

## Cyclification in Middle Dutch Literature: The Case of the *Lancelot* Compilation

Somewhere between 3 March 1469 and 4 March 1470 Sir Thomas Malory finished a work that he himself called “The Whole Book of King Arthur and of His Noble Knights of the Round Table”. Today we know this text as the *Morte Darthur*, which is the title the printer William Caxton in 1485 gave to the printed version of Malory’s book.<sup>1</sup> In Caxton’s edition Malory’s work is divided into twenty-one sections or books. It would seem that together these books are a clear example of a narrative cycle. But appearances can be deceptive and in this case they are, as is obvious from the only manuscript that has survived. In this codex, that was not discovered until 1934, Malory’s work is made up of eight books or tales, which not only are very much longer than Caxton’s books are, but which also are more self-sufficient. Every tale, for example, ends with an explicit. According to Eugène Vinaver, the eminent Arthurian scholar who on the basis of the manuscript provided the standard edition of Malory’s work, Malory did not write a cycle, but eight separate romances. In Vinaver’s view, Malory tried to unravel the threads of which the thirteenth-century cycles of romances are made and tried to reduce the entire narrative to relatively small self-contained units.<sup>2</sup>

One of the arguments Vinaver puts forward to support his view that Malory did not write a cycle bears upon the striking phenomenon that some characters reappear after their deaths.<sup>3</sup> This is, for example, the case with the knight Breunys Sanze Pyté. His epithet suggests that he is a disagreeable person and he lives up to his name. It is with good reason that he is called the “grete dystroyer of all good knyghtes”.<sup>4</sup> Someone who reads Malory’s work from the beginning will be surprised at Breunys’ reappearance in the fifth tale: in the fourth tale he was killed by Sir Gareth of Orkney.<sup>5</sup> In this respect Breunys is not the only lucky fellow. The same holds for the brothers Tarquyn and Carados of the

<sup>1</sup> For an introduction see Terence McCarthy, *Reading the Morte Darthur*, Arthurian Studies 20 (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1988), and Norris J. Lacy et al., eds., *The New Arthurian Encyclopedia*, Garland Reference Library of the Humanities 931 (New York/London: Garland Publishing, 1991), pp. 294-97 (entry written by Peter J.C. Field).

<sup>2</sup> *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory*, edited by Eugène Vinaver, revised by P.J.C. Field. 3rd edition in three volumes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), vol. 1, p. XLVI.

<sup>3</sup> *The Works*, vol. 1, p. XXXVIII.

<sup>4</sup> *The Works*, p. 614/18.

<sup>5</sup> *The Works*, pp. 355/5-36 and commentary on 355/14-24.

Dolowres Towre. In the third tale we are told dat Carados was killed by Sir Launcelot. To revenge him, Tarquyn took the lives of more than a hundred good knights, and is thereupon done to death by Launcelot. In the fourth tale, however, the two brothers take part in a tournament and they even both combat with Launcelot, the man who had put them to death!<sup>6</sup>

As I indicated, according to Vinaver these knights who have risen from the dead are one argument among others to support his view that Malory did not write a narrative cycle but wrote separate romances. I am unable to pronounce upon Vinaver's being in the right, but I will go so far as to maintain that the fact that Breunys, Tarquyn and Carados rise again, in itself provides no valid argument. I can substantiate this assertion by drawing attention to a beautiful example of a narrative cycle: the Middle Dutch *Lancelot* Compilation. There can be no doubt that this compilation of Arthurian romances is a cycle, and not a collection of independent romances. I need only point out that the Middle Dutch texts are linked by means of transitional passages and that in this respect they differ from Malory's tales, which end with an explicit. By way of an example I quote the transition that precedes the indigenous romance *Ridder metter mouwen* (The Knight with the Sleeve):<sup>7</sup>

Dus latic di tale hier ter stonde  
Van Lancelote ende van sinen geselle  
Tote dat icker meer af telle.  
Nu selew swigen van desen  
Ende van enen jongelinc vord lesen,  
Die te hove nu sal comen;  
Eest alsict hebbe vernomen  
Soe salmen noch van hem sien  
Groet wonder hier na gescien.

