Grossman (New York, 2003), pp. 87–88.

Old Stories').[108] Number 82, entitled 'Qui conta come la damigella di Scalot mori per amore di Lancialotto del Lac', retells the story of the Maid of Ascalot in the *Mort Artu*. The damsel loves Lancelot 'oltre misura' ('beyond measure'), and dies of grief when the object of her desire refuses her because of his love for the queen. In her letter, which is read aloud at Arthur's court, she calls him 'lo migliore cavaliere del mondo e [...] lo piu villano' ('the best knight of the world and the most villainous'). However, the measureless nature of the damsel's love should warn us that she is incapable of objectivity in her judgement of the hero. Lancelot's reputation is also the subject of two other tales which are included in the *Novellino*. Whereas in tale number 28, which refers to his ride in the cart of shame, Lancelot's action is judged negatively, tale number 45 shows him in a different light. During a break in a duel, Lancelot and his opponent make themselves known to each other. When they continue their fight, the knight says that he fears Lancelot's 'nome' ('name') more than his 'prodezza' ('prowess'). In the tale's last sentence, the narrator explains the knight's statement: his knowledge of his opponent's identity made him doubt his own 'bontà' ('worth').

The Lancelot tradition as established by the French prose cycle can be seen to have played a central role in the continued production of Arthurian fiction in certain fringe traditions, while only a small number of corpora fail to preserve any trace of this fascination. The success of the prose cycle is the result perhaps not exclusively of adventures devoted solely to Lancelot, but also of the consequences of his actions for the Arthurian world. In spite of his association with the downfall of the Arthurian kingdom, Lancelot's chivalric prowess, the absolute nature of his love and the humanity of his spiritual failing make him a multi-faceted and popular hero.

Tristan

The earliest extant narratives which tell the story of Tristan and Isolde date from the second half of the twelfth century. In the wake of these texts, which were composed by Marie de France, Béroul, Thomas de Bretagne and Eilhart von Oberg, the growth of the legend of the famous love couple in medieval literature was immense. Tristan narratives were written in almost all European languages.[109] This development is charac-

[108] *Il Novellino*, ed. Guido Favati (Genova, 1970). With an English translation by Steven Wright accessible via http://scrineum.unipv.it/wight/novellino.htm. Cf. Gardner, *The Arthurian Legend in Italian Literature*, pp. 88–94.

[109] For an overview, see Joan T. Grimbert (ed.), *Tristan and Isolde: A Casebook* (New York and London, 1995); Peter K. Stein, *Tristan–Studien*, ed. Ingrid Bennewitz, Beatrix Koll and Ruth

terized by three tendencies. First, we see that the common and courtly versions of the legend, as represented by Béroul/Eilhart and Thomas respectively, are elaborated. Secondly, these versions were expanded in long adaptations, in which Tristan and Isolde were drawn completely into the Arthurian world. Thirdly, the opposing phenomenon is discernible: many authors did not present a (more or less) full account of the Tristan legend, but limited their short tales to one or more episodes.

Common and Courtly Versions

Brother Robert's *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar,* a Norse prose translation of Thomas's narrative, was composed, according to its prologue, at the request of King Hákon Hákonarson in 1226.[110] The text is thought to have been the first of the group of renditions of Old French verse texts which came into being in Norway during Hákon's reign. Brother Robert's version is characterized by the accentuation of story line at the expense of discursive passages, inner monologues and interventions of the narrator. This difference, which effects the portrayal of the lovers to the extent that the readers participate less in their thought processes than is the case in the French source, may be due to an intervention on the part of the Norwegian translator or an Icelandic redactor, as the text has come down to us only in late Icelandic copies.[111] Noteworthy among the deviations of *Tristrams saga* from the French source is the Christianization of Isolde. Right before her death, she prays to God, asking him forgiveness for her sins (220–21).

At some time in the fourteenth century, *Tristrams saga* was rewritten by an author who modified the original to the extent that the resulting Icelandic prose text is one of the most intriguing Tristan narratives. The *Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd* contains a remarkable number of enigmatic passages, like the description of the love affair of Tristan's parents. What are we to think of their passion, which is so overwhelming that they isolate themselves in the bower for no less than three years?[112] After the fight with the dragon, both Tristan and the wicked steward cut a piece from the animal's tongue, but, contrary to what one might expect in terms of narrative logic, the hero does not need to show it to prove that he has slain the beast (272–3). In an equally puzzling turn, when Tristan returns from Ireland with Isolde, King Mórodd, as Mark is called, suggests that

Weichselbaumer (Stuttgart, 2001); Phillipa Hardman et al. (ed.), *The Growth of the Tristan and Iseut Legend in Wales, England, France and Germany* (Lewiston, NY, 2003).

110 Kalinke (ed.), *Norse Romance I: The Tristan Legend*, ed. and trans. Peter Jorgensen (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 23–226 (pp. 28–29).

111 See Kalinke (ed.), *Norse Romance I*, pp. viii–ix.

112 Kalinke (ed.), *Norse Romances I*, ed. Peter Jorgensen, trans. Joyce M. Hill, pp. 241–92 (pp. 250–53).

Tristan should marry her, on account of her age (276–7). Finally, having observed Tristan's footsteps in the flour, the king persists in believing in the hero's innocence, stating: 'Ekki aetla ek honum illt til ganga, þótt hann fari til rekkju hennar. Heldr mun hann vilja skemta henni [...] þá ek em á brottu' ('Even though he goes to her bed, I do not think he has any evil intention. He wishes rather to keep her amused [...] when I am absent', 278–9). These curious passages have led to differing opinions on the tale. While some scholars dismiss the Icelandic narrative as a failure, others ascribe the changes to the author's aim of producing a burlesque, and still others argue that the *Saga* should be interpreted in the context of serious Icelandic story-telling traditions.[113]

The last elaboration of the common and courtly versions of the Tristan legend to be discussed here is the Czech verse romance *Tristram a Izalda*, composed in the final quarter of the fourteenth century.[114] The author based his translation on no less than three German versions of the Tristan legend. Three sections follow Eilhart von Oberg (nos. 1, 3, 5), while one is based on the version of Gottfried von Strassburg (no. 2) and two on that of his successor Heinrich von Freiburg (nos. 4 and 6). In the final episode of the tale, however, the Czech translator deviates visibly from the German tradition. On a religious note, Tristan dies on Palm Sunday (l. 8541) and is referred to as a God-fearing Christian (l. 8570).[115] The pope himself later arrives to consecrate a newly-founded monastery (ll. 8894–8901). King Mark enters the monastery and leads a sober life there, which, according to the narrator, the kings of his own days did not usually do (ll. 8908–15). These Christian elements adequately neutralize the immoral implications of the love affair.

The Prose Tristan *Tradition*

The Old French Prose *Tristan* (1230–1235) expands the story of Tristan and Isolde into an enormous narrative in which the worlds of Tristan and Arthur merge completely: the hero has become a knight of the Round Table and participates in the quest for the Grail.[116] In Italy, the Prose

113 See Geraldine Barnes, 'Tristan in Late Medieval Norse Literature: Saga and Ballad', in *Tristan und Isolt im Spätmittelalter*, Chloe 29, ed. Xenja von Ertzdorff and Rudolf Schulz (Amsterdam and Atlanta, 1999), pp. 373–96 (pp. 380–91); Stein, *Tristan–Studien* , pp. 242–45; *The Growth of the Tristan and Iseut Legend*, ed. Hardman *et al.*, pp. 188–93 (by Françoise Le Saux); Kalinke (ed.), *The Arthur of the North*, pp. 145–46.

114 Cf. Ludger Udolph, 'Der alttschechische Roman von *Tristram a Izalda*', in: *Tristan und Isolt im Spätmittelalter*, ed. Von Ertzdorff and Schulz, pp. 355–72.

115 *Das altčechische Tristan–Epos, unter Beifügung der mhd Paralleltexte*, ed. and trans. Ulrich Bamborschke, 2 vols. (Wiesbaden, 1968–69).

116 See *The Growth of the Tristan and Iseut Legend*, ed. Hardman *et al.*, pp. 55–92 (by Peter S. Noble), Emmanuèle Baumgartner, 'The Prose *Tristan*', in *The Arthur of the French*, ed. Burgess and Pratt, pp. 325–41.

Tristan enjoyed particular popularity: no less than six prose renditions of the Prose *Tristan* survive.[117] The earliest translation is the Tuscan *Tristano Riccardiano*, which was composed between 1272 and 1300. The incomplete narrative opens with Mark murdering his brother Pernehan and breaks off right after a duel between Tristan and Perceval.[118] At the expense of the love theme, the tale focuses on the development of Tristan into the world's greatest knight. In contrast to the Cornish knights, who are repeatedly blamed for their cowardice, Tristan constantly excels in prowess. Highlights among his deeds include his fighting for the King of Brittany, the father of Isolde of the White Hands, against Count Agrippa (chapters 109–130) and his rescue of the enchanted King Arthur in the wilderness of Darnantes (chapters 192–200).

Composed in the Tuscan area around 1330–1340, the *Tavola Ritonda* is doubtless the most original of the Italian Tristan prose romances.[119] In addition to various indigenous episodes, the text is indebted to a series of Italian and French sources.[120] The narrative glorifies Tristan's chivalric excellence, which is compared to Lancelot's throughout. No fewer than three times the pair are engaged in a duel beside a rock.[121] Each time, however, the duel remains undecided. Judging them the two best knights of the world, the Lady of the Lake seeks to unite the two heroes with their respective queens. Using her magic she cares for both couples in an enchanted tent for fifteen days (chapters 106–7). Ultimately, it is Tristan who will emerge as the superior hero, both as a lover and as a knight.[122] He surpasses his opponent as a lover, according to the narrator, because Tristan's love for Isolde became only sinful after they had unwittingly drunk the love potion.[123] In an astonishing episode, Lancelot is even portrayed as a knight who shamelessly lusts after Isolde. On meeting her in the company of Tristan, who is wearing a monk's robe over his armour, Lancelot fails to recognize the couple, and tries in vain to abduct

117 For an overview, see Fabrizio Cigni, 'Tristano e Isotta nelle letterature francese e italiana', in *Tristano e Isotta. La fortuna di un mito europeo*, ed. Michael Dallapiazza (Triest, 2003), pp. 29–129 (pp. 102–15, 126–29).

