

THE *CONTE DU GRAAL* CYCLE

Chrétien de Troyes's *Perceval*, the Continuations,
and French Arthurian Romance

Thomas Hinton



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THE *CONTE DU GRAAL* CYCLE
CHRÉTIEN DE TROYES' *PERCEVAL*,
THE CONTINUATIONS, AND
FRENCH ARTHURIAN ROMANCE

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THE *CONTE DU GRAAL* CYCLE

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THE CONTINUATIONS, AND
FRENCH ARTHURIAN ROMANCE

THOMAS HINTON

D. S. BREWER

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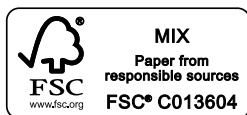
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ABBREVIATIONS

Texts

CdG	Chrétien de Troyes, <i>Le Roman de Perceval ou Le Conte du Graal</i> , ed. Busby
C1 [LR]	First Continuation [Long Redaction], ed. Roach (1950 [II]) ¹
C1 [MR]	First Continuation [Mixed Redaction], ed. Roach (1949 [I])
C1 [SR: A]	First Continuation [Short Redaction of MSS <i>APS</i>], ed. Roach (1952 [III, 1])
C1 [SR: L]	First Continuation [Short Redaction of MS <i>L</i>], ed. Roach (1952 [III, 1])
C2 [SR]	Second Continuation [Short Redaction], ed. Roach (1971 [IV])
C2 [LR]	Second Continuation [Long Redaction], ed. Roach (1971 [IV])
C2	Second Continuation, ed. Roach (1971 [IV]) ²
CG	Gerbert Continuation, ed. Williams (tome I: 1–7020; tome II: 7021–14078) and Oswald (tome III: 14079–end) ³
CM	Manessier Continuation, ed. Roach (1983 [V])

All translations are my own unless stated otherwise.

¹ Volume references are to William Roach's five-volume edition of *The Continuations of the Old French Perceval of Chrétien de Troyes* (1949–83).

² The Second Continuation is edited in two redactions in Roach (1971 [IV]) up to C2 [SR] 10268 / C2 [LR] 20689; from this point onwards, a single version of the text is given, with line numbers following that of the Long Redaction.

³ The Gerbert Continuation is edited in three separate volumes by Mary Williams (1922 and 1925) and Marguerite Oswald (1978).

MANUSCRIPT SIGLA

- A Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fr. 794
- B Bern, Burgerbibliothek, 354
- C Clermont-Ferrand, Bibliothèque municipale et interuniversitaire, 248
- D *Rappoltsteiner Parzifal*: German translation interpolated into Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival* (two extant manuscripts)
- E Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, Advocates 19. 1. 5
- F Florence, Biblioteca Riccardiana, 2943
- G 1530 prosification (black letter edition for Galiot du Pré)
- H London, College of Arms, Arundel XIV
- K Bern, Burgerbibliothek, 113
- L London, British Library, Add. 36614
- M Montpellier, Bibliothèque interuniversitaire, Section Médecine, H 249
- P Mons, Bibliothèque universitaire, 331/206
- Q Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fr. 1429
- R Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fr. 1450
- S Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fr. 1453
- T Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fr. 12576
- U Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fr. 12577
- V Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, n. a. fr. 6614

For dating and contents of the manuscripts, see Appendices 3 and 4.

Introduction

The subject of this book is a literary corpus whose character is a challenge to definition, beginning with the matter of its title. What I refer to throughout as the *Conte du Graal* cycle is a constellation of texts, found in different combinations in different manuscripts, which tell the story of Perceval from his first encounters with knighthood and the mysteries of the Grail to his eventual succession to the Fisher King's throne and death as a hermit, interspersed with the adventures of other knights, chiefly Gauvain. The first move in this narrative game is Chrétien de Troyes's *Conte du Graal*, believed to have been written between 1180 and 1195. That romance, left unfinished, provoked a number of writers to continue the tale, their work generally identified today as the First, Second, Manessier and Gerbert Continuations.¹ The first two Continuations are thought to have appeared by around 1200; the Manessier Continuation is dated between 1214 and 1227; and the Gerbert Continuation between 1225 and 1230. Two prologues, the *Elucidation* and the *Bliocadran*, also appeared in the early thirteenth century, so that all the constituent parts of the corpus were in existence (in their earliest forms) within fifty years of Chrétien's text.²

¹ The difficulty of identifying the constituent parts of this corpus is amply demonstrated by the history of the titles assigned to these texts. The Manessier Continuation is often labelled the 'Third Continuation', though this title is occasionally used for the Gerbert Continuation, which may at other times be referred to as the 'Fourth Continuation'; meanwhile, 'Gauvain Continuation' and 'Perceval Continuation' are terms still used for the first two Continuations (especially in Francophone criticism). In the first half of the last century, these two units were treated as a single item under the heading 'Wauchier Continuation'; when a division into two was accepted, the appellation 'Pseudo-Wauchier' was adopted for a time for the former text, and the original title retained for the latter. (See Roach 1956: 107–9 for a summary of the debate over this last point, but note that the attribution of the Second Continuation to Wauchier de Denain has subsequently been revived.) Whichever title one adopts, there is an additional question relating to typography: 'First Continuation', *First Continuation* or First Continuation? I have chosen to give the names of the individual texts in roman type, in order to emphasise my conception of the cycle as a unit whose constituent parts function together, rather than as separable, individual works. I make an exception with regard to Chrétien's *Conte du Graal*, which is found on its own in a small number of manuscripts, and also in deference to established critical practice, although my goal in this study is to emphasise its more common transmission as a constituent part of the cycle.

² Dates are from Pickens, Busby and Williams (2006).