(I [it is the narrator that speaks] let the story of Lancelot and his companion rest now until I shall tell more. We shall now be silent about this, and tell about a young man who will come to court; if things go as I have heard, he shall hereafter be seen accomplishing great deeds.)

In the *Lancelot* Compilation Perchevael makes his appearance as one of the two companions of Galahad, the Grail hero. In the *Queeste vanden Grale*, the Middle Dutch translation of the *Queste del Saint Graal*, Perchevael retires to a monastery after Galahad's death. He dies about one year later.<sup>8</sup> However, in one of the texts that follow the translation of the *Queste*, the romance *Ridder metter mouwen* that I have just mentioned, we meet with him again. In this text he is one of Arthur's most important knights and he repeatedly takes action. In the beginning of the story, for example, he and Walewein together conduct the

<sup>6</sup> *The Works*, pp. 265/7-267/23 and 343/28-29, 349/18-23.

<sup>7</sup> *Roman van Lancelot*, ed. W.J.A. Jonckbloet, vol. 2, book 3, vv. 14572-80. This only complete edition of the *Lancelot* Compilation (2 vols.) dates back to the 19th century ('s-Gravenhage: Van Stockum, 1846-49).

<sup>8</sup> *Roman van Lancelot*, vol. 2, book 3, vv. 11025-40. For the Old French see *La Queste del Saint Graal*, roman du XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle édité par Albert Pauphilet, Classiques français du moyen âge 33 (Paris: Champion, 1949), p. 279/14-20.

queen.<sup>9</sup> So: even though the *Lancelot* Compilation is a narrative cycle, we do see a person reappearing after his death. Such a lucky fellow cannot be used as an argument against cyclification.

In the mean time I have already mentioned two Middle Dutch romances that are part of the *Lancelot* Compilation: the *Queeste vanden Grale* and the *Ridder metter mouwen*, and it is high time I introduced the entire compilation to you. The *Lancelot* Compilation is a collection of ten Middle Dutch Arthurian romances in verse, that have come down to us in one manuscript which came into being in Brabant about the year 1320. The core of the *Lancelot* Compilation is made up of three romances: *Lanceloet*, *Queeste vanden Grale* and *Arturs doet*. These works are translations of the three most important parts of the Old French Vulgate Cycle: *Lancelot* proper, *Queste del Saint Graal* and *Mort le roi Artu*. The compiler made use of the transitions between these three texts to insert no fewer than seven Middle Dutch Arthurian romances. After the *Lanceloet* he included two texts: the *Perchevael* and the *Moriaen*. The *Perchevael* is based on a Middle Dutch translation of Chrétien's *Perceval*, followed by a number of Gauvain-episodes from the First Continuation; in all probability the *Moriaen* is an indigenous romance. The *Queeste* follows these two romances, and is followed itself by five interpolated texts. The first one is the *Wrake van Ragisel*, an adaptation of an extant Middle Dutch translation of the *Vengeance Raguidel*. This *Wrake* is followed by two indigenous romances, *Ridder metter mouwen* and *Walewein ende Keye*. The fourth text that was inserted here, *Lanceloet en het hert met de witte voet* (Lancelot and the Stag with the White Foot) is perhaps best described as an Arthurian novelette that is probably based on the Old French *Lai de Tyolet*. The fifth and last romance that was inserted here is the *Torec*, an adaptation of a Middle Dutch translation — now lost — of an Old French Arthurian romance that is lost too, the *Torrez, le Chevalier au cercle d'or*.<sup>10</sup>

In the *Lancelot* Compilation the compiler tried to present these separate romances as one coherent unity. As I have just indicated, he tried, among other things, to connect them by means of transitional passages. At other places he inserted complete episodes to round off narrative threads. He furthermore connected the romances by means of a system of cross-references. As a result of all these interventions the *Lancelot* Compilation is a striking example of a narrative cycle which is the product of a compiler who, within the confines of a codex, combined and arranged existing romances into a comprehensive structure. We are, therefore, clearly dealing with a form of cyclification in which the codex is a structuring force. In this respect the *Lancelot* Compilation is certainly not unique: in the Middle Ages more such Arthurian compilation-codices were made. According to Lori Walters, for example, “quelques manuscrits contenant plusieurs romans de Chrétien de Troyes sont plus qu'une mise ensemble mécani-

<sup>9</sup> *Roman van den riddere metter mouwen*, eds. M.J.M. de Haan et al. (Utrecht: Hes, 1983), vv. 35-36.

