

## Introduction

The development of narrative cycles is a characteristic aspect of medieval literature. A cycle can be the end product of a gradual process of expansion as a result of which an original tale or romance is preceded by stories telling of previous events, or continued by sequels or continuations treating of later developments. It can also be the product of a compiler who arranges or combines existing works into a comprehensive structure. A cycle is distinguishable from a mere collection of works by the fact that events are presented in a linear sequence, that the principal characters throughout the cycle are identical or related to each other, and that the cohesion between the constituent works is made clear by external or internal references.

This broad definition includes cycles of different types. One of these types is represented by the so-called Vulgate Cycle of the Arthurian Romances, another by a work like the Middle Dutch *Lancelot* Compilation, a series of ten Arthurian romances brought together in an ordered sequence. In the Old Norse *Karlamagnús saga* the constituent texts, translations of originally independent works, present together a biography of Charlemagne; the same applies to the German *Karlmeinet* Compilation. The Old French cycle of Guillaume d'Orange recounts the deeds of one protagonist, whereas the Lorrains cycle narrates the vicissitudes of a noble lineage. The definition also comprises the various continuations of a work like Chrétien's *Perceval*.

Cyclification, *i.e.* the development of narrative cycles, plays a major role in two main domains of medieval literature: in the chansons de geste (including their derivatives in various medieval literatures) and in the Arthurian romances. The phenomenon has been studied by specialists in these fields, but as a rule the scope of their work has remained within the confines of one of the two principal genres. Comparisons between the development of narrative cycles in Arthurian literature and in the chansons de geste have rarely been made. This was the reason for the Dutch sections of the *Société Rencesvals pour l'étude des épopées romanes* and the *Société Arthurienne* to join hands in organizing a colloquium in which specialists in both fields would have the opportunity to exchange notes on the development of narrative cycles in the Matter of France and the Matter of Britain. The colloquium, organized by Bart Besamusca (secretary), Frank Brandsma, Hans van Dijk, Willem P. Gerritsen (chairman), Corry Hogetoorn, Orlanda S.H. Lie, Ada Postma and Irene Spijker, took place on 17 and 18

December 1992 under the auspices of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences. The Board of the Academy agreed to publish the proceedings of the colloquium.

The volume opens with the texts of the five plenary lectures which were given on the first day of the colloquium.

In 'Le roman de *Tristan* en prose et le cercle des bretthes estoires' Emmanuèle Baumgartner of the University of Paris III explores the poetics of compilation. She shows how the Prose *Tristan* combines two ways of expanding the story: on the one hand the well-worn technique of continuation and on the other a more modern way of decentralising or spreading the narrative material over a variety of sub-plots and story-lines.

Michael Heintze (University of Gießen) discusses 'Les techniques de la formation de cycles dans les chansons de geste'. He distinguishes four processes of cycle formation: the construction of links between epics belonging to the same cycle, the amplification of a cycle by adding new epics to it, the junction of epics of different cycles by external references, and the blending of epics stemming from different cycles. A survey of the entire corpus of Old French chansons de geste shows that the poets have used these techniques in various ways during the entire period.

Jane H.M. Taylor of St. Hilda's College, Oxford, entitles her lecture 'Order from Accident: Cyclic Consciousness at the End of the Middle Ages'. She stresses the distinction between "sequential" and "organic" cyclicity. The first term refers to the process of authorial accretion or scribal agglomeration "which may at its simplest do no more than juxtapose a series of individual texts linked only by the presence, say, of some particular hero." In the case of organic cyclicity, on the other hand, the fictional structure is modelled according to "a conception of time itself as a cycle", carrying a history from "an identifiable beginning to a final stasis". By the fourteenth century, Jane Taylor argues, organic cyclicity had become the model, so that existing cycles were modified in order to conform to it.

The Old Norse *Karlamagnús saga* offers a good example of the formation of a cycle. According to Povl Skårup (University of Århus) the concept of series is a basic requirement: in order to constitute a cycle the assembled works should form a series. He discusses five criteria: there should be at least two texts involved; their inclusion in one manuscript should be determined by the order of the narrated events; throughout the cycle the principal characters should be the same or should be linked to each other by bonds of kinship; there should be "cyclic signals" between the texts; and inside the texts there should be "cyclic signals" in the form of allusions or adaptations.

The case of the Middle Dutch *Lancelot* Compilation is presented by Bart Besamusca of Utrecht University. This fourteenth-century manuscript contains the second half of a verse translation of the Old French tripartite cycle *Lancelot* proper, *Queste del Saint Graal*, *Mort le roi Artu*, interspersed with seven Arthurian verse romances, two of which have been incorporated between *Lancelot* and *Queste*, the remaining five between *Queste* and *Mort Artu*.

Besamusca shows that it is rewarding to compare the Middle Dutch compilation from different angles with Old French compilations like the one contained in the Chantilly MS. 472, as well as with those preserved in manuscripts 112 and 1450 of the fonds français of the Bibliothèque Nationale.

The texts of the five plenary lectures are followed by a series of discussion notes, based upon the contributions to the five sessions which were held on the second day of the conference. These were devoted to five important aspects of cyclification: typological, codicological, biographical, genetic, and structural and thematic. Together, these discussion notes provide an overview of the various approaches to the problems of cyclification.

In presenting the *Proceedings* of the Amsterdam Colloquium on the development of narrative cycles, the editors hope to render a service not only to specialists of chansons de geste and Arthurian romances, but also to a wider circle of students of medieval literature. They gratefully acknowledge the assistance they received from several persons who helped them prepare this volume for the press. Special thanks are due to Claar van Oppen, and to Frederik Bos and the staff of Edita, the publishing department of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences.

The Editors