Apparently popular with contemporary audiences, yet often neglected by modern critics, the *Conte du Graal* cycle played a role in the development of medieval Arthurian narrative which so far has not been fully appreciated. Instead, the vast majority of commentators have preferred to treat the unfinished *Conte du Graal* in isolation from its sequels, too frequently dismissed as confused or prolix by critics dreaming of the conclusion that Chrétien might have written. Jean Frappier, for instance, concludes his analysis of the text as follows:

Nous n'en savons pas plus. La mort a arrêté en cet endroit (v. 9234) l'oeuvre du maître Chrétien de Troyes. Cette brusque interruption nous laisse à nos incertitudes, car nous ne pouvons nous fier à ses continuateurs pour connaître le véritable dessein du grand romancier.³

[We know no more. At this point (v. 9234), death put an end to the work of the great Chrétien de Troyes. This sudden interruption leaves us to grapple with our uncertainties, for we cannot rely on his continuators to know the true intentions of the great writer.]

Frappier's interest is explicitly displaced from the extant corpus onto the question of how the 'master' might have brought his romance to an end, and the Continuations are read as merely one possible (and inauthentic at that) attempt to answer this riddle. These approaches to the Continuations echo that of Gustave Cohen, who warned in 1931 that 'il faut, pour interpréter correctement Chrétien et son *Perceval*, faire abstraction de cette évolution ultérieure' [In order to interpret Chrétien's *Perceval* correctly, one must ignore this subsequent evolution of the material].⁴ The perceived inadequacies of these texts are summed up in Frappier's study during a general presentation of French Grail romance: they lack coherence and they display insufficient fidelity to the parameters of the narrative as set out in the *Conte du Graal*:

Aucun plan d'ensemble ne paraît avoir dominé cette production diffuse; d'un texte à l'autre, on relève des contradictions; chaque continuateur a inventé selon sa fantaisie, en perdant souvent de vue l'aventure du Graal... Le tout représente plus de soixante mille vers.⁵

³ Frappier (1972: 252–3).

⁴ Cohen (1931: 445). See also Le Rider (1978: 7): 'J'ai voulu oublier dans toute la mesure du possible les continuations médiévales du *Conte du Graal*... Le confondre dans un "cycle du graal", l'interpréter à partir des allégories et des exégèses ritualistes de ses épigones eût été, m'a-t-il semblé, le trahir.' [I have decided, as far as possible, to ignore the medieval continuations of the *Conte du Graal*... To merge it into a 'grail cycle' and interpret it through the allegories and ritualistic interpretations of its imitators would be, it seems to me, to betray it.]

⁵ Frappier (1972: 13).

[It appears that no general plan underlay this uncoordinated activity; from one text to the next, one notes contradictions; each continuator wrote according to his whim, often losing sight of the Grail adventure... The whole thing comes to more than sixty thousand lines.]

The First Continuation in particular has been singled out for the lack of interest it shows in Perceval, preferring to narrate the adventures of Gauvain, Caradoc and Guerrehet. In Frappier's opinion, 'le récit manque... d'unité ou de *conjointure*. Il se fragmente en contes à peu près indépendants' [The story lacks... unity or *conjointure*. It breaks up into a collection of more or less independent tales].⁶ And Keith Busby, in a study of Chrétien's *Conte du Graal* aimed at students, similarly flags a lack of unity and coherence as a defining feature of the corpus:

These Continuations are on the whole fairly loosely attached to Chrétien's poem, and seem to consist of a number of tenuously related adventures, featuring Gauvain, Perceval, Caradoc, and Guerrehés (Gauvain's brother), in which the Grail sometimes plays a role, and sometimes does not.⁷

Busby does, however, go on to note: 'They reflect a manner of storytelling that requires further urgent investigation, although here is not the place.' In recent years, he and other scholars have begun serious study of what he calls elsewhere 'one of the most extraordinary products of medieval romance writing'.⁸ A brace of stimulating articles by Alexandre Leupin either side of 1980 represents the earliest attempt to come to terms with the aesthetics of the corpus.⁹ More recently, Mireille Séguy has devoted some pertinent pages to the subject in the context of a wider discussion of Grail romance, while Matilda Bruckner has produced a number of thoughtful pieces on what she calls its 'poetics of continuation', culminating in the first English-language monograph given over to it, published in 2009.¹⁰ Indeed, interest in the *Conte du Graal* cycle now appears to have reached critical mass, with a number of articles, books and doctoral theses on the subject appearing or soon to appear.¹¹ Busby's call for further investigation is beginning to find an answer in the forest of Arthurian scholarship.

⁶ Frappier (1973: 153). Note the choice of the term *conjointure* (coined by Chrétien to describe his authorial technique in *Erec*, v. 14), establishing an implicit contrast between the art of the 'master' and the supposed artlessness of his continuator.

⁷ Busby (1993a: 91).

⁸ Busby (1994b: 178).

⁹ Leupin (1979) and (1982).

¹⁰ Séguy (2001a), especially 286–342; Bruckner (1987), (1993), (2000), (2006) and (2009).

¹¹ In the last five years alone, one may cite the doctoral theses of Sébastien Douchet, Massimiliano Gaggero, Etienne Gomez and Leah Tether.

The current study is an attempt both to understand the corpus's cyclic aesthetics and to identify how medieval audiences and authors of Arthurian verse romance responded to it. Continuation as a literary practice is fundamental to medieval poetics, fuelled as much by an aesthetics and ethics of *rewriting* as by the material conditions of manuscript transmission that left the medieval text more vulnerable to alteration and addition than its modern counterpart. The period's most popular text, the *Roman de la Rose*, was a product of continuation: the version transmitted in the overwhelming majority of manuscripts features the continuation of Jean de Meun, which seized upon the suspended narrative of Guillaume de Lorris's original romance as an invitation to redirect and extend the work to more than twenty thousand lines, five times the initial length. Similarly, many medieval cycles developed by exploiting the potential for narratives to be re-opened through the addition of new material; in most cases, however, the new texts can be considered to exemplify the notion of 'suite' or 'sequel/prequel', rather than that of 'continuation' proper: that is, where the latter notion suggests the prolongation of an unfinished narrative, the former responds to a desire for further development of material initially considered to be complete.¹²

The decision as to what is and is not complete is clearly a delicate one, but it is impossible to avoid, as argued by David Hult:

Any critical evaluation of literary continuations must in some way deal with the question of a text's relative openness or closure – the extent to which a 'first' text can be considered complete and unified in an ideal way or, conversely, in need of further additions.¹³

The existence of the *Conte du Graal* Continuations in itself is proof that medieval authors and audiences read Chrétien's text as open, a judgment that is confirmed by the most superficial engagement with its ending. Whether one considers such irresolution to be deliberate or accidental, the end of the text clearly constitutes an interruption of, rather than conclusion to, the narrative.¹⁴ Gauvain has dispatched a messenger to ask King Arthur to witness his duel; just as the messenger arrives at court, Arthur, despairing of obtaining news of his nephew, faints before the eyes of Lore, one of the queen's ladies in waiting, who runs to inform her mistress:

¹² For a discussion of the distinction between *suite* and *continuation* in relation to modern literature, see Genette (1982: 181–3); for consideration of the terminology in the specific context of a discussion of the First Continuation, see the questions and answers at the end of Roach (1956).

¹³ Hult (1984: 248).

¹⁴ Rider (1998: 18–19) observes that 'ending the story with an incomplete or unanswered question is... entirely in keeping with the story's logic', and suggests that this may have been a deliberate decision on the author's part.

Et quant la roïne le voit,
Si li demande qu'ele avoit (CdG 9233–4)

[And when the queen sees her, she asks her what is wrong]

The text thus breaks off in a manner that invites continuation on the levels of both micro-development (a question awaiting a response) and macro-development (the audience's questions about whether Arthur will recover, how he will react to the messenger, and what will happen if and when he travels to Gauvain's side). We have been deflected from the main narrative (Gauvain's conflict with Guiromelant) to a subsidiary narrative (the messenger's journey to court), which is in turn interrupted by Arthur's faint; the narrative view-point then switches again to another character, Lore, who moves us into the queen's chamber, only to be interrupted herself before she can relate her tale to her mistress. As we will see repeatedly in this study, such interruptions are part and parcel of the textuality of this first Grail romance, to which the Continuators will respond in their different ways. But the essential point for now is that, in ending in this manner, the text invites continuation; the extraordinary production of continuatory narrative by the continuators, and the popularity of the resultant corpus, provide confirmation that Chrétien's text on its own appeared insufficient to many readers. Similarly, Guillaume de Lorris's allegorical *Roman de la Rose* ends at a point of narrative crisis, with the figure of Amant [Lover] cursing the frustration of his desire; both the rose that he wishes to pluck, and the figure of Bel Accueil [Fair Welcome] who had encouraged him earlier in the narrative, are secured behind a fortress built by Jalousie [Jealousy]. Guillaume's text is followed in the vast majority of manuscripts (over 250) by Jean de Meun's continuation; in addition, eight manuscripts preserve a different and much shorter continuation, generally referred to as the Anonymous Conclusion.¹⁵ As with the *Conte du Graal*, both continuations operate on the level of micro-development (reading Amant's final line as an unfinished sentence to be continued) and of macro-development (concluding the narration of Amant's attempt to capture the rose). Despite the similar mechanics at work, the two continuations could hardly be more different: the Anonymous Conclusion wraps up the narrative in the space of seventy-eight lines, while Jean's text swells the original four thousand lines written by Guillaume into an encyclopaedic romance of over twenty thousand verses, which covers a dazzling range of discourses and subjects.

If the *Roman de la Rose* and the *Conte du Graal* corpus both demonstrate the power of a perceived suspended ending to generate additional narrative, one may wonder what advantage is to be gained in speaking of one as a (primarily) dual-authored romance and the other as a cycle. The term 'cycle'

¹⁵ On the Anonymous Conclusion, see Brook (1995).

as used in modern literary criticism is a coinage of the early nineteenth century, when it was applied to the body of romances dealing with Arthur and the Round Table, or to the group of *chansons de geste* relating to Charlemagne.¹⁶ In other words, it is a concept born of modern reading practices. A more detailed discussion of cyclicity will be provided later in this Introduction, but it is necessary to pre-empt that argument a little in order to explain the use of the term in relation to the *Conte du Graal* corpus. The essential point for the time being is that a narrative cycle is a collection of texts read in sequence according to a uniting principle of coherence. A cycle is at once one and many; as David Staines puts it: ‘the unity of a cycle... is the thematic pattern imposed upon the multiplicity of the cycle’s parts’.¹⁷ In this way the codices of the *Guillaume* cycle contain a sequence of texts relating the *enfances* (youth) of its heroes, their mature exploits and the final events of their lives; the biographic sweep that binds such a cycle together can be extended into a genealogical principle by the inclusion of material relating to the heroes’ ancestors or descendants.¹⁸ The *Roman de la Rose*, on the other hand, has been transmitted and is usually read as a single, albeit complex and polyphonic, text. Individual critics may place emphasis on the unity binding its two unequal halves, or instead on its refusal to coalesce into a single viewpoint;¹⁹ but in either case, as Hult observes, ‘the two parts have always been designated by a single title and thus, more often than not, viewed as two components of one text’.²⁰ In contrast, as we have seen, most scholarship on the *Conte du Graal* corpus has placed emphasis on the disparate character of its different parts; the overwhelming omission of the Continuations in analyses of Chrétien’s romance says much about the (lack of) relevance that these later texts are still generally perceived to have by critics of the *Conte du Graal*. To some extent, this reaction is provoked by the corpus’s complex and shifting narrative aesthetics. Yet there is considerable evidence that, in large measure, medieval audiences received the corpus as a single textual entity. The tension between the manifest cohesion of the manuscript tradition and the diverse directions of the narrative is encapsulated by Busby’s remark that ‘this “other Grail cycle” does not work by means of any sort of “unity”’.²¹

¹⁶ For a history of the term’s use, see Staines (1994) and (1996).

¹⁷ Staines (1994: 110).

¹⁸ On the manuscript tradition of the *Guillaume* cycle, see Tyssens (1967) and Sunderland (2010).

¹⁹ See Huot (2010: 3–4) for a summary of critical debate over how to conceptualise the general aesthetics of the *Rose*.