<sup>10</sup> For a diagram see p. 119.

que de textes de cet auteur: on peut légitimement les considérer comme de véritables créations littéraires.”<sup>11</sup>

In the remainder of this essay I would like to discuss the character of the *Lancelot* Compilation as a narrative cycle. That can, of course, be done in many ways. It seems to me to be very attractive to compare the compilation to the work of the German poet Ulrich Füetrer. Between 1473 and 1484 Füetrer wrote his *Buch der Abenteurer*, in which he brought together a great number of texts which all are adaptations of older German works. He used, for example, Wolfram's *Parzival*, Konrad's *Trojanerkrieg* and Hartmann's *Iwein*.<sup>12</sup> I am convinced a comparison of Füetrer's *Buch der Abenteurer* and the *Lancelot* Compilation would result in very interesting observations. If, however, I were to do so now, I would have to compare two narrative cycles that are both rather unknown, and I fear I would not offer much that is recognizable. It is for this reason that I have decided to steer another course here: I think I had better compare the relatively unknown *Lancelot* Compilation to three familiar Old French compilation-codices. It goes without saying that in the context of this article I can only discuss a limited number of aspects. Nevertheless I hope to be able to show that this approach is productive.

The first codex I would like to introduce is Chantilly ms. 472. This codex, which dates back to the end of the thirteenth century, contains no less than eleven famous Old French texts.<sup>13</sup> Three of Chrétien de Troyes' romances, *Erec et Enide*, *Yvain* and the *Chevalier de la Charrette*, are surrounded by Arthurian romances as, among others, the *Fergus*, the *Bel Inconnu*, the *Vengeance Raguidel* and the *Perlesvaus*. It is striking that the codex closes with some of the branches of the *Roman de Renart*. It would seem that this latter text is an odd one out in this codex. Yet, scholars have observed that beyond all doubt the compiler of ms. 472 tried to unify the constituent parts.<sup>14</sup>

When we compare the compilation in the Chantilly codex to the *Lancelot* Compilation, similarities are obvious. To each compilation, for example, a number of scribes contributed; this does not hold for the two Old French codices which I shall discuss later on. With two other parallels between Chantilly and the *Lancelot* Compilation I would like to deal in some greater length. The first point of agreement is connected with the two types of Arthurian romances we distinguish: works in verse, like Chrétien and his followers wrote them, and Arthurian romances in prose. These two types do not only differ in form, but just as much in subject matter. The scope of the prose romances is more historical and more religious. Beate Schmolke-Hasselmann is very much right when she states: “Der Versroman gehorcht in Struktur und Bedeutung anderen Geset-

<sup>11</sup> Lori Walters, ‘Le rôle du scribe dans l’organisation des manuscrits des romans de Chrétien de Troyes’, in *Romania* 106 (1985), p. 325.

<sup>12</sup> For an introduction see Carola L. Gottzmann, *Artusdichtung*, Sammlung Metzler 249 (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1989), pp. 199-215.

<sup>13</sup> For a description see Alexandre Micha, *La tradition manuscrite des romans de Chrétien de Troyes*, Publications romanes et françaises 90 (Genève: Droz, 1966<sup>2</sup>), pp. 38-39.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Micha, *La tradition manuscrite*, pp. 270-72 and Walters, ‘Le rôle du scribe’, pp. 321-24.

zen als der Prosaroman".<sup>15</sup> Seen against this background it is striking that the compilers of ms. 472 and the *Lancelot* Compilation decided to bring these two types of romances together.