118 See *Italian Literature II: Tristano Riccardiano*, Arthurian Archives 12, ed. and trans. F. Regina Psaki (Cambridge, 2006).

119 See F. Regina Psaki, 'Chivalry and medieval Italian romance', in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance*, ed. Roberta L. Krueger (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 203–17 (pp. 213–15).

120 For an overview, see Daniela Branca, *I romanzi italiani di Tristano e la Tavola Rotonda* (Florence, 1968), pp. 47–61.

121 See *La Tavola Ritonda*, ed. Filippo–Luigi Polidori, revised Marie-José Heijkant (Milan, 1997; 1st edn. Bologna, 1864–65), chapters 49, 113 (Merlin's rock), 126, and *Tristan and the Round Table: A Translation of La Tavola Ritonda*, trans. Anne Shaver (Binghamton, NY, 1983), pp. 114–16, 283–84, 314–15.

122 See Joan Tasker Grimbert, 'Changing the Equation: The Impact of Tristan-Love on Arthur's Court', in *The Fortunes of King Arthur*, Arthurian Studies 64, ed. Norris J. Lacy (Cambridge, 2005), pp. 104–15 (pp. 111–15).

123 *La Tavola Ritonda*, ed. Polidori, chapter 13; *Tristan and the Round Table*, trans. Shaver, p. 33.

her, noting: 'la coscienza mi reprende di farvi villania; ma troppo più mi costrigne l'animo d'avere cotesta bella dama' ('my conscience warns me against such villainy, but my will compels me to take this beautiful lady').[124]

In contrast to the French Prose *Tristan*, Isolde does not die as a result of Tristan's physical strength in the *Tavola Ritonda*. The Italian author retains the embrace which causes the death of the lovers in the French text, but here, they pass away from weakness and sorrow, feeling pleasure and delight at the same time. 'E però, con verità, possiamo dire, che Isotta morì perchè vedeva morire Tristano suo drudo; e Tristano morì perchè sentì morta sua speranza Isotta' ('Therefore we can truthfully say that Isotta died because she saw Tristano her lover die, and Tristano died because he felt the death of his own hope, Isotta.')[125] This tragic outcome of the competition between Tristan and Mark is followed by the bizarre account of the king's death, which marks an important deviation from the French tradition. There, Mark's passing is only mentioned in two later adaptations of (parts of) the Prose *Tristan*: the Post-Vulgate relates that he is killed by a knight of Lancelot's lineage after the destruction of Logres, while in Micheau Gonnot's 1470 Arthurian compilation we read that he is tied to a tree and devoured by a bear.[126] In the *Tavola Ritonda* Mark dies of forced gluttony: Arthur's knights have him imprisoned in a tower in front of Tristan's sepulchre and order that he be supplied with 'tre maniere carne a grande abbondanza, e di fini vini et potenti, senza niuna acqua' ('three kinds of meat in great abundance and good strong wine with no water').[127]

Another Italian version of the Prose Tristan survives in an intriguing context. Preserved in a unique manuscript, the early fourteenth-century *Zibaldone da Canal* ('The da Canal Notebook') is a collection of mercantile material. Amidst all kinds of practical information assembled by a member of the Venetian da Canal family, such as the descriptions of herbs, statements about taxes and mathematical exercises, we find a section devoted to Tristan, based on (an Italian version of) the Prose *Tristan*. It relates in very compressed form the disappearance of Tristan's father Meliadus, the birth of the hero, the measures undertaken by Merlin to find both father and son, the stepmother's attempt to poison Tristan, his plea before his father not to punish her, the murder of Meliadus and

124 *La Tavola Ritonda*, ed. Polidori, chapter 89; *Tristan and the Round Table*, trans. Shaver, pp. 219–22 (p. 221).

125 *La Tavola Ritonda*, ed. Polidori, chapter 129; *Tristan and the Round Table*, trans. Shaver, p. 322.

126 On the French tradition, see Burgess and Pratt (ed.), *The Arthur of the French*, pp. 343–44, 381 (by Fanny Bogdanow).

127 *La Tavola Ritonda*, ed. Polidori, chapter 137; *Tristan and the Round Table*, trans. Shaver, p. 333.

the stepmother's second effort to poison Tristan.[128] This incorporation of Tristan episodes in a mercantile text collection surely testifies to the great popularity of the Tristan legend in the circles of the Venetian elite.

A number of Italian Tristan narratives were the sources for the Belarusian *Povest' o Tryshchane* ('Romance of Tristan'). Extant in one manuscript which was copied around 1580, this prose narrative presents a somewhat idiosyncratic version of the Tristan legend, written by an unknown author for a high aristocratic audience.[129] Approximately two-thirds of the tale correspond closely to the Prose *Tristan*, with the exception of a single episode which usually features only in the verse tradition: the Belarusian text contains the famous orchard episode in which Mark climbs into a tree (an apple tree, according to the *Povest' o Tryshchane*) in order to spy on the lovers.[130] The final third of the narrative, however, deviates strongly from the Tristan versions that we know. It relates, for instance, that the jealous Guinevere, in reaction to Arthur's court judging Isolde the most beautiful woman in the world, begs the knights of the Round Table to duel against Tristan. In the next section of the tale, Tristan abolishes the evil custom of a lady who will accept homage only from castrated men. As a result of these deviations, the *Povest' o Tryshchane* is a tale which focuses on chivalric adventures and minimizes the love aspect of the Tristan legend. This is corroborated by the title preceding the prose romances in the codex, which announces that the stories will be about warriors, and by the marginal notes in the manuscript, which, with a single exception, alert the reader to battles between knights.[131]

Short Tales of Tristan

The third tendency displayed by the fringe adaptations of the Tristan tradition is the isolation from the Tristan legend of one or more episodes. Some authors favoured a scene in which cunning is applied to arrange a secret meeting between the lovers; many others were more interested in knightly aspects; still others were attracted by memorable narrative elements present from the earliest texts of the tradition onwards, like the scene featuring Mark in the tree and the description of the death of the lovers. Whatever the focus of these tales, they are always short.

128 See *Merchant Culture in Fourteenth-Century Venice: The Zibaldone da Canal*, trans. John E. Dotson (Binghamton, NY, 1994), pp. 125–27.

129 See Witold Kósny, 'Der weissrussische *Tristan*', in *Tristan und Isolt im Spätmittelalter*, ed. Von Ertzdorff and Schulz, pp. 473–99 (pp. 477–78).

130 See *Il Tristano biancorusso*, ed. and trans. (in Italian) Emanuela Sgambati (Florence, 1983). For an English translation by Sonja Dekanić–Janoski, see Joyce Hill (ed.), *The Tristan Legend: Texts from Northern and Eastern Europe in Modern English Translation* (Leeds, 1977), pp. 47–143 (Orchard episode: pp. 110–12).

131 See Kósny, 'Der weissrussische *Tristan*', 485. The exception reads: 'The king's dream' (*The Tristan Legend*, ed. Hill, p. 112).

The majority of the short Tristan tales are concerned with knightly deeds. This is, for instance, the case in the Welsh prose and verse tale *Ystorya Trystan* (or *Trystan ac Esyllt*), probably composed sometime in the thirteenth or fourteenth century. The forest where the lovers have taken refuge is surrounded by Arthur's army, but no one dares to fight Tristan, due to the peculiarities 'that whoever drew blood on him would die, and whoever he drew blood on would die'.[132] It is Gwalchmai 'dafud aur' ('golden-tongued'), who successfully negotiates with the seemingly invincible hero.[133]

A number of Italian *cantari*, which ultimately derive from the Prose *Tristan*, also concentrate on Tristan's chivalric prowess. The fifteenth-century *Quando Tristano e Lancielotto conbatetero al petrone di Merlino* ('When Tristan and Lancelot Fought at Merlin's Stone'), for example, describes the duel between Tristan, who mistakes his opponent for his rival Palamedes, and Lancelot at Merlin's stone, where an inscription predicts that the two best knights in the world will fight there.[134] Yet other short Tristan tales evoke certain memorable moments from the tradition. This is, for instance, the case in one of the *Novellino* stories: number 65 describes the orchard tryst.[135] Here a gardener informs the king of the meeting of the lovers. Mark climbs up the pine tree, but is discovered by Isolde, who rebukes the amazed Tristan for being disloyal. In a Spanish text, the hero is reproached as well. The late fifteenth-century *Carta enviada por Hiseo la Brunda a Tristán; Respuesta de Tristán* ('Letter Sent by Isolde the Blond to Tristan; Answer of Tristan'), included in a sixteenth-century miscellany, is an exchange of letters between the lovers. The highlight of the Tristan tradition that is evoked here is the hero's marriage to Isolde of the White Hands. While Isolde of Ireland complains of Tristan's departure and his marriage, Tristan defends his actions.[136]

In other tales the subject is the death of the lovers. The fourteenth-century Italian verse text *Morte di Tristano*, for example, relates it in accordance with the Prose *Tristan*, but here the tragedy is intensified, for it is the hero himself who brings the poisoned lance with him. He leaves it outside Isolde's chamber, where Mark finds it.[137] In the fourteenth-century

132 See *The Tristan Legend*, ed. Hill, pp. 1–5 (p. 1) (trans. by R. L. Thomson).

133 See Bromwich, Jarman, Roberts (ed.), *The Arthur of the Welsh*, pp. 216–19 (by Rachel Bromwich), and *The Growth of the Tristan and Iseut Legend*, ed. Hardman *et al*., pp. 18–29 (by Françoise H. M. Le Saux).

134 See *I Cantari di Carduino giuntovi quello di Tristano e Lancielotto quando combattettero al Petrone di Merlino*, ed. Pio Rajna (Bologna, 1873), pp. 46–64.

135 See *Il Novellino*, ed. Favati; English translation Steven Wright (http://scrineum.unipv.it/wight/novellino.htm).

136 See Fernando Gómez Redonda, 'Carta de Iseo y respuesta de Tristán', *Dicenda. Cuadernos de Filología Hispánica* 7 (1987), 327–56; and Harvey L. Sharrer, 'Letters in the Hispanic Prose Tristan Text: Iseut's Complaint and Tristan's Reply', *Tristania* 7 (1981–82), 3–20.