²⁰ Hult (1984: 249). It is of course still open to scholars to analyse Guillaume’s text in abstraction from Jean’s continuation, as a ‘finished’ work in its own right. Indeed, this is precisely the project of Hult (1986); but this critical move must be performed knowingly as a deliberate counter-narrative to the general thrust of *Rose* scholarship, which draws on the whole, dual-authored textual tradition.

²¹ Busby (1994b: 178).

As indicated by Busby's use of scare quotes, the real issue at state is the *kind* of unity to be found in the corpus; clearly, the application of modern notions of textual coherence dooms the Continuations to critical contempt. This is where I believe a cyclic reading of the corpus is valuable. The coherence which produces cyclic unity is always provisional and sufficiently precarious for multiple versions and recombinations of a corpus to form and co-exist. Unlike the *Roman de la Rose* tradition, then, the *Conte du Graal* cycle rests on a unity that runs in tension with the potential for its parts to be broken up or interpolated into: less 'essential' parts, such as the *Elucidation* and *Bliocadran* prologues, or the Gerbert Continuation, orbit around the cyclic core; Chrétien's text is sometimes transmitted by itself; the Second Continuation is transmitted on its own in one manuscript.²² To read the corpus as a cycle is simultaneously to acknowledge this potential for its constituent parts to be separated and combined in different ways while maintaining the focus on the features that bind them together into a single textual whole.

The *Conte du Graal* corpus is thus unusual in representing an 'incomplete text plus continuation' ensemble that invites a cyclical reading. Perhaps for this reason, it has rarely been studied in relation to the phenomenon of cyclicality. Bruckner alludes in a 1987 article to the importance of understanding 'the particular character of this cycle within the larger context of thirteenth-century cyclicization' but does not pursue the question; Busby's short article entitled 'The Other Grail Cycle' sketches out possible avenues for further research.²³ Aside from such isolated instances, however, the *Conte du Graal* corpus has been largely absent from debates about the nature of medieval narrative cyclicality, presumably because its narrative aesthetics do not correspond neatly to critics' expectations of what a cycle is supposed to be.²⁴ The purpose of this Introduction is to make the case for approaching the text as a cycle in two complementary ways: first, to suggest limitations to the traditional scholarly habit of isolating the *Conte du Graal* from its Continuations in order to study it alongside Chrétien de Troyes's other romances; secondly, to give an account of how the *Conte du Graal* cycle fits into the

²² For the purpose of comparison, it is worth reiterating more precisely the manuscript tradition of the *Roman de la Rose*: one manuscript preserves only Guillaume de Lorris's text; one contains Guillaume's text with the Anonymous Conclusion (AC); a further six sandwich the AC between Guillaume's text and Jean de Meun's continuation; the overwhelming majority (more than 250) contain Guillaume's text followed by Jean's continuation. No manuscript preserves Jean's portion on its own.

²³ Bruckner (1987: 262); Busby (1994b: 176–8). Similarly, Bruckner (2009) frequently uses the term 'cycle' to describe the corpus, but never explicitly considers the nature of this cyclicality.

²⁴ See however Gomez (forthcoming), whose decision to refer to the corpus as the 'cycle du *Conte du graal*' coincided with my choosing the appellation '*Conte du Graal* cycle'.

broad context of cyclification in the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and what it can add to critical study of the phenomenon.

The *Conte du Graal* Corpus and Chrétien de Troyes

It is not difficult to find points of contrast between the *Conte du Graal* and the other Arthurian romances of Chrétien de Troyes. Though unfinished, it stands at well over nine thousand lines by the time it breaks off, with sufficient material left unresolved to fill several thousand more, whereas Chrétien's other four romances all run to around seven thousand lines. Rupert Pickens identifies the following additional features as making this romance unique within Chrétien's *oeuvre*: (i) both the prologue and the main tale deal explicitly with religious sentiment and doctrine; (ii) the romance is thoroughly informed by prediegetic matter (e.g. accounts of British history, events in communities in exile from Arthur's kingdom); (iii) it interacts with Wace's *Brut* to a greater degree than any other Chrétien romance (with the possible exception of *Erec*); (iv) it offers a doubled narrative which allots to two heroes, Perceval and Gauvain, an independent and equally elaborated set of adventures; and (v) the alleged source text is given a name by its narrator, 'li contes del graal' (CdG 66).²⁵ 'Les différences', concludes Barbara Sargent-Baur after comparing the *Conte du Graal*'s prologue with those of Chrétien's other romances, 'semblent annoncer un nouveau départ' [The differences appear to announce a new beginning].²⁶ This new direction, exemplified in the Gauvain adventures that dominate the second half of the text, has so disturbed some modern readers that at one point debate raged over whether the Gauvain part was by Chrétien at all.²⁷ Discussing the second half of the romance, Per Nykrog wryly sums up the feeling of disquiet that has affected several of its critics: 'these adventures engage Chrétien on a road that must fill the reader with apprehension'.²⁸ The choice of words is apposite: the reader's 'apprehension' equates to a fear of the unknown, as Chrétien's knights lead him progressively away from the narrative models established by the earlier romances and the horizon of expectation disappears from view.

Certainly, the evidence of the surviving manuscripts suggests that the singularity of the *Conte du Graal* was not lost on medieval audiences. Of Chrétien's other four Arthurian romances, three (*Erec*, *Cligés* and *Yvain*) survive in twelve copies or fragments, and the *Lancelot* in only eight; by contrast, there are eighteen extant complete or fragmentary copies of the *Conte du*

²⁵ Pickens (2005: 170–1). On the *Conte du Graal*'s interaction with Wace, see Pelan (1931) and Sturm-Maddox (1984).

²⁶ Sargent-Baur (2000: 12).

²⁷ See the summary of various positions on this issue in Busby (1993a: 51).

²⁸ Nykrog (1973: 269).