In the case of the Chantilly codex this bringing together of different types of romances was done on a rather modest scale. In addition to the many verse romances there is one prose romance: the *Perlesvaus*, a Grail text that dates back to the beginning of the thirteenth century. In the *Lancelot* Compilation this combination of the two types of romances was carried out on a much larger scale. It should, however, be noted that the form does not betray this bringing together of the two types, as the *Lanceloet*, the *Queeste vanden Grale* and *Arturs doet* are versified translations of the prose trilogy *Lancelot-Queste-Mort Artu*. Yet, in subject matter they agree with the prose romances. On the other hand, texts as the *Wrake van Ragisel* and the *Ridder metter mouwen* evidently are part of the tradition of Chrétien and his followers. The compiler integrated these texts and a coherent unity resulted. I shall discuss this later on, when I deal with the third Old French codex.

The *Perlesvaus* in ms. 472 takes me to the second parallel between the Old French codex and the *Lancelot* Compilation. In her discussion note Lori Walters observes that the part of this romance that was incorporated into ms. 472 particularly deals with Gauvain's adventures. She links this to the compiler's aim to give a complete — and flattering — picture of Gauvain; the compiler creates a type of "geste de Gauvain", among other things by alternating the adventures of Gauvain with those of other knights in the compilation.<sup>16</sup> Something similar was suggested for the *Lancelot* Compilation. Whereas Lancelot plays the central part in the core of the cycle, it is Walewein that plays the leading part in most of the interpolated romances. It is not inconceivable that the compiler wanted to alternate the adventures of Lancelot with those of Walewein.<sup>17</sup> It is also possible that he wanted to improve the unfavourable picture of Walewein we get in the core of the compilation (where he, for example, kills eighteen of Arthur's knights during his quest for the Grail). It may well be that the compiler decided to do so by means of the interpolated romances in which Walewein surpasses Lancelot.<sup>18</sup>

I would now like to include a second Old French compilation-codex in the comparison. I am referring to a codex from the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, more precisely fonds français ms. 112 about which Cedric Pickford wrote a fine

<sup>15</sup> Beate Schmolke-Hasselmann, *Der arthurische Versroman von Chrestien bis Froissart. Zur Geschichte einer Gattung*, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für romanische Philologie 177 (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1980), p. 4.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. pp. 135-36.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. W.P. Gerritsen, *Die Wrake van Ragisel. Onderzoekingen over de Middelnederlandse bewerkingen van de "Vengeance Raguidel"*, gevolgd door een uitgave van de *Wrake-teksten*, 2 vols., Neerlandica Traiectina 13 (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1963), pp. 259-60.

<sup>18</sup> See Roel Zemel, "'Hoe Walewein Lanceloet bescedde ende enen camp vor hem vacht'". Over *Lanceloet en het hert met de witte voet*, in Bart Besamusca and Frank Brandsma, eds., *De ongevallige Lanceloet: Studies over de Lancelotcompilatie*, Middelieuwse studies en bronnen 28 (Hilversum: Verloren, 1992), pp. 95-97.

study.<sup>19</sup> It is a manuscript from 1470 that came from the library of Jacques d'Armagnac, Duke of Nemours, who was decapitated in 1477. Unlike the Chantilly codex and the *Lancelot* Compilation this ms. 112 was entirely copied by one single scribe, whose name we know: Michot Gonnot. This copyist, who describes himself as a priest, made a number of codices for the Duke.