137 See *Cantari di Tristano*, ed. Bertoni, pp. 44–67, and Gardner, *The Arthurian Legend*, pp. 262–63.

Icelandic ballad *Tristrams Kvæði* ('Poem of Tristan'), the episode begins with the wounding of the hero and ends with the death of the lovers. Although Tristan's jealous wife, called the dark Ísodd ('svarta Ísodd'), buries them on either side of the church, two trees grow from their graves, joining together above the building.[138] Whereas in one of the four versions of the poem the refrain with which each of the thirty stanzas ends reads rather light-heartedly 'Og er sá sæll sem sofna náir hjá henna' ('happy is he who falls asleep beside her'), the original, gloomy refrain, found in the other three versions, reads 'Þeim var ekki skapað nema skilja' ('they were destined only to part').[139]

The fifteenth-century Spanish ballad *Herido está don Tristán* ('Wounded is Sir Tristan'), extant in four versions, contains a remarkable variant of the account of the death of the lovers. It is told that when Isolde visits Tristan, who is lying on his deathbed, wounded by Mark's lance, 'una azucena' ('a lily') sprouts from their tears. Isolde announces that any woman who eats/drinks from the lily will become pregnant. In two versions, Isolde is indeed impregnated, not from eating the lily, but from drinking tears that flow from the bed. It has been argued that this enigmatic text presents an image of the sexual union of the lovers in their last meeting.[140]

A different idiosyncratic ending is provided by some versions of the fifteenth-century Danish ballad *Tistram og Jomfru Isolt*.[141] While the oldest of the five surviving texts (A) relates how Tristan wins the emperor's daughter Isolde against the will of her mother and builds an unassailable castle for her, versions B and C add that the mother attempts to poison the lovers, but is forced to drink the brew herself. In the versions D and E, the lovers die. In these two texts, Tristan and Isolde are brother and sister. Disliked by her mother, Isolde is sent away, in reaction to the prediction that the children would be lovers. When they meet, fall in love and refuse to believe that they are siblings, Isolde's stepmother, the empress of Rome, poisons them both. 'Thett war ynnck att see der-paa / och hall mere harm: / thett wor iomfru Ísall, / døde y her Tysteroms arm' ('Pity it was to look thereon, and double so much pain. There was Maid Isall, she died in Sir Tysterom's arms.')[142]

The amalgamation of the narrative traditions surrounding Tristan and Isolde and the Arthurian world, as established by the Prose *Tristan* texts, was embraced by the fringe literatures, in tales highlighting Tristan's chivalric excellence and often seeking to address and redress problems

138 See Kalinke (ed.), *Norse Romances I*, ed. and trans. Robert Cook, pp. 227–39.

139 See Barnes, 'Tristan in Late Medieval Norse Literature', pp. 393–95.

140 See Pedro F. Campa, 'The Spanish Tristán Ballads', *Tristania* 7 (1981–82), 60–69.

141 See *Danmarks gamle Folkeviser* (Copenhagen, 1905–1919), vol. 8, pp. 37–46 (by Axel Olrik), and *The Tristan Legend*, ed. Hill, pp. 148–55 (trans. S. A. J. Bradley).

142 *Danmarks gamle Folkeviser*, p. 45; *The Tristan Legend*, ed. Hill, p. 155.

caused by the moral implications of the adulterous relationship. Alongside this interest in the expansion of the Tristan tradition, we also observe the choice to magnify the paradox of the love between Tristan and Isolde by adapting single moments of action which encapsulate the tension surrounding their fate. Both approaches – expansion and reduction – visible in the staggering proliferation of Tristan narratives in medieval Europe, bear witness to the fascination exerted by the lovers throughout Europe.

Arthur

While Arthur figures in the vast majority of medieval Arthurian narratives in the role of *roi fainéant,* things are different in the limited number of texts in which he features as the principal character, such as the *Chevalier du Papegau*, or in which the action takes place at Arthur's court only and he is prominent among the courtiers, such as the *Lai du Cor* and the *Mantel mautaillié*.[143] In the fringe traditions, two tendencies are discernible in the depiction of the king: some texts idealize Arthur, viewing him as a great warrior, a heroic leader and a moral authority, while others depict him in an ambivalent light.

Arthur as Exemplary Leader

The Welsh verse text *Preiddeu Annwn* ('The Spoils of Annwn') has survived in an early-fourteenth-century, incomplete manuscript, but was probably composed somewhere between ca. 800 and ca. 1150.[144] The codex is known as the Book of Taliesin, because it collects poems which were supposedly composed by this legendary bard (although only one text is explicitly attributed to him).[145] He is the unnamed narrator of *Preiddeu Annwn*, a text of some 60 lines evoking an expedition undertaken by Arthur and his companions to the Otherworld. Repeating no less than six times that only seven men returned from the perilous voyage in the ship Prydwen to obtain a magic cauldron, the narrator leaves us in no doubt as to the status of Arthur as a leading warrior of great valour.[146]

The Black Book of Carmarthen, compiled around the middle of the thirteenth century, preserves under number 31 the incomplete Welsh verse text *Pa gur yv y porthaur?*, named after its opening line ('What Man is the Gatekeeper?').[147] It is a dialogue, which might date to before 1100,

143 See *The Arthur of the French*, ed. Burgess and Pratt, pp. 513–15 and 205–6.

144 See *The Arthur of the Welsh*, ed. Bromwich, Jarman and Roberts, pp. 51–57 (p. 54).

145 Marged Haycock, '*Preuddeu Annwn* and the Figure of Taliesin', *Studia Celtica* 18–19 (1983–84), 52–78 (53).

146 See for an edition and translation Haycock, '*Preuddeu Annwn*', pp. 60–78.

147 'Rhai o Gerddi Ymddiddan Llyfr Du Caerfyrddin', ed. Brynley F. Roberts, in *Astudiaethau ar*

between Arthur and the unwilling porter Glewlwyd Great Grasp.[148] Arthur is in the company of Cai and a band of famous warriors, whose heroic deeds are recalled. Arthur's position as a leader of heroes is reinforced by the allusions to his own heroic past: he has fought against a witch, he has pierced the 'Pen Palach' ('Cudgel head', an otherwise unknown opponent) and he has slain the 'Cinbin' ('Dog-heads'), who 'fell by the hundred' (ll. 37–46).[149]

Both *Preiddeu Annwn* and *Pa gur yv y porthaur?* share episodes with *Culhwch ac Olwen*. This Welsh prose text, which in its extant form was written around 1100, features, firstly, a passage in which Arthur and his warriors capture a cauldron in Ireland to cook food for Culhwch and Olwen's wedding feast, and secondly, two porter scenes, located at the gate of Arthur's hall and that of the giant Wrnach.[150] *Culhwch ac Olwen* starts off as the story of Culwhch's efforts to win Olwen as his wife, a task rendered virtually impossible by the magnitude of the obstacles imposed by the bride's father, the giant Ysbaddaden. The last third of the tale, however, shows Arthur and his men accomplishing the mission. This part of the narrative culminates in Arthur's successful hunt of the boar Twrch Trwyth, who carries between his ears the comb, razor and scissors which are needed to cut and comb the giant's hair, and Arthur's killing of the Black Witch, whose blood is required to stiffen the giant's beard for shaving.[151] Moments before his death, Ysbaddaden begrudgingly stresses that it is none other than King Arthur himself who is solely responsible for facilitating the nuptials.[152]

Like *Pa gur yv y porthaur?*, the enigmatic Welsh verse text *Ymddiddan Arthur a'r Eryr* ('Dialogue of Arthur and the Eagle'), which may be dated as early as the twelfth century, is a dialogue.[153] Arthur, who introduces

yr Hengerdd / Studies in Old Welsh poetry, ed. Rachel Bromwich and R. Brinley Jones (Cardiff, 1978), pp. 281–325 (pp. 296–309).

148 For a discussion and translation of the text, see Bromwich, Jarman and Roberts (ed.), *The Arthur of the Welsh*, pp. 38–46 (by Patrick Sims-Williams). See also Rachel Bromwich, 'Celtic Elements in Arthurian Romance: A General Survey', in *The Legend of Arthur in the Middle Ages*, ed. P. B. Grout *et al*., pp. 41–55, 230–33 (pp. 45–46).

149 It has been suggested that line 37 needs to be emended. In that case, it is not Arthur's deeds which are recalled in ll. 37–46, but Cai's. See *The Arthur of the Welsh*, ed. Bromwich, Jarman and Roberts, p. 42.

150 See *Culhwch and Olwen: an edition and study of the oldest Arthurian tale*, ed. Rachel Bromwich and D. Simon Evans (Cardiff, 1992), ll. 1036–1056, 82–141, 769–787. See also *The Mabinogion*, trans. Jones and Jones, pp. 85–121 (pp. 115–16, 87–88, 108).

151 See *Culhwch and Olwen*, ed. Bromwich and Evans, ll. 1057–1229; *The Mabinogion*, trans. Jones and Jones, pp. 116–20. For a discussion of the tale, see Bromwich, Jarman and Roberts (ed.), *The Arthur of the Welsh*, pp. 73–80 (by Brynley F. Roberts).