Graal.²⁹ Beyond the question of number, the manuscript tradition points to another important difference between the *Conte du Graal* and its predecessors. These latter texts are almost always collected in manuscripts with other romances, either singly or in groups of two or three.³⁰ Only two manuscripts (Paris, BNF, fr. 794 and fr. 1450) collect all of Chrétien's texts together, and in both cases these make up less than half of the total number of lines in the manuscript.³¹ There are thus no manuscripts which can comprehensively be described as Chrétien compilations. The *Conte du Graal*, in contrast, is generally transmitted along with one or more of the Continuations. This is the case for eleven of the fifteen complete or largely complete manuscripts of the text, as can be seen from the table in Appendix 3. In the vast majority of cases the texts are copied by a single hand without any indication of a break between the different parts of the corpus; the only instance where any explicit indication is given of the transition between Chrétien's contribution and those of other authors is *A* (Paris, BNF, fr. 794), where the scribe (Guiot) indicates the end of Chrétien's part with the colophon 'Explicyct perceuax le uel' [Here ends the old *Perceval*].³² The eight manuscripts which contain the Manessier Continuation (*EMPQSTUV*) all originally contained no other texts, though the blank folios in *MT* were used for later additions; moreover, it is likely that manuscript *L* (London, BL, Add. 36614) initially contained only the *Conte du Graal*, with the first two Continuations, the *Bliocadran* and the *Vie de Sainte Marie l'Egyptienne* being added before the manuscript left the workshop. These nine codices bear witness to the popularity and stability of a *Conte du Graal* corpus, which (anticipating on fuller discussion below) I will be describing as cyclical. One may also adduce two additional pieces of evidence. First, the *Rappoltsteiner Parzifal*, a redaction of Wolfram von

²⁹ See Busby (2005).

³⁰ As David F. Hult (1998: 20) notes: 'The first four romances, which have survived... in roughly similar numbers of manuscripts, are associated with each other in a uniform and mostly random fashion... The *Perceval*, for its part, developed a tradition of its own.'

³¹ The so-called Annonay fragments, from a manuscript containing *Cligés*, *Yvain*, *Lancelot* and the *Conte du Graal*, provide a further possible instance of a manuscript including all of Chrétien's works, though there is no hard evidence that *Erec* was contained in this codex, nor of what other texts might have been present. On these fragments, see Nixon (1993b: 20–2).

³² In *L*, the *Conte du Graal* is copied in a different hand from the Continuations; similarly, in *T* (Paris, BNF, fr. 12576) the end of the First Continuation and beginning of the Second Continuation (folios 95 to 121) are copied by a different hand from the rest of the text. In both cases, however, the hands are so similar that they probably belong to scribes from the same workshop; given the otherwise homogeneous presentation of the text, the change of hand is most likely a consequence of practical considerations, rather than expressing any desire to signal a change of authorship or of textual unit. For more details, see the Introductions to Roach's edition of the Mixed Redaction of the First Continuation (Roach 1949 [I]) and Busby's edition of Chrétien's text (*Conte du Graal*); on manuscripts *TV* in particular, see Busby (1993b) and Gaggero (2008b).

Eschenbach's *Parzival* by Claus Wisse and Philipp Colin known as siglum *D* in the *Conte du Graal* manuscript tradition: Wisse and Colin translated and interpolated into Wolfram's text a corpus comprising the *Elucidation*, *Conte du Graal*, First, Second and Manessier Continuations. The original manuscript (Karlsruhe, Landesbibl., Cod. Donaueschingen 97) is dated between 1331 and 1336; a copy is also preserved in Rome (Bibl. Casanatense, Mss. 1409). The second additional witness to a unified corpus is the 1530 prosification printed by Galiot du Pré (siglum *G*): this contains the *Elucidation* and *Bliocadran* prologues, *Conte du Graal*, First, Second and Manessier Continuations.

Conversely, all four manuscripts which transmit Chrétien's romance independently (*BCFH*) show signs of the partner-shifts which affect the transmission history of the whole *Conte du Graal* manuscript tradition, where the use by scribes of multiple sources leads to periodic swapping and pervasive instability in the relations of the different manuscripts; these copies may therefore ultimately be derived from manuscripts presenting either all or part of the corpus.³³ Busby has shown this to be the case for manuscript *H* (London, College of Arms, Arundel XIV). It contains two interpolations (428 lines after CdG 3926 and 116 lines after CdG 3994) relating to the breaking of the sword given by the Fisher King to Perceval; in the first, after the Fisher King has had the broken pieces recovered, he has them placed on a bier, declaring that the knight who can heal him will be the one who can mend the sword. This passage is modelled on, and designed to harmonise with, the broken sword test introduced in Branches I and V of the First Continuation, and therefore a manuscript containing at least this Continuation must have been involved at some point in the composition of *H*.³⁴

MS *H*, along with MS *B* (Bern, Burgerbibliothek 354), are the only surviving codices in which the *Conte du Graal* is found on its own as part of a compilation. The cyclical manuscripts, by contrast, go to significant lengths to emphasise the unity of their texts. An extreme instance of this is provided by MS *P* (Mons, BU 331/206), whose scribe deliberately encourages the illusion of single authorship. Opening with the *Elucidation* and the *Bliocadran* (this is the only codex in which both texts appear), Chrétien's prologue is removed from the beginning of the *Conte du Graal* and its last eight lines reworked into a prologue to the *Bliocadran*, which thereby becomes absorbed into the *Conte du Graal* as its first chapter;³⁵ meanwhile,

³³ See Van Mulken (1993) and the Introduction to Busby's edition, where he summarises the situation as follows: 'Il serait possible de démontrer sans trop de peine à l'aide des variantes l'existence de presque chaque filiation concevable entre deux ou plusieurs manuscrits' [It would be relatively easy, with the help of the variants, to demonstrate the existence of almost any conceivable filiation between two or more manuscripts] (*Conte du Graal*: xlii).

³⁴ Busby (1993c).