Ms. 112 contains an enormous compilation that is based on a great number of Old French Arthurian romances in prose. The compiler used, among others, the *Lancelot* proper, *Queste del Saint Graal*, *Mort le roi Artu*, *Tristan en prose* and the *Suite du Merlin*. It seems as if he wanted to bring together as much Arthurian matter as possible. Elspeth Kennedy characterized ms. 112 as "a kind of Reader's Digest of all the important Arthurian adventures".<sup>20</sup>

Michot Gonnot was not merely the scribe of ms. 112, there is every indication that he was the compiler as well.<sup>21</sup> Although I must make a reservation, this fact provides a striking analogy with the *Lancelot* Compilation. Some years ago I argued that there are sufficient indications to believe that the most important copyist of the Middle Dutch compilation, the one who produced the greatest part of the codex and supervised the work of the other scribes, was also the compiler.<sup>22</sup> I made a reservation, because there is another candidate for the position of compiler. I refer to Lodewijk van Velthem, a well-known Middle Dutch poet who finished a translation of the *Suite-Vulgate du Merlin* in 1326. According to a note on the last leaf of the codex, this Lodewijk van Velthem, who was a priest, just as Michot Gonnot, was the first owner of the *Lancelot* Compilation. Obviously, this leads one to suspect that he was not only the owner, but the compiler as well.<sup>23</sup>

That both compilers in all likelihood acted as scribes too, is not the only parallel between ms. 112 and the *Lancelot* Compilation. It is not difficult to point to other similarities. Michot Gonnot, for example, divided his compilation into four books. Ms. 112 consists of three books, "le second livre de messire Lancelot du Lac", the "tiers livre" and the "dernier livre"; the preceding first book is lost.<sup>24</sup> The *Lancelot* Compilation is also divided into books. The *Torec*, for example, is the last text of the third book, as is clear from the following verses:<sup>25</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Cedric E. Pickford, *L'évolution du roman arthurien en prose vers la fin du Moyen Age d'après le manuscrit 112 du fonds français de la Bibliothèque Nationale* (Paris: Nizet, 1960).

<sup>20</sup> Elspeth Kennedy, 'The Re-writing and Re-reading of a Text: the Evolution of the *Prose Lancelot*', in Alison Adams et al., eds., *The Changing Face of Arthurian Romance: Essays on Arthurian Prose Romances in Memory of Cedric E. Pickford*, *Arthurian Studies* 16 (Woodbridge: D.S. Brewer, 1986), p. 9.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Pickford, *L'évolution*.

<sup>22</sup> *Lanceloet. De Middelnederlandse vertaling van de Lancelot en prose overgeleverd in de Lancelot-compilatie. Pars 2 (vs. 5531-10740)*, ed. Bart Besamusca, *Middelnederlandse Lancelotromans* 5 (Assen/Maastricht: Van Gorcum, 1991), pp. 175-80.

<sup>23</sup> For this view see for example Frits van Oostrom, *Aanvaard dit werk: Over Middelnederlandse auteurs en hun publiek*, *Nederlandse literatuur en cultuur in de middeleeuwen* 6 (Amsterdam: Prometheus, 1992), pp. 60-64.

<sup>24</sup> Pickford, *L'évolution*, pp. 10, 14, 17, 129 and "Appendice 1".

<sup>25</sup> *Roman van Lancelot*, vol. 2, book 3, vv. 26979-80.

Dus indic hier den derden boec:  
God hude ons jegen sduvels vloec!

(Thus I finish here the third book; may God protect us against the devil's curse!)

What is more: the Middle Dutch compilation was divided into four books, too, and here too the first book is lost. That these books have come down to us incompletely must be purely accidental. It is hard to believe, however, that the similar division into four books is purely accidental, too.

Another parallel between ms. 112 and the *Lancelot* Compilation has to do with the structure of the two narrative cycles. According to Pickford, Michot Gonnot structured his compilation in such a way that it could serve two goals: "La double intention de ce copiste se révèle: il fait entrer sous la même couverture autant de romans que possible, et il permet au lecteur de lire en quelques feuillets un seul roman arthurien."<sup>26</sup> To put it differently: Gonnot's sources were not interwoven so closely that they have become inseparable. Frank Brandsma has shown that more or less the same holds for the *Lancelot* Compilation. The compiler did not implant one romance inside another. He connected separate texts by means of transitional passages, and did so in such a way that each romance became an independent chapter of the book as a whole.<sup>27</sup> We can isolate the separate romances in the *Lancelot* Compilation just as we can in ms. 112.