152 See *Culhwch and Olwen*, ed. Bromwich and Evans, ll. 1236–1238; *The Mabinogion*, trans. Jones and Jones, p. 121.

153 See Bromwich, Jarman and Roberts (ed.), *The Arthur of the Welsh*, pp. 57–58 (by Patrick Sims–Williams).

himself as a *bard*, a poet (stanza 1), is given religious instruction by an eagle, which reveals itself as his dead nephew Eliwlad.[154] Arthur is presented here as a renowned warrior. The animal calls his apprentice 'arth llu' ('bear of the host', stanzas 2 and 4), 'arth gwyr' ('bear of men', stanza 8), 'Arthur gledyfawc aruthyr, / ny seif dy alon rac dy ruthyr' ('Arthur of the terrible sword, your enemies stand not before your rush', stanza 6) and 'Arthu dihafarch ffossawt, / diarwyrein arllwybrawt' ('Arthur, undaunted of battle, path of the fallen', stanza 10).[155]

The Welsh tradition also preserves a tale in which the heroic future of the young Arthur is heralded. The short prose text, known as *The Birth of Arthur,* was written in the fourteenth century at the latest and is preserved in fragmentary form, the opening section having been lost. Following the Prose *Merlin*, the romance relates the story of Arthur's *enfances*.[156] The text opens with the marriage of Uther and Eigyr, followed by Arthur's birth, his fostering by Kynyr Varvoc, as Kai's father is called in this text, the sword-in-the-stone episode and Arthur's coronation.[157] The concluding lines, referring to Geoffrey of Monmouth and mentioning the name of Arthur's sword, announce Arthur's future role as a great warrior and a wise king: 'Ac odd yna yddaeth Arthur i ryvelu ac i lywio i dyrnas yny mod y treithir yn ystoria y Brytanieit ar cleddyf hwnnw a getwis Arthur gantho tra vu vyw a hwnnw a elwit Kaletvwlch. Ac velly y tervyna yr ystoria hon.' ('And hence Arthur went to do battle and to govern the kingdom as is set forth in the history of the Britons. And Arthur kept the sword while he lived, and it was called Kaletvwlch. So endeth this story.')[158]

As is the case in these Welsh texts, the Catalan verse narrative *La Faula* ('The Tale') offers a positive portrayal of Arthur. This text, written in the mid-fourteenth century by the Majorcan author Guillem Torroella, does not, however, focus on the heroic deeds of the king, but on his moral authority. A first-person narrator, introducing himself as Guillem (l. 174), announces his intention to relate an adventure he experienced himself. According to his story, he was carried away on the back of a whale and

154 See *Blodeugerdd Barddas o Ganu Crefyddol Cynnar*, ed. and trans. Marged Haycock (Abertawe, 1994), pp. 297–312 (stanzas 6–9).

155 For the translations, see Jon B. Coe and Simon Young, *The Celtic Sources for the Arthurian Legend* (Felinfach, 1995), pp. 103–7. We are grateful to Bernadette Smelik for providing us with a copy of these pages. See also Jenny Rowland, *Early Welsh Saga Poetry: A Study and Edition of the Englynion* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 285–86.

156 See Bromwich, Jarman and Roberts (ed.), *The Arthur of the Welsh*, pp. 194–95 (by Ceridwen Lloyd–Morgan).

157 For an edition and translation, see J. H. Davies, 'A Welsh Version of the Birth of Arthur', *Y Cymmrodor* 24 (1913), 247–64. We are grateful to Gareth Griffith for providing us with a copy of this article.

158 Davies, 'A Welsh Version', 258, 264. For the reference to Geoffrey, see *The Arthur of the Welsh*, ed. Bromwich, Jarman and Roberts, p. 195.

reached the 'Isl' Enxantea' ('Enchanted Island', l. 179), where a French-speaking serpent informed him that he had arrived at the dwelling of 'Morgan la fea and mesire le roy Artus' (ll. 180–81).[159] There he found Arthur, who explained that Morgan had brought him to the island after the battle of Salisbury, and that he was nourished by the 'Sans Gresaus' ('Holy Grail', l. 1083), which kept him alive and young. He then described his sadness over the fact that wicked kings prosper in the world while the valorous remain powerless (ll. 1158–81). Arthur's command that Guillem make his views known finally underlines the king's importance in the dissemination of an urgent moral message to humankind.

Critical Views of Arthur

In a number of texts originating from the fringe traditions, Arthur is shown in an unfavourable light. This is, for instance, the case in *Breudwyt Rhonabwy* ('Dream of Rhonabwy'), in which, as in *La Faula*, the world of Arthur does not coincide with the world of the main character. Dating from the end of the thirteenth or the early fourteenth century, the Welsh prose text features a new hero, Rhonabwy, but his role is limited to that of a spectator.[160] In his dream, he is led to Arthur's encampment on the eve of the battle of Badon by his guide Iddawg Cordd Prydain, Iddawg 'the Embroiler of Britain'. The latter explains that he is so called as a result of the rude manner in which he, as a young, belligerent man, deliberately addressed Medraut on behalf of Arthur, which started off the battle of Camlan more than seven years previously.[161] The order of the two battles is unexpected, since, according to the chronicle tradition, the battle of Badon precedes Arthur's last battle against Mordred. This reversal alerts the audience to the possibility that *Breudwyt Rhonabwy* is playing with Arthurian conventions. Written in a satiric vein, the tale's treatment of Arthur is characterized by non-heroic elements.[162] Soon after Rhonabwy has met him, for example, Arthur and his counsellors are drenched, due to a rider who spurs his horse into a ford. Iddawg reacts, preposterously, by declaring this rider the wisest man of the kingdom.[163] The critical portrayal of Arthur culminates in the description of the board game that he plays against Owain.[164] While the two men should be preparing for the battle against their opponent, they are, at the behest of Arthur, engaged

159 Guillem de Torroella, *La Faula*, ed. Pere Bohigas and Jaume Vidal Alcover (Tarragona, 1984).

160 *Breudwyt Ronabwy*, ed. Melville Richards (Cardiff, 1948), and *The Mabinogion*, trans. Jones and Jones, pp. 122–35.

161 *Breudwyt Ronabwy*, ed. Richards, pp. 4–5; *The Mabinogion*, trans. Jones and Jones, p. 124.

162 See Bromwich, Jarman and Roberts (ed.), *The Arthur of the Welsh*, pp. 183–93 (p. 185) (by Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan).

163 *Breudwyt Ronabwy*, ed. Richards, pp. 7–8; *The Mabinogion*, trans. Jones and Jones, pp. 126–27.

164 *Breudwyt Ronabwy*, ed. Richards, pp. 11–18, and *The Mabinogion*, trans. Jones and Jones, pp. 129–33.

in one game after the other. Three squires subsequently warn Owain that Arthur's men are slaying his ravens. After Arthur's third stubborn refusal to call off his men, Owain permits his ravens to go into battle. As a result, three squires subsequently report that Arthur's men are being killed by the ravens. Now it is Owain's turn to persist in refusing to end the conflict. 'Ac yna y gwasgwys Arthur y werin eur a oed ar y clawr yny oedynt yn dwst oll' ('And then Arthur crushed the golden pieces that were on the board till they were all dust.')[165] By doing so, Arthur admits his defeat, and the senseless killing stops. In *Breudwyt Rhonabwy*, Arthur is not a heroic leader, but a foolish one.

A critical view of Arthur also emerges clearly in *Arthur and Gorlagon*, a Latin prose text which was probably written by a Welsh author at the end of the twelfth century.[166] Like Gawain in the Middle Dutch *Wrake van Ragisel*, the king leaves the court in order to investigate 'artem et ingenium mentemque femineam' ('the wiles, and nature, and mind of women').[167] The reason for his quest is his impulsive behaviour at the beginning of the narrative: in a cheerful mood he hugs and kisses Guinevere in public. In reaction to her embarrassed reply that he does not understand women, he vows that he will not eat until he has learned about them. Both his inappropriate action and his clearly untenable oath indicate the narrative's intention of poking fun at the king – an expectation neatly fulfilled by the remainder of the tale.[168] At Gorlagon's court, Arthur refuses steadfastly to dismount and eat before his host has finished his story about his transformation into a wolf, caused by his wicked wife in an effort to get rid of him in favour of a pagan lover. Time and again, Gorlagon interrupts his story: 'Arture, descende et comede. Magnum est quod queris, et pauci sunt qui illud agnoscunt, et cum tibi retulero parum inde doctior habeberis' ('Arthur, dismount and eat. For weighty is your question and few there are who know the answer, and when I have told you all, you will be but little wiser').[169] The comedy of these persistent invitations is clearly at the cost of the frustrated Arthur.[170] Returning home, Arthur, 'super hiis que audiuerat ualde miratus' ('marvelling greatly over what he had heard'), is indeed but little the wiser, as Gorlagon had announced.[171]

Möttuls saga ('The Saga of the Mantle'), a thirteenth-century Norse prose rendition of the *Mantel mautaillié*, written, according to the prologue, at the request of King Hákon Hákonarson, depicts Arthur as a singularly

165 *Breudwyt Ronabwy*, 18, ll. 13–15, and *The Mabinogion*, p. 133.

166 For the proposed date and provenance, see *Latin Arthurian Literature*, ed. and trans. Day, pp. 41–43.

167 *Latin Arthurian Literature*, ed. and trans. Day, pp. 208–35 (pp. 210–11).

168 On parody in this text, see Echard, *Arthurian Narrative in the Latin Tradition*, pp. 204–14.

169 *Latin Arthurian Literature*, ed. and trans. Day, pp. 218–19, ll. 17–19.

170 Cf. Amanda Hopkins, 'Why Arthur at all? The Dubious Arthuricity of *Arthur and Gorlagon*', *Arthurian Literature* 26 (2009), 77–95 (p. 79).

171 *Latin Arthurian Literature*, ed. and trans. Day, pp. 234–35, ll. 11–12.

apathetic king.[172] The text opens with an elaborate portrait of Arthur, who is praised for being the world's most valiant, generous, gentle, clever and benevolent man (6–7). However, since these qualities are, with the exception of generosity, strikingly absent further on in the tale, one may wonder whether this description is intended to provide an ironic contrast with the events which follow.[173] The Arthurian values are ridiculed by means of a magic mantle which tests the fidelity of the women at court: all ladies but one are exposed as unfaithful. Arthur reacts to this outcome with indifference. He does not comment on Guinevere's failure (14–17) and is irritated by the women's reluctance to be tested, because he wants dinner to start (22–23). Whereas the courtiers are depressed by the shame that has come over them, Arthur 'lét veita hirð sinni með svá miklum kostnaði at hvergi hefir verit önnur þvílík veizla veitt né þegin' ('let his court be entertained at such great cost that never had there been such entertainment either offered or enjoyed', 28–29). The implicit criticism is aimed at Arthur's failure to show the slightest dismay over the shortcomings of his court.