³⁵ Chrétien's prologue (the whole thing this time) also directly precedes the *Blio-*

the name of Manessier at the end of the cycle is replaced by that of Chrétien, who becomes both the initiator and completer of the narrative. The success of this strategy can be gauged from the inside cover of the manuscript, where an unidentified modern hand has made the following note:

Ce roman est du douzième [~~'treizième'~~ crossed out] siècle. Son auteur est Chrestien de Troyes. Il se nomme au pénultième vers de tout l'ouvrage [where Manessier's name has been removed] et deux fois dans les cinq derniers de la première colonne de la page 6 [the prologue to *Bliocadran*].

[This romance is from the twelfth century. Its author is Chrestien de Troyes. He names himself in the penultimate line of the whole work and twice in the last five lines of the first column of page 6.]

A further indication of cohesion in the *Conte du Graal* corpus is the rarity of manuscripts which include other texts from outside the corpus. Thus the *Conte* is found with another Chrétien text only in the two manuscripts which include all of his romances, *A* and *R* (Paris, BNF, fr. 1450, which interpolates the romances into Wace's *Brut*) – and, in both cases, a portion of the Continuations is also included. In the case of MS *R*, which includes only Branch I of the First Continuation, it seems plausible that the scribe retained this Branch principally in order to bring to a close the episode involving Gauvain and Guiromelant begun by Chrétien, before moving on to the next romance. This scribe may or may not have been aware that Chrétien's part of the text was left unfinished, but his decision shows at the very least that it was not felt necessary to signal a change of authorship to the manuscript's intended users. MS *A*, meanwhile, includes the whole First Continuation and the first 800 lines of the Second. Guiot's manuscript is made up of three units, each with its own quire structure, with Chrétien's other four romances constituting the first, and the *Conte du Graal* and its two Continuations coming at the end of the third. Terry Nixon argues that the Chrétien unit was intended to come after that containing the *Conte du Graal*, creating a continuous textual entity of Chrétien works.³⁶ Yet, even if this conjecture is correct, the two Continuations would still sit between the *Conte du Graal* and *Erec*, demonstrating that – even in these most 'authorly' of Chrétien manuscripts – the desire to create a unified 'Chrétien corpus' was less powerful than the cohesion of the *Conte du Graal* ensemble. As Busby argues, the tendency for modern critics to edit and study Chrétien's final romance in isolation from its Continuations therefore 'does violence to the cohesive nature of the codicological whole'.³⁷

cadran in MS *L*, suggesting that this text owes its survival to the strategy of integration into the *Conte*, without which it may not have been preserved by the versions of the cycle which include it.

³⁶ Nixon (1993a: 22).

³⁷ Busby (2005: 70).

This raises the question of why critics have been so resistant to reading the *Conte du Graal* corpus as the unified text presented by the manuscripts. The answer lies in large part in the investment of French Medieval Studies in the name 'Chrétien de Troyes' and the corpus of Arthurian romances which has coalesced around it. The author-figure 'Chrétien' is frequently made to serve as the key reference point for accounts of the development of medieval romance, of twelfth-century vernacular literature in general, and even of the modern novel.³⁸ Further, the name 'Chrétien de Troyes' has functioned for some time as a useful standard to be brandished by medievalists seeking admittance for their texts to the inner chamber of literary respectability, a name with which to communicate with colleagues (and a reading public) more used to apprehending literature through the lens of modern authorship. This strategy is quite explicit in Michel Zink's preface to the *Livre de Poche Pochothèque* collection of Chrétien's *oeuvre*:

Il ne faut pas s'étonner de voir Chrétien de Troyes figurer dans une collection consacrée aux Classiques Modernes. Il peut être dit classique, car s'il existe un canon des grands auteurs, il y figure à coup sûr. Et il est moderne... parce qu'il est le premier dans notre littérature à avoir donné ses lettres de noblesse à ce genre éminemment moderne qu'est le roman... il écrit avec une fluidité, une densité et une légèreté, un art de mêler le mystère à la limpidité, qui en font l'un des plus grands écrivains français.³⁹

[One should not be surprised to find Chrétien de Troyes in a collection dedicated to Modern Classics. He can be called classic since, if a canon of great authors exists, he is certain to be included. And he is modern... because he is the first in our literature to have made respectable that eminently modern genre which is the *roman*... he writes with a fluidity, a gravity and a lightness of touch, a talent for presenting the enigmatic in a limpid style, which make him one of the greatest French authors.]

Recent years have also seen the publication of a Pléiade *Œuvres complètes*, as well as volumes with titles such as *A Companion to Chrétien de Troyes*, *The Manuscripts of Chrétien de Troyes* and *The Legacy of Chrétien de Troyes*. All this activity has ensured that, despite a more-or-less total absence of available biographical data, the author-figure Chrétien looms larger in both scholarly and popular culture than perhaps any other authorial name in medieval French literature. And a corollary of this success, as Virginie Greene ob-

³⁸ On Chrétien as precursor to the modern novel, see the citation from Zink (1994) below. Jewers (2000) takes Chrétien as the starting point (and Cervantes's *Don Quixote* as the end point) for an account of the role of chivalric romance in the history of the novel. A similar account of the development of romance is implicit in the title of the collaborative volume *Romance: Generic Transformation from Chrétien de Troyes to Cervantes* (Brownlee and Brownlee 1985).

³⁹ Zink (1994: 5).

serves, is that 'Chrétien de Troyes' has become 'an author's name functioning as authors' names do in our times, that is, as a marketing tool'.⁴⁰

The popularity of the Chrétien de Troyes romances both within and without the medievalist community explains why the *Conte du Graal*, despite having its own distinct manuscript tradition, is so often severed from its codicological context in order to be studied alongside his other romances. Yet it is worth reminding ourselves that what we think we know about this medieval author is informed far more by modern literary criticism than by contemporary medieval documentation. The capacity for scholarly conjecture about the author Chrétien to harden into fact is noted by Sarah Kay:

From an effect derived from these texts we postulate an entity that precedes them. The biographical approach makes a backdoor return in efforts to fathom an author's literary personality, which then sets limits on the interpretation of 'his' works and conditions on admission to 'his' canon.⁴¹

Kay's article speculates that the name 'Chrétien de Troyes' may have functioned as an anonym, a descriptive *nom de plume* adopted by a range of authors in order to signal their participation in a shared literary debate. In doing so, it offers a salutary reminder that the decisions we make about authorship and attribution shape our reading habits, often blinding us to alternative ways of understanding and interpreting medieval texts.