The most important difference between Gonnot's narrative cycle and the *Lancelot* Compilation lies in the sources that were used. Whereas the Old French scribe confined himself to one type of Arthurian texts — the prose romances — the Middle Dutch compiler combined these chronicle-like Arthurian romances with romances *à la Chrétien*. With respect to this, the *Lancelot* Compilation had better be compared to the third Old French manuscript which I announced I would discuss. Just as ms. 112 this third codex is deposited with the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, where its shelf mark is fonds français ms. 1450. This codex, which dates back to the first half of the thirteenth century, contains two romances of antiquity, the *Roman de Troie* and the *Roman d'Enéas*. These are followed by the *Roman de Brut*, by the five Arthurian romances Chrétien left behind, and by the *Roman de Dolopathos*.<sup>28</sup> It was convincingly argued that we deal with a narrative cycle here.<sup>29</sup>

If it is the person of the compiler we are talking about, ms. 1450 shows a parallel with the *Lancelot* Compilation just as ms. 112 does. In all three cases the

<sup>26</sup> Pickford, *L'évolution*, p. 201.

<sup>27</sup> *Lanceloet. De Middelnederlandse vertaling van de Lancelot en prose overgeleverd in de Lancelot-compilatie. Pars 3 (vs. 10741-16263)*, ed. Frank Brandsma, *Middelnederlandse Lancelotromans 6* (Assen/Maastricht: Van Gorcum, 1992), pp. 182-202. See also Brandsma's discussion note (pp. 118-21).

<sup>28</sup> For a description see Micha, *La tradition manuscrite*, pp. 35-37.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Walters, 'Le rôle du scribe' and Sylvia Huot, *From Song to Book: The Poetics of Writing in Old French Lyric and Lyrical Narrative Poetry* (Ithaca/London: Cornell University Press, 1987), pp. 27-32. By the way: considering the romances of antiquity it contains, ms. 1450 lends itself for a comparison to the German cycle *Buch der Abenteurer*. After all, Fuëtrér made room for Konrad's *Trojanerkrieg* in his compilation.

scribe probably acted as compiler. Another similarity between ms. 1450 and the Middle Dutch work has to do with the small degree of restraint with which the compilers of these two manuscripts treated their sources. The copyist of ms. 1450, for example, deleted the prologues of several romances.<sup>30</sup> Everything seems to indicate that the compiler of the *Lancelot* Compilation followed the same line of action with most of the interpolated romances. Moreover, in a number of cases he abridged his sources. We have a clear example of this in the *Ridder metter mouwen*. In this respect too, the compiler of ms. 1450 is probably a kindred spirit, as he seems to be responsible for, among other things, the substantial reduction of Chrétien's *Erec et Enide* in the manuscript.<sup>31</sup>

It is, however, the combination in both narrative cycles of, on the one hand, chronicle-like texts and, on the other hand, Arthurian romances in verse in the tradition of Chrétien, that makes it worthwhile, more than anything else, to compare ms. 1450 and the *Lancelot* Compilation. In the *Lancelot* Compilation the translations of the prose romances lend a historical character to the narrative cycle: the flourishing and the decline of Arthur's realm are being described. In ms. 1450 it is the third text, the *Roman de Brut* by the Norman poet Wace, that to a large extent determines the historical framework. This text is, after all, a free translation of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*.

In ms. 1450 the *Roman de Brut* is interrupted halfway through at the moment Arthur's realm enters a period of peace that will last twelve years. This interruption is as follows.<sup>32</sup> First the scribe/compiler copies a famous passage from Wace:

En cele grant pais que jo di  
 Ne sai se vos l'aves oï  
 Furent les mervelles provées  
 Et les aventures trovées  
 Qui d'Artu sont tant racontées  
 Que a fable sont atornées  
 N'erent mensonge, ne tot voir,  
 Tot folie ne tot savoir;  
 Tant ont li conteor conté  
 Et par la terre tant fablé  
 Pour faire contes delitables  
 Que de verité ont fait fables

To this the compiler adds:

Mais ce que Crestiens tesmogne  
 Porés ci oïr sans alogne

Thereupon Chrétien's five romances follow.