The prominence of the Welsh tradition among fringe literatures which depict King Arthur in the role of hero – be it in the light of glorious leader or stubborn monarch – is unmistakable. Before the backdrop of these indigenous Welsh texts, Arthur's absence from the ranks of Arthurian heroes elsewhere, outside of texts belonging to the *Mort Artu* tradition, seems to come all the more clearly to the fore. The majority of the fringe corpora seem to continue the patterns set by the French.

New Heroes

Not only do the fringe literatures further develop the traditions surrounding heroes familiar from French romance, the Arthurian world is also expanded by the introduction of new heroes in indigenous romances peculiar to the these traditions. Unsurprisingly, the narrative techniques involved in bringing about an encounter between the Arthurian world and a figure previously unknown to it often re-use strategies already at work in the introduction of new heroes in the French tradition. Notwithstanding, the fringe literatures occasionally bring forth heroes so strongly influenced by an older indigenous literary tradition that they cause unprecedented developments in the Arthurian world as we know it.

172 See *Norse Romance II*, ed. Kalinke. pp. 1–31 (pp. 6–7).

173 See Geraldine Barnes, 'Scandinavian Versions of Arthurian Romance', in *A Companion to Arthurian Literature*, ed. Fulton, pp. 189–201 (pp. 193–94).

Kinsmen of the Round Table

The practice of presenting a new hero on the basis of credentials defined by ties of kinship is established by romances as early as *Bliocadran, Le Bel Inconnu, Beaudous, Lanzelet* and *Wigalois* in the French and German traditions, and embraced later by the fringe literatures which developed in their wake.

The *Lancelot* Compilation preserves the Middle Dutch romance of *Moriaen*, which is believed to be a modified version of a lost thirteenth-century Flemish original.[174] The family ties which justify the presence of this hero among the more illustrious members of the Round Table are remarkable for a number of reasons. Firstly, the prologue to *Moriaen* in the *Lancelot* Compilation mentions that there is some uncertainty as to whether the hero's father is in fact Perchevael or his brother: 'Som die boeke doen ons weten / Dat hi Perchevals sone was, / Ende som boke secgen oec das, / Dat hi was Acglavaels soene, / Perchevaels broder was die goene' ('Some books inform us that he was Perchevael's son, while others say that he was the son of Acglavael, who was Perchevael's brother', ll. 4–8). Clearly mindful of the imperatives imposed by the context of the Compilation, the narrator defends the decision to rule out Perchevael as the father of this hero, stressing that he, like Galahad, remained a virgin for the sake of the Grail (ll. 14–17). In addition to the doubt as to the identity of Moriaen's father implied by the prologue, certain incongruities in the text provide strong evidence in support of the hypothesis that the lost Flemish original must have featured Moriaen as the son of Perchevael, while the inclusion of the romance in the Compilation necessitated some intervention on the part of the compiler.[175] More important for our present purposes, perhaps, is the point that even though the compiler could not depict Perchevael in the role of Moriaen's father, he still chose to retain the blood relationship between them, which invites us to draw a comparison between the adventures of the young Moriaen and the history of Perchevael. In this light, Moriaen's quest for justice for his mother, who finds herself bereft of her rights to her lands when abandoned by the father of her child (ll. 707–13), is revealed as a correction of the sin committed by Perceval in Chrétien's *Conte du Graal* when he decided against turning back to tend to his ailing mother. Moriaen distinguishes himself further from his older relative when he decides against the spiritual path, favouring the sphere of worldly knighthood under the tutelage, needless to say, of none other than Walewein.[176]

[174] See Jackson and Ranawake (ed.), *The Arthur of the Germans*, p. 217 (by Bart Besamusca). For an edition of the text, see *Moriaen,* ed. H. Paardekooper-van Buuren and M. Gysseling (Zutphen, 1971).

[175] See Besamusca, *The Book of Lancelot*, pp. 84–87.

[176] See Roel Zemel, 'Moriaen en Perceval in "Waste Land"', *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandse Taal – en Letterkunde* 112 (1996), 297–319, and Besamusca, *The Book of Lancelot*, p. 79.

The hero of the Italian romance *Gismirante,* a *cantare* by Antonio Pucci (d. 1388), is identified as the son of a knight of the Round Table who is known simply as 'il cavalier Cortese' (stanza 2, 2), 'the courtly knight'.[177] Of the father we learn only that he left the realm of King Arthur in order to make his way to Rome and remained there until his death. On his deathbed, he urged his son to seek out the Arthurian court, commending him to *messer Tristano, Lancelotto* and *messer Calvano* (3, 7–8). So it is that Gismirante's arrival is eased by the high regard in which all of the knights held his father: 'per amore del suo padre' (5, 1), 'for the love of his father'. While a newcomer to Arthurian romance, this hero – as the son of a virtually anonymous and singularly uninteresting veteran of the Round Table – seems neither a true outsider nor a true insider at the court of King Arthur. It is precisely his status as a half-outsider, however, a certain affinity for communication with the world outside of Arthur's court, that proves Gismirante's value within the court. The hero begins by spending seven years here, at the end of which the implosion of the Arthurian world due to sheer lack of action seems imminent: the court undertakes to refrain from eating until some news is heard from an external source, and when the fast enters its second day, Gismirante finally demands that Arthur make him a knight, in order that he might set out to put an end to the severe discomfort occasioned by the unhappy 'usanza' (6,3). It is not until day three that Gismirante encounters the fairy who furnishes him with the material of a fine adventure, and when he returns to liberate the court from its self-imposed misery, he is greeted by a picture of ultimate lethargy: all have gone to bed (stanza 13).[178] The only knight in a position to reflect on a possible solution to the problem at hand, and the only one willing to leave the court in quest of adventure, this new hero Gismirante stands out among the Arthurian personnel of this romance as the only figure capable of generating action.

Genealogical bonds are also used as a means to explain the presence of Samson at the Arthurian court in the Icelandic prose romance *Samsons saga fagra*, although his place among European Arthurian heroes is an enigmatic one.[179] In this fourteenth-century tale, the hero is introduced as the son of King Arthur. This Norse Arthur may be the king of England, and significant parts of the action are centred in Brittany, but there is little

177 *Gismirante*, ed. Franco Zabagli, in *Cantari novellistici dal Tre al Cinquecento*, ed. Elisabetta Benucci, Roberta Manetti and Franco Zabagli (Roma, 2002), vol. 1, pp. 129–64. The English translations are our own. For a summary in English, see Gardner, *The Arthurian Legend*, pp. 247–50.

178 On humour in the opening episode of *Gismirante*, see Christopher Kleinhenz, 'The Quest Motif in Medieval Italian Literature', in *Conjunctures: Medieval Studies in Honor of Douglas Kelly,* Faux titre 83, ed. Keith Busby and Norris J. Lacy (Amsterdam, 1994), pp. 235–51 (p. 248).

179 See *Samsons saga fagra*, ed. John Wilson (Copenhagen, 1953). The text has not been translated into English. For a German translation, see *Die Saga vom Mantel und die Saga vom schönen Samson. Möttuls saga und Samsons saga fagra*, trans. Rudolf Simek (Wien, 1982).

about this tale to remind us of Arthurian tradition as it existed in Continental Europe. Arthur is married here to a certain Filipa, the daughter of the King of Hungary, and his son Samson becomes engaged in a lengthy quest to win the daughter of the King of Ireland. The chastity-testing mantle, known to Norse audiences from the *Möttuls saga,* is the only motif of Arthurian origin here.[180] This romance includes a description of the origins of the mantle, which is finally used to prove the virtue of Valentina, the hero's bride.[181] In view of the fact that a good part of the secondary plot concerning the mantle has been shown to be immersed in Scandinavian tradition, the bonds of kinship which link the hero to King Arthur seem less to fulfil the function of justifying the fair Samson's place beside Lancelot and Perceval in the Arthurian hall of fame than to offer the Arthurian subject-matter a point of entry into Scandinavian tradition.[182]

Outsiders to the Arthurian World

If the expansion of family circles found favour as a means of providing a new Arthurian figure with an incontrovertible right to membership of the Round Table, underlining the outsider status of a newcomer in the world of Arthurian romance allowed authors to problematize the expansion of the Arthurian world in terms of an encounter with the unknown.

The thirteenth-century Middle Dutch verse romance *Ridder metter mouwen* ('The Knight with the Sleeve') revolves around a nameless young squire who comes to King Arthur in the hope of being made a knight.[183] The opening episode depicts the court in the city of Kardoelet in a state of disintegration. Whitsunday festivities are interrupted by the arrival of a messenger who comes to announce the deaths of Tristan and Isolde (ll. 52–75), upon which Arthur and his knights make arrangements to depart promptly in order to attend the double funeral. The newcomer has no choice but to await the return of the king. In addition to this unfortunate neglect of Arthurian hospitality, the court is left virtually unmanned. With almost all of the knights absent, Kardeloet is vulnerable to uncourtly forces and becomes the scene of an appalling crime against an innocent damsel. While the outsider status of the nameless visitor means that he was not invited to attend the prestigious funeral, he becomes by that same

180 See *The Arthur of the North*, ed. Kalinke, pp. 145–67 (pp. 160–61).

181 *Samsons saga fagra*, ed. Wilson, p. 45; *Die Saga vom Mantel*, trans. Simek, p. 129.

182 On the Scandinavian influence in the second part of the text, see *Die Saga vom Mantel*, trans. Simek, pp. 23–27.

183 *Dutch Romances III*, ed. Johnson and Claassens, pp. 196–367. The romance was incorporated in the *Lancelot* Compilation, but in a shortened form: a fragment surviving independently of the Compilation reveals that the original romance was more elaborate. See Jackson and Ranawake (ed.), *The Arthur of the Germans*, pp. 218–19 (by Bart Besamusca).

token the only man on hand at Kardeloet to uphold that central principle of the Arthurian court, the protection of the helpless. The place of the hero at court, therefore, is justified purely by chivalric merit, displayed in the course of adventures which reveal a conscious effort on the part of the author to highlight qualities the hero holds in common with Tristan, Perceval, Lancelot and Yvain.[184] It is noteworthy, however, that family relations ultimately play a significant role in his final integration at the Arthurian court. Firstly, new bonds of alliance are created when the hero marries Walewein's niece Clarette (ll. 2225–36) – so that he marries into the family of Walewein and, therefore, of King Arthur himself. Secondly, it is simultaneously with his installation as a knight at the Arthurian court that the hero becomes aware of his own family background: in the course of the festivities to mark his success in the tournament in which he won the hand of Clarette (ll. 2126–219), he makes the acquaintance of his mother and learns his name, Miraudijs. Finally, the hero embarks on a quest to find his imprisoned father, and the romance ends with the marriage of his parents (ll. 3631–55). The Arthurian genealogy, therefore, is ultimately extended to create a niche for Miraudijs, whose suitability as an Arthurian hero seems confirmed by his ability to replace his initial anonymity by a plethora of kinship bonds.