Hult makes a similar point in his Morrison Library Inaugural Address, where he questions the assumption in so much critical literature that Chrétien's reputation among medieval audiences was comparable to that which he enjoys today. Clearly, Chrétien's name was associated with Arthurian romance at an early stage, as evidenced notably within the *Conte du Graal* continuations and prologues, where the name appears up to four times in the text depending on the manuscript (see below for more details). Yet the vast body of scholarship on this author today is not commensurate with their level of medieval popularity, a fact brought out by Hult's comparison of manuscript survival for other twelfth-century texts: Aimon de Varenne's *Florimont* has survived in seventeen manuscripts, while there are more than twenty extant copies of Wace's *Brut* and over thirty-five of Benoît de Sainte-Maur's *Roman de Troie*.⁴² To imply, as do the editors of *Les Manuscrits de Chrétien de Troyes*, that the more than forty surviving manuscripts containing at least one of his romances demonstrate that Chrétien's pre-eminence was recognised by twelfth-, thirteenth- and fourteenth-century audiences, is to filter the phenomenon of medieval textual transmission through the distorting lens of modern assumptions about the cohesiveness of an authorial *œuvre* and the

⁴⁰ Greene (2006: 218).

⁴¹ Kay (1997: 2–3).

⁴² Hult (1998: 14).

reciprocal relation that might obtain between an author's reputation and that of his various works.⁴³

It is worth emphasising again that the evidence for even a single 'Chrétien collection' manuscript is scant, if not inexistent. Manuscript *R* compiles Chrétien's romances (with the opening episode of the First Continuation attached to the *Conte du Graal*) as an interpolation into Wace's *Brut*; it also includes the *Roman de Troie*, the *Roman d'Enéas* and the *Dolopathos*. Manuscript *A* also contains the *Brut* and the *Roman de Troie*, along with *Athis et Prophilias* and *Les Empereurs de Rome* (see Appendix 4 for the order of texts in the manuscripts). As Hult points out, the way in which the romances have been compiled alongside (and, in *R*, within) more obviously historicising narratives, contextualises Chrétien less as an eminent author and pioneer of Arthurian fiction than 'as a contributor of fragments to what amounts to a universal history'.⁴⁴ If we are able to abstract the scholarly author-construction 'Chrétien' from our consideration of the medieval manuscript evidence, a different picture of the development of medieval Arthurian literature begins to emerge, one in which the *Conte du Graal* cycle as a textual unit plays a major role.

For instance, the earliest illustrated 'Chrétien manuscripts' are cyclical *Conte du Graal* codices, dating from the last quarter of the thirteenth century. Busby suggests that the fact that some *Conte du Graal* manuscripts were illustrated at all is down to the popularity of the prose Vulgate Cycle manuscripts;⁴⁵ this may then in turn have encouraged the illustration of Chrétien's other romances. In this case, one might have to turn on its head Busby's comment that 'the evidence suggests that parts of the Continuations were very well-known indeed and one may surmise that this was at least in part due to their association with Chrétien's *Perceval*',⁴⁶ we might say rather that the popularity of Chrétien's other romances may be due at least in part to the association of his name with the *Conte du Graal* cycle, Continuations and all.⁴⁷ This assertion is supported by data collated by Colette-Anne Van Coolput on textual references to Chrétien in medieval literature. Of the thirteen references which she lists, four come from the *Conte du Graal*

⁴³ See Alison Stones's 'General Introduction' (1993a: 3): 'The number of surviving manuscripts and fragments... is already some indicator of the relative popularity of the texts.' The same logic underpins Nixon's argumentation in his article on romance collections (1993a: 17): 'The more than forty manuscripts and fragments which contain one or more of the romances of Chrétien de Troyes form one of the largest legacies of any known author of medieval romance.'

⁴⁴ Hult (1998: 23).

⁴⁵ Busby (1993d: 365–6).

⁴⁶ Busby (1993d: 367).

⁴⁷ Bruckner (2009: 3) similarly sees the Continuations as playing a potential significant role in the popularity of Chrétien's work: 'It might be argued that *Perceval* survives in many more copies than other romances by Chrétien... precisely because of the interest generated by the continuations.'

cycle itself (C1 [MR] 1234 and 4116, CM 42641 (a variant from MS P), CG 6984, *Elucidation* 475). The cycle thus makes a habit of referring to its originary author, and its success can plausibly be considered to have contributed towards investing the name 'Chrétien' with a certain amount of literary capital. Of the nine other references, only two make explicit reference to any of Chrétien's works: one (*Miracle d'une none tresoriere*) invokes him as author of *Perceval* and *Cligés*, the other (Sarrasin's *Roman de Hem*) as author of *Perceval*.⁴⁸ Meanwhile, Arthurian verse romances which allude to events in Chrétien's works turn their attention exclusively to the events of the *Conte du Graal* cycle.⁴⁹ Indeed, as I argue in Chapter 4, the ways in which thirteenth-century authors interacted with the cycle shows that they were far more attuned to its narrative aesthetics than modern readers have been, treating it as a coherent textual tradition with or against which to write. A major goal of this study will therefore be to read the *Conte du Graal* and its Continuations as the unified corpus which the manuscript evidence argues for, and by so doing to bring into view the significant role that it played in the reception and evolution of Arthurian romance, especially verse romance. In order to achieve this, it will be necessary to understand the aesthetic principles which underlie the corpus's cyclic coherence. Before beginning to examine these, however, I return to two terms which have featured heavily already in the course of this Introduction – 'continuation' and 'cyclicality'. By probing these notions further, greater light can be shed on the particularity of the *Conte du Graal* cycle, and on what study of this corpus can add to our understanding of medieval literature.