According to the compiler of ms. 1450, the adventures of the individual knights as Chrétien pictures them belong in Wace's twelve-year period of peace

<sup>30</sup> Walters, 'Le rôle du scribe', p. 305.

<sup>31</sup> Walters, 'Le rôle du scribe', pp. 312-13. See also Micha, *La tradition manuscrite*, pp. 297-301.

<sup>32</sup> Micha, *La tradition manuscrite*, p. 37.



during Arthur's reign. It goes without saying that this was a brilliant idea.<sup>33</sup> One wonders whether the same can be said about the way in which romances were inserted into the *Lancelot* Compilation. As I have indicated, this was done at two points: before the translation of the *Queste del Saint Graal* and following it. For various reasons, however, the second one, the transition from the *Queste* to the *Mort Artu*, is not a suitable place to insert romances.<sup>34</sup> Firstly, this transition does not involve a lapse of time that would create an opportunity to picture other adventures; the action continues. The second reason is much more important. In the *Queste* Galahad accomplishes the Grail quest. We are told that with Galahad's achievement all the adventures of Arthur's realm are brought to an end. The time of adventures is over. Nevertheless, in the *Lancelot* Compilation we get a great many quests and adventures in the five interpolated romances.

According to the Belgian scholar J.D. Janssens what we face here is a serious mistake that was made by the compiler, a mistake that shows his lack of insight.<sup>35</sup> I think that Janssens is rather too strict in his judgement, but I have to admit that there is no convincing explanation. Possibly — I am aware that I do not have a solid argument here — the compiler decided to insert the romances after the *Queste* purely for codicological reasons. In an attempt to offer an explanation it was suggested some years ago that the compiler thought that Wace's twelve-year period of peace lay between the *Queste* and the *Mort Artu*.<sup>36</sup> This, however, seems to me to be very improbable, as the *Queste* stresses the Grail quest as the most important and final adventure.<sup>37</sup>

It is time to draw up the balances. The comparison I have made enables us to roughly characterize the Middle Dutch compiler in relation to his Old French colleagues. Just like they — and, if we go by what Vinaver says, contrary to what Malory did — the Middle Dutch compiler intended to create a narrative cycle. Doing so, he followed the beaten track. He adapted his sources, lent structure to this whole of successive romances, and divided the whole into books. At the same time, however, he went his own way. He linked on a broad scale chronicle-like Arthurian romances and romances in the tradition of Chrétien, and inserted the greater part of these latter texts at a place that is so odd that one wonders whether he did not carry it too far. Anyhow, the result of his work is an original and fascinating cycle.

That we do not very well understand why it was that romances were inserted following the *Queste* is characteristic for the study of the *Lancelot* Compilation. The cycle has been studied for one century and a half now, and still it has not yielded up all its secrets. Jonckbloet, who published the only complete edition

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Walters, 'Le rôle du scribe', pp. 309-11. See also Douglas Kelly, *The Art of Medieval French Romance* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), p. 210.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Brandsma, *Lanceloet*, pp. 188-89.

<sup>35</sup> J.D. Janssens, *Dichter en publiek in creatief samenspel. Over interpretatie van Middelnederlandse ridderromans* (Leuven/Amersfoort: Acco, 1988), p. 237, note 427.

<sup>36</sup> Jeannette Koekman, 'A guiding thread through the textual labyrinth of the Middle Dutch *Lancelot en prose*', in W. van Hoecke, G. Tournoy, W. Verbeke, eds., *Arturus Rex Volumen II: Acta Conventus Lovaniensis 1987*, *Mediaevalia Lovaniensia*, 1/xvii (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1991), pp. 361-66.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. also Brandsma, *Lanceloet*, p. 202, note 121.

of the compilation between 1846 and 1849, was fascinated by it for decades on end. Today scholars are still under the spell of the compilation and it will undoubtedly fascinate future scholars as well.

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