The Middle Dutch verse romance *Torec* survives solely in the *Lancelot* Compilation, but is thought to have originally existed independently as a text written by Jacob van Maerlant around 1262.[185] Torec's adventures are driven by the quest to regain possession of a golden circlet of which his grandmother was unjustly deprived, a search which will lead him via Arthur to his bride. In this text, however, the Arthurian court is hardly the centre of courtly values and chivalric prowess which attracts Fair Unknowns from far and wide: Torec makes his way here, rather, in order to seek retribution for a damsel who was wrongly deprived of thirty castles as a result of a verdict pronounced by the Round Table (ll. 1925–58). It is significant that all of Arthur's knights stubbornly uphold the clearly wrongful ruling except Walewein, who can deny any association with this injustice on the grounds that he was not present when the decision was taken (ll. 1959–64). The friendship that emerges between Arthur's nephew and the newcomer draws clear ethical lines within the Arthurian court; in offering the hero accommodation and even supplying him with the additional items of armour which he requires in order to take part in

184 See Besamusca, *The Book of Lancelot*, pp. 108–14.

185 *Dutch Romances III*, ed. Johnson and Claassens, pp. 562–727. Maerlant probably based his work on another lost text: the French *Torrez, le Chevalier au cercle d'or*. While the innovative features of *Torec* cannot, therefore, be viewed exclusively as a product of the Dutch tradition, scholarship assumes that Maerlant introduced important changes to his source and notes that further adaptation on the part of the compiler cannot be ruled out. On the source text, see *Dutch Romances III*, ed. Johnson and Claassens, pp. 38–44 (pp. 39–42).

the duel against Ywain (ll. 1989–97), Walewein shows overt solidarity with this new arrival who will initially politely decline the offer of a place among the Arthurian knights. When the conditions for achieving lasting happiness with Miraude are revealed, Torec faces a further encounter with the Arthurian court: Miraude will marry only the suitor who succeeds in unhorsing all of Arthur's knights. In a moment of realism extraordinary in Arthurian narrative, the author passes up the chance to depict Torec in the role of the superhuman hero, choosing instead to highlight a remarkable act of courtesy on the part of Walewein towards the knight who as yet remains an outsider to the Arthurian circle. Clearly eager to facilitate Torec's effort to win the hand of Miraude, Arthur's nephew urges his fellow knights to cut their saddle-girths, so that the hero will indeed achieve what otherwise appears an utterly impossible task (ll. 3286–94, 3620–27). The myth of the hero capable of unhorsing an entire army of knights is at once undone by means of this singularly charming narrative twist. It is undoubtedly significant that Torec subsequently chooses to leave the court to repair with his new wife to her country, but it is equally significant that, in times of turmoil, such as when the land he inherits from his father is invaded, the Dutch narrator insists that Torec will continue to rely on the help of the Round Table (ll. 3799–826).

In the twelfth-century Latin prose tale *Historia Meriadoci,* the arrival of the hero at Arthur's court is the result not of his own wish to join the Round Table, but of an abduction carried out by Kaius (Kay).[186] Meriadoc, whose father Caradoc, the king of Cambria, was murdered by his own brother, is rescued along with his twin sister Orwen and raised in the wilderness by loving foster-parents. Because of their radiant beauty, the two youngsters draw upon themselves the attention of Kay and King Urien of Scotland. Orwen is taken captive against her will and packed off to Scotland, where she later becomes the wife of King Urien, while Kay seizes Meriadoc with great delight to abduct him to Arthur's court. While the abductees later seem pleased enough with their respective lots – both become honoured members of the royal courts to which they are initially taken as prisoners – we are left in no doubt as to the terrible grief which the disappearance of the twins causes the virtuous couple who raised them (p. 138, ll. 33–38). Such is the nature of the first shadow to be cast over the court of King Arthur in this romance. However, together with Urien, Arthur will subsequently wage war on Griffin, the murderer of Meriadoc's father, in order to avenge that wrong, after which Meriadoc is crowned king of Cambria. It is noteworthy that, at this point, Meriadoc goes to some lengths to evade the pitfall famously associated with Erec: 'domi residens desidia torpescere' ('[to] reside at home and become slug-

186 *Latin Arthurian Literature,* ed. and trans. Day, pp. 122–207. On problems of authorship and dating, see pp. 2–11 and 25–27.

gish with inactivity', p. 148, ll. 4–5), committing the kingdom of Cambria to the care of King Urien in order to devote his own time to knightly exercises. Similarly, the hero is determined not to live out his existence at the court of King Arthur, viewing it as an interim solution of which he will avail only until he has decided on his next move (p. 148, ll. 10–12). The lack of personal solidarity with King Arthur becomes even more obvious when Meriadoc agrees to defend the king against the Knight of the Black Forest, who announces that he has been wrongfully deprived by Arthur of the land from which – as he points out himself – his very name is taken (p. 148, ll. 30–31). The Black Knight succeeds in unhorsing thirty-seven of Arthur's men, and is finally defeated by Meriadoc, who immediately returns to upbraid the king for having forced his knights to involve themselves in this case and demands as his reward for the defeat of the Black Knight the restitution of the forest to its rightful owner. Arthur protests – further proof of his capacity for unjust behaviour – and it takes the concerted efforts of the lords and princes of his realm to persuade him to grant this boon (p. 158, ll. 15–21).[187] The dubious dealings of the king take on a comical aspect when, after this remarkable comment on Arthurian justice, two more knights emerge to contest the ownership of two further forests: the Knights of the Red and of the White Forests respectively.[188] After seeing to it that justice is done by restoring their lands to them, Meriadoc – having had enough, it would seem, of life as an Arthurian hero – now moves on to confront further unjust rulers, his encounter with the Arthurian world a closed chapter.

Eachtra Mhacaoimh-an-Iolair ('The Story of Eagle-Boy'), an Irish prose romance of uncertain dating which appears to have been written by one Brian Ó Corcráin, tells the story of another youth deprived, like Meriadoc, of his right to his father's throne by a scheming uncle.[189] The hero is carried off by an eagle shortly after his birth and dropped into the lap of King Arthur, who receives 'an aitheasc beag sin' ('that little gift', p. 118, l. 19) with delight, immediately declaring the child his rightful heir (p. 120, ll. 28–29) and naming him Macaomh-an-Iolair (p. 120, ll. 47–48). Arthur, here called 'an ríogh Artuir mic Iubhair mic Ambrois mic Constaintin mic Ughdhaire Fionndraguin' ('King Arthur, son of Iubhar, son of Ambrose, son of Constantine, son of Uther Pendragon', p. 118, ll. 5–6), is on the Plain of Wonders when the eagle comes upon

187 On the legal implications of Arthur's behaviour towards the Black Knight, see Echard, *Arthurian Narrative in the Latin Tradition*, pp. 159–92 (pp. 171–77), and Echard (ed.), *The Arthur of Medieval Latin Literature*, pp. 132–45 (pp. 137–38) (by Elizabeth Archibald).

188 On comic effect in this episode, see Echard, *Arthurian Narrative in the Latin Tradition*, pp. 184–86.

189 See *Two Irish Arthurian Romances,* ed. and trans. Macalister. On the problem of dating, see William Gillies, 'Arthur in Gaelic Tradition. Part II: Romances and Learned Lore', *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies* 3 (1982), 41–75 (46), and *A Companion to Arthurian Literature* ed. Fulton, pp. 117–27 (pp. 123–24) (by Joseph Falaky Nagy).

him, in the hope of discovering some wonder which might permit him to break the *geis* preventing his court from feasting. Eagle-Boy's status as Arthur's foster-son is reminiscent of the relationship depicted between Gawain and the king in one version of the *Eachtra an Mhadra Mhaoil*; unlike Gawain in that romance, however, this hero will not remain at the Round Table as Arthur's heir, but succeeds alone in winning back his father's kingdom. Eagle-Boy's contribution to the Arthurian court consists of winning a wife for the king, the Girl of the Grey Palfrey, whom he frees from her evil husband, the Knight of Music. Since Arthur is now provided with a spouse and thereby, presumably, with the means to produce a new heir, it is hardly problematic that the hero should finally part company with the Arthurian world, when he departs in order to rule over the kingdom of his father with his own new-found wife.

The most innovative of the heroes added by the fringe traditions must surely be the protagonist of the Irish prose text *Céilithe Iosgaide Léithe* ('The Visit of Grey Thigh'), which is preserved in later manuscripts, but dates in all probability from the fifteenth century.[190] Initially, the text follows what appears to be a conventional plot, surrounding a young knight known as the Knight of the Hunt who sets out to prove his mettle at the court of King Arthur. The focus changes, however, with the intrusion of a supernatural female figure upon the narrative: 'Grey Leg' or 'Grey Thigh' makes her first appearance as a deer during a hunt, and is eventually invited to Arthur's court, where the origins of her ugly nick-name are made public: behind her knee grows a tuft of grey hair so unflattering that it inspires hatred in all who see it.[191] From this point on, it is the female figures – primarily Grey Thigh – who will determine the course of the action. When the wives of the Round Table observe that their husbands no longer desire them as a result of the great beauty of the new arrival, these 'evil-intentioned women' set out to expose their rival.[192] Grey Thigh is called upon to raise her skirts and reveal the offending hair, but shows off a leg of such beauty that all who behold it are overcome

190 The original text is edited in *Dhá sgéal Artúraíochta: mar atá* Eachtra Mheldra agus Orlando *agus* Céilidhe Iosgaide Léithe, ed. Máire Mhac an tSaoi (Dublin, 1946), pp. 42–70. For an English translation, see Connor P. Hartnett, *Irish Arthurian Literature*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, New York University, 1973, vol. 2, pp. 337–80. (A two-volume print–out was produced by University Microfilms, Ann Arbor, Michigan in 1978). On the question of dating and for a brief summary of the plot, see Gillies, 'Arthur in Gaelic Tradition. Part II', 43–44, and *A Companion to Arthurian Literature,* ed. Fulton, pp. 117–27 (pp. 121–22) (by Joseph Falaky Nagy).

191 *Dhá sgéal Artúraíochta*, ed. Mhac an tSaoi, pp. 50–51, ll. 1712–18; *Irish Arthurian Literature*, trans. Hartnett, p. 351, par. 35.

192 *Dhá sgéal Artúraíochta*, ed. Mhac an tSaoi, p. 52, l. 1758; *Irish Arthurian Literature*, trans. Hartnett, p. 353, par. 46.

with love for her.[193] It is now the knights' wives who suddenly find themselves afflicted with tufts of hair behind their knees and covered with the shame they had intended to heap upon the stranger. Grey Thigh condemns all of the wives of the court to live out their existence without husbands, inviting the knights to follow her to the Otherworld, where, as she promises, she will replace their cantankerous spouses. Initially, however, a nasty surprise awaits the menfolk of Arthur's court: the knights are attacked by diabolical animals, leaving only Gawain and the king alive. Grey Thigh announces that this is the manner in which she proposes to avenge the shame she endured at Arthur's court, before explaining that the animals are in fact the new wives of the knights. The dead are then reawakened to life, their animal aggressors take on human form, and the Arthurian company is despatched back home to live happily ever after.[194] This intrusion of the Irish tradition in the form of Grey Thigh on the world of Arthurian fiction may lead to the disintegration of conventional Arthurian narrative structures and threaten to shatter the stability of King Arthur's court, but in its briefly narrated happy ending, this text is ultimately content to leave the Arthurian world largely in the intact state in which it was found.[195]

Lookalikes

A further stratagem which proved productive for the introduction of new heroes involved the attribution of key traits of a well-known Arthurian hero to a new character, who is in turn immediately recognizable as a reflection on his model, sometimes in parodical guise. Within the French tradition, Perceval returns as the peasant hero of Guillaume le Clerc's *Fergus*, who subsequently finds his way into the Dutch tradition as Ferguut.[196] Outside of France, Perceval inspired – at least to some extent – two further heroes: the Great Fool in the Irish *Eachtra an Amadáin Mhóir* ('Story of the Great Fool') and Carduino in the Italian *cantare* of the same name.

The Great Fool is the hero of a later prose romance of uncertain dating which is preserved in three eighteenth-century manuscripts and shows

193 *Dhá sgéal Artúraíochta*, ed. Mhac an tSaoi, p. 53, ll. 1798–1802; *Irish Arthurian Literature*, trans. Hartnett, p. 355, par. 53.

194 *Dhá sgéal Artúraíochta*, ed. Mhac an tSaoi Mhac, p. 70, ll. 2336; *Irish Arthurian Literature*, trans. Hartnett, p. 379, par. 119.

195 The Irish connection behind the figure of Grey Thigh and the collective humiliation of the ladies at Arthur's court are discussed by Nagy (*A Companion to Arthurian Literature,* ed. Fulton, pp. 122–23).

196 On *Fergus*, see Burgess and Pratt (ed.), *The Arthur of the French*, pp. 426–29 (by D.D.R. Owen), and Roel Zemel, *The Quest for Galiene. A Study of Guillaume le Clerc's Arthurian Romance 'Fergus'* (Amsterdam and Münster, 2006); on *Ferguut*, see R. M. T. Zemel, *Op zoek naar Galiene. Over de Oudfranse Fergus en de Middelnederlandse Ferguut* (Amsterdam, 1991), and Jackson and Ranawake (ed.), *The Arthur of the Germans*, pp. 211–14 (by Bart Besamusca).

important connections to Chrétien's *Perceval*.[197] The hero, a nephew of King Arthur, is deliberately removed from the civilised world in order to be raised as a 'senseless and complete fool' in the forest.[198] As is the case in the French text, the strategy is conceived with a view to protecting the lad, but the risk posed by knighthood is of a different order: the hero's parents fear that he might one day take it upon himself to avenge his three older brothers who found their deaths while attempting to kill the King of the World, as Arthur is often called in Irish texts, in order to see their father seated on his throne.[199] The family of the Great Fool, therefore, is no victim of unjustly waged war, but suffers on account of its own corrupt aspirations. Just as inevitably as Perceval, the young hero comes into contact with chivalric civilization, but when he finds himself at the court of King Arthur, it is by chance, and he moreover immediately sets his sights not on the knightly accoutrements he sees there, but on the apparel of the court fool, demanding to know whether he himself can become an even greater fool than the other if he can come by the appropriate clothing.[200] After his first taste of life at court, the Great Fool does not move on to a chivalric education but significantly returns to his mother and nurse to be kitted out. The deer-skin garb in which he is clad before departing once more for Arthur's court is not, as in the case of Perceval, the result of a subversive measure taken by a scheming mother-figure, but exactly the clothing the hero has ordered. No less unmistakably out of kilter with the continental tradition is the behaviour of the Arthurian court: here, it is not Cay, but – remarkably – Gawain who slaps the young girl for laughing at the visitor, while Arthur's bone of contention with a knight in coloured armour is depicted as the result solely of his own failure to keep to the terms of an agreement.[201] The Great Fool now sets out with the intention of travelling the world to make fools of everyone

197 For an edition of this romance, see 'An t-Amadán Mór', ed. T. Ó Rabhartaigh and Douglas Hyde, *Lia Fáil* 2 (1927), 191–228; for an English translation, see *Irish Arthurian Literature*, trans. Hartnett, vol. 2, pp. 445–516. On the relationship between this text and Chrétien's *Perceval*, see Linda Gowans, 'The *Eachtra an Amadáin Mhóir* as a Response to the *Perceval* of Chrétien de Troyes', *Arthurian Literature* 19 (2003), 199–230. On the complex text tradition of this material, which is also preserved in Scottish and Irish folktales, see William Gillies, 'Arthur in Gaelic Tradition. Part I: Folktales and Ballads', in *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies* 2 (1981), 47–72 (51–53), and 'Arthur in Gaelic Tradition. Part II, 47–49, and further Gowans, 'The *Eachtra an Amadáin Mhóir*', pp. 199–200, who also offers a brief guide to further literature on the subject.

198 'An t-Amadán Mór', ed. Ó Rabhartaigh and Hyde, p. 196; *Irish Arthurian Literature*, trans. Hartnett, p. 448.

199 'An t-Amadán Mór', ed. Ó Rabhartaigh and Hyde, p. 196; *Irish Arthurian Literature*, trans. Hartnett, p. 448.

200 'An t-Amadán Mór', ed. Ó Rabhartaigh and Hyde, p. 198; *Irish Arthurian Literature*, trans. Hartnett, p. 453.

201 'An t-Amadán Mór', ed. Ó Rabhartaigh and Hyde, pp. 199–200; *Irish Arthurian Literature*, trans. Hartnett, pp. 456–57. On the irony associated with the encounter between the Great Fool and the Arthurian court, see Gowans, 'The *Eachtra an Amadáin Mhóir*', 205–7.

he meets. Male opponents are quickly subdued and subsequently become friends and even companions, while amorous encounters with women prove a more lengthy enterprise as a result of the enjoyment they entail.[202] The meeting with the mentor-figure in this tale serves to enlighten the Great Fool as regards the ridicule attached to the epithet by which he identifies himself, which prompts the hero to demand of King Arthur an explanation for this deliberate humiliation. When Arthur, however, not realising the ties of kinship which link him to the Fool, offers the Great Fool his kingdom, the hero declines the opportunity to relinquish the fool status which has stood him thus far in good stead.[203] Details of the hero's family background are provided in this narrative by a strange one-eyed cat who can also assume human form, but the Fool does not return to seek out his relatives.[204] Moving on, he encounters a young woman mourning her husband and her abductor, whose bodies she holds in her arms and who lost their lives in a duel for her love. This lady, who bears a parodic resemblance to Perceval's cousin, is neither a blood relation of the Fool nor the dispenser of genealogical information. Impressed by, of all things, his account of the well-placed family to which he belongs, she remains with him as something akin to a wife.[205] In its humorous approach to *niceté* as a guiding principal, this text deliberately explores an alternative both to the Perceval's trajectory as aspiring Grail hero and to conventional Arthurian notions of chivalric success.

The hero of the fourteenth-century Italian verse text *Cantari di Carduino* is related to two heroes of the French verse tradition. In his upbringing and in his primary encounter with King Arthur, Carduino closely resembles Perceval, while the adventures in quest of which he rides forth from Arthur's court are unmistakably reminiscent of the *Bel Inconnu* in the romance of that name by Renaut de Beaujeu.[206] Carduino is the son of Dondinello, who was a knight at the court of King Arthur and a particular favourite of the king. Dondinello was treacherously murdered by a brother of Calvano – a crime which the hero will later avenge, albeit unknowingly.[207] Carduino is aged nine months when his father is killed

202 'An t-Amadán Mór', ed. Ó Rabhartaigh and Hyde, p. 210; *Irish Arthurian Literature*, trans. Hartnett, p. 478.

203 'An t-Amadán Mór', ed. Ó Rabhartaigh and Hyde, p. 208; *Irish Arthurian Literature*, trans. Hartnett, p. 473.

204 'An t-Amadán Mór', ed. Ó Rabhartaigh and Hyde, p. 213; *Irish Arthurian Literature*, trans. Hartnett, p. 485.

205 'An t-Amadán Mór', ed. Ó Rabhartaigh and Hyde, p. 221; *Irish Arthurian Literature*, trans. Hartnett, pp. 503–4.

206 See *Cantari di Carduino,* in *Cantari fiabeschi arturiani,* ed. Daniela Delcorno Branca (Milano, Trento, 1999), pp. 39–64. For a summary in English, see Gardner, *The Arthurian Legend*, pp. 253–57.

207 On *Carduino* as a Perceval romance, see Claude Luttrell, 'The upbringing of Perceval heroes', *Arthurian Literature* 16 (1998), 131–69.

and is removed by his mother to a forest, where he grows up not just in ignorance of chivalry, but in the belief that no other people exist save his mother and himself (cantare I, stanza 10, ll. 5–8). The intrusion of the outside world upon the protected maternal sphere takes place in this romance in two stages. First, the boy comes upon hunting spears which were left behind in the forest after a hunt, and it is to his mother that he poses his questions, which gives rise to the fallacy that they are a gift from God (I, 3, ll. 6–8). Some time later, a royal hunt passes close to the cabin where Carduino lives with his mother, and he ventures out to investigate the clamour. Here, however, it is not the youth who exhibits the greater fascination, but the hunters, who believe Carduino to be a wild man and attempt without success to catch him (I, 18, ll. 1–3). Carduino, understanding now that there are more people like himself in the world, twice accuses his mother of wilful deception and resolves to leave the forest. In this text, his mother leaves the forest with him, leading her son back to civilization, taking up residence in a city and acquiring a horse and armour for him, and finally giving him her full blessing to seek out the court of King Arthur. The adventures which ensue seem to be drawn from the narrative tradition of the *Bel Inconnu.* The hero is chosen by Arthur to accompany a damsel and her dwarf who have come to the royal court in order to request assistance for the damsel's sister, whose realm languishes in the mercy of an evil enchanter intent on forcing her to marry him (II, 4–5). Like the hero of the French romance, Carduino will spend the night at the residence of an attractive female enchantress. In spite of the explicit invitation she issues to the hero, she avoids sleeping with him: on entering her room, Carduino finds himself at the mercy of four giants, who – such is, we are told, the custom of this place – hang him by the arms over a swollen and raging river (II, 16–19). If the hero is not left afire with love for his supernatural hostess, he is at least spared the quandary which plagues his French counterpart following the dragon kiss. For when Carduino subsequently banishes the enchantment of the 'città incantata' by kissing the wretched serpent, which he does with some reluctance, he does not stir from the side of the beautiful Beatrice, who in turn declares him 'l'amor mio fino' (II, 65, l. 8). The romance closes with the final stage of the integration of the hero at the Arthurian court: Carduino's relationship with Dondinello becomes known, and Calvano and his brothers beg forgiveness.

The addition of new heroes to the Arthurian world most often involves the fabrication of new material according to existing patterns. Alternatively, it can reveal a readiness to almost completely reshape existing frameworks in order to recast Arthurian tradition in structures emanating from the indigenous literary tradition. In every case, the productivity associated with the introduction of home-grown Arthurian heroes marks a moment of conscious encounter with the Arthurian tradition.

Conclusion

Viewing the literatures which we have designated as the fringes of the Arthurian tradition as a whole, we can observe a marked diversity not only in terms of geography and language, but also in the dating of texts, in the size of the individual corpora and in the forms and lengths of the texts involved. The fringe literatures cover a vast time-span. While the older texts of the Welsh and Latin corpora are tentatively dated to the beginning and middle of the twelfth century respectively, a substantial number of Italian, Spanish and Irish texts are believed to have been composed as late as the fifteenth century. The fringe corpora range in quantity from those consisting of a single Arthurian narrative, as in the case of the Belarusian and Hebrew traditions, to the magnitude of the Italian group, which, comprising some thirty texts, is hardly smaller than the English and German corpora. Certain corpora, such as the Welsh, Iberian, Scandinavian and Irish, show a marked preference for prose, while the Dutch Arthurian texts are almost exclusively in verse – a distinction connected in all likelihood to the influence of indigenous norms. Alongside vast romances in prose, the fringe traditions include short tales in prose, such as those incorporated in the Italian *Novellino*, and in verse, such as the Spanish ballads and a number of Italian *cantari*.

Against the backdrop of this variety, one might expect the treatment of Arthurian material in the fringe traditions to show a similar degree of diversity. And indeed, the spectrum of fringe texts covers faithful translations, free adaptations, radical rewritings and indigenous romances alongside texts in which the Arthurian world as we know it seems modified almost beyond recognition. This is the case in the Irish and Scandinavian traditions, in which the depiction of the Arthurian world is heavily colored by the influence of native literary culture. The *Eachtra an Mhadra Mhaoil* ('The Story of the Crop-Eared Dog') and *Céilithe Iosgaide Léithe* ('The Visit of Grey Thigh') both confront the Arthurian court with characters and situations formed by Irish tradition. The process of acculturation appears even more marked in the Icelandic *Samsons saga fagra*, in which the Arthurian court seems reduced to the name of its king and the motif of the mantle test. A special place is occupied by Welsh texts such as *Preiddeu Annwn* ('The Spoils of Annwn'), *Pa gur yv y porthaur?* ('What Man is the Gatekeeper?') and *Culhwch ac Olwen*. If they have little in common with continental Arthurian fiction, this is, as is well known, by virtue of their early date.

In the overwhelming majority of the fringe texts, however, a clear tendency is discernible both to repeat and develop narrative structures – plots, characters, themes and motifs – which play a constitutive role in the French tradition. That this holds true for the many translations, adaptations and rewritings which are based directly or indirectly on a

French source is obvious. In the case of the indigenous fringe tales, however, the same phenomenon can be observed. Perceval adventures are reshaped in the *Eachtra an Amadáin Mhóir* ('Story of the Great Fool') and the *Cantari di Carduino*. The *Roman van Walewein* and the *Cantare di Ponzela Gaia* recast Gawain as a knight thoroughly committed to the woman he loves. *La Faula* places Arthur at the centre of the action even after his last battle. These examples are characteristic of the strategies by which indigenous texts make productive use of familiar Arthurian structures. It is noteworthy that also in the case of those Latin texts which are thought by some to predate French romance, narrative features known to us from the French tradition abound. In the *Historia Meriadoci*, the hero's fear of the *recreantise* so similar to the lapse suffered by Erec offers a striking example.

In *Herido está don Tristán* ('Wounded is Sir Tristan'), a lily sprouts from the tears shed by Tristan and Isolde immediately before the death of the hero. Combining the well-known scene of the lovers' last meeting with the highly original element of the flower, this text powerfully demonstrates the joint mechanisms of convention and innovation, eloquently reflecting the quintessence of the response to the Arthurian tradition in the fringe literatures.

Appendix

This appendix lists all the fringe texts which are discussed in our article. They are ordered according to the language in which they were written.

Belarusian literature
Povest' o Tryshchane (before 1580)

Czech literature
Tristram a Izalda (late 14th century)

Danish literature
Tistram og Jomfru Isolt (15th century)

Dutch literature
Arturs doet (*c*. 1280)
Lanceloet en het hert met de witte voet (13th century)
Lancelot Compilation (*c*. 1320)
Lantsloot vander Haghedochte (*c*. 1260)
Moriaen (13th century)
Penninc and Pieter Vostaert, *Roman van Walewein* (*c*. 1250)
Perchevael (*c*. 1320)

Queeste vanden Grale (*c*. 1280)
Ridder metter mouwen (13th century)
Torec (*c*. 1262)
Walewein ende Keye (13th century)
Wrake van Ragisel (early 13th century)

Hebrew literature
Melekh Artus (1279)

Icelandic literature
Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd (14th century)
Samsons saga fagra (14th century)
Tristrams Kvæði (14th century)

Irish literature
Céilithe Iosgaide Léithe (15th century)
Eachtra an Amadáin Mhóir (16th century?)
Eachtra an Mhadra Mhaoil (after 1517)
Eachtra Mhacaoimh-an-Iolair (15th century?)
Lorgaireacht an tSoidhigh Naomhtha (mid-15th century)

Italian literature
Cantare dei Cantari (1380–1420)
Cantari di Carduino (14th century)
Chantari di Lancellotto (*c*. 1400)
Morale (before 1410)
Morte di Tristano (14th century)
Novellino (or *Cento novelle antiche*), nos. 28, 45, 65, 82 (late 13th century)
Ponzela Gaia (mid-14th–15th centuries)
Antonio Pucci, *Gismirante* (late 14th century)
Quando Tristano e Lancielotto conbatetero al petrone di Merlino (15th century)
Tavola Ritonda (1330–1340)
Tristano Riccardiano (1272–1300)
Zibaldone da Canal (early 14th century)

Latin literature
Arthur and Gorlagon (late 12th century)
De ortu Waluuani (mid-12th century?)
Historia Meriadoci (12th century)
Norse-Icelandic literature [208]
Brother Robert, *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar* (1226)

[208] This corpus includes Norse texts which are extant in Icelandic redactions.

Erex saga (after 13th century)
Ívens saga (13th century)
Möttuls saga (13th century)
Parcevals saga, including *Valvens Þáttr* (13th century)

Spanish literature
Brother Juan Vives, Spanish Post-Vulgate (*c*. 1313)
Carta enviada por Hiseo la Brunda a Tristán; Respuesta de Tristán (late 15th century)
Guillem Torroella, *La Faula* (mid-14th century)
Herido está don Tristán (15th century)
Lanzarote del Lago (*c*. 1300)
Lanzarote y el ciervo del pie blanco, or *Tres hijuelos habia el rey* (15th century)
Nunca fuera caballero de damas tan bien servido, or *Lanzarote y el Orgulloso* (15th century)

Swedish literature
Ivan Lejonriddaren, or *Hærra Ivan* (1303)

Welsh literature
The Birth of Arthur (14th century?)
Breudwyt Rhonabwy (*c*. 1300)
Culhwch ac Olwen (*c*. 1100)
Geraint (*c*. 1210–1230)
Owain (*c*. 1210–1230)
Pa gur yv y porthaur? (before 1100)
Peredur (*c*. 1225–1250)
Preiddeu Annwn (*c*. 800–*c*. 1150)
Ymddiddan Arthur a'r Eryr (12th century)
Y Seint Greal (late 14th century)
Ystorya Trystan, or *Trystan ac Esyllt* (13th–14th centuries)