The *Conte du Graal* Corpus and Cyclicality

The cycle as a literary form emerged in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. Existing verse narratives, expanded and adorned with prequels and sequels, became ordered narrative compilations transmitted in cyclical manuscripts. The earliest extant cyclical codices date from the thirteenth century, and reflect a growing interest both in the production and ownership of manuscripts in general and, more specifically, in reading the cyclical narratives themselves. Fundamental to grasping the cyclicality of the *Conte du Graal* corpus is the crucial point that its elaboration, from the final quarter of the twelfth century to the second quarter of the thirteenth, is contemporary with the development of the major epic cycles, and of the prose Vulgate Cycle, such that one can place it alongside these vast works as part of a 'cyclic turn' in medieval French literature.

⁴⁸ Van Coolput (1987: 333–7).

⁴⁹ See Schmolke-Hasselmann [Middleton] (1998: 213), and pages 185–200 below, where I deal in more detail with the ramifications of this.

Recent years have seen much attention paid to the question of how to recognise and characterise cyclicity in medieval narrative, with two conferences in the early 1990s producing edited volumes on the subject.⁵⁰ More recently still, Bart Besamusca has discussed cyclicity in some detail in his study of the Middle Dutch *Lancelot* Compilation, drawing heavily on five criteria proposed by Povl Skårup as entering into the definition of a cycle.⁵¹ Since Skårup's ideas and terminology provide a good example of both the possibilities and limits of a general definition of cyclicity, it is worth briefly restating them here. We can speak of a cycle, he suggests, only in cases where we are dealing with (1) a sequence of originally independent texts, (2) contained in the same manuscript and ordered according to the progression of events, (3) which share the same protagonist or of which the protagonists are related. In addition, (4&5) there must be 'cyclic signals' both between texts and within texts in the ensemble. Skårup has in mind, on the one hand, linking passages which highlight the sequential nature of the different texts (such as an announcement of the next text that will follow); on the other, passages within texts which refer backwards or forwards to events in other parts of the cycle ('allusions') or which show signs of having been altered in order to avoid discrepancies with events elsewhere in the corpus ('adaptations'). In other words, cyclic signals manifest a desire on the part of a compiler, redactor or author to establish the coherence of the narrative sequence.

For Besamusca, 'the features listed by Skårup are incontrovertible'. Yet he himself acknowledges that the Middle Dutch *Lancelot* Compilation, which he considers 'a classic example of a narrative cycle', 'cannot be said to comply with the [third] criterion entirely: two romances... invalidate it'.⁵² While Skårup's work might constitute a starting point for discussion of cyclicity, any attempt definitively to limit, either by inclusion or by exclusion, the essential features of a group of texts is liable to work less well the further away one moves from the particular case or cases on which the delimitation is based. Skårup's criteria are no exception to this tendency: they are developed in the context of an analysis of the *Karlamagnús saga*, a cycle of Scandinavian translations of French *chansons de geste*, and define a model of cyclicity drawn ultimately from the *chanson de geste*, which maps less successfully onto other groups of text. For instance, as Besamusca himself notes, the genealogical aspect of Skårup's third criterion is more appropriate to epic cycles, where the frequent narrative concern with feuding between families makes filiation (or, conversely, ancestry) a natural motor for cyclical

⁵⁰ Besamusca, Gerritsen, Hogetoorn and Lie (1994); Sturm-Maddox and Maddox eds. (1996).

⁵¹ See Besamusca (2003) and Skårup (1994). The influence of Skårup's definition is also apparent in the editors' introductory comments on the nature of cyclicity in Besamusca, Gerritsen, Hogetoorn and Lie eds. (1994: 1).

⁵² Besamusca (2003: 146 and 141).

prolongation;⁵³ as for the *Conte du Graal* cycle, it clearly breaks the first rule, since each Continuation and prologue is explicitly conceived as an addition to the existing body of text. This quality of our cycle sets it apart from the majority of others, which are typically formed of sequences of individual narratives, each of which contains its own relative unity. One might usefully speak of its composition as embodying a principle of cyclic continuation. Thus, although Skårup's criteria provide an insightful and productive way into thinking about cyclicity, the attempt to produce a single, comprehensive and synchronic, definition already begins to break down before the multifarious nature of the literary evidence.

It may be more fruitful to look at cyclification as a process in diachrony. Here we can distinguish between three broad phases, beginning with the reconfiguration of originally independent texts to create longer narratives. The *Guillaume* cycle, one of the first cycles to be recognised as such by critics, is based around a core of three such twelfth-century texts that seem to have been brought together around 1190: the *Couronnement de Louis* (c. 1130), the *Charroi de Nîmes* (c. 1130–40) and the *Prise d'Orange* (c. 1140–50). The second phase, which becomes visible around the turn of the thirteenth century, is the deliberate composition of new texts to add to an already established cycle, demonstrating a desire to fit the new narratives into the perceived cyclical frame. The *Guillaume* material was thus expanded through the addition of the *Enfances Guillaume* (c. 1200–1225), as well as the creation of new texts relating the youthful exploits and further adventures of other characters from the narrative: *Les Enfances Vivien* (c. 1200–1225), *La Chevalerie Vivien* (c. 1200), *La Bataille Loquifer* (c. 1200–1210) and *Le Moniage Rainouart* (c. 1190–1200) all date from this period. Two distinct phases can also be discerned in the cyclification of the *Conte du Graal* material, the first in the extension of Chrétien's unfinished narrative by the first two Continuations, and the second in the addition of the two later Continuations and the two prologues to the now-established cycle; a significant difference in the case of our corpus is that the initial phase already involves the composition of new material in order to continue the interrupted narrative, rather than the bringing together of previously independent texts.

The third stage of cyclification is the compilation of material into cyclical manuscripts, a process which implied a new phase of editing and rewriting to make the constituent parts fit together more harmoniously. As a result of this process, each cyclical manuscript potentially creates a different configuration of the corpus. Within the *Conte du Graal* cycle tradition, this phase begins concurrently with the second, as the First Continuation in particular is subjected to numerous recastings which its editor sorts into three families: the Short, Long and Mixed Redactions. Indeed, another notable feature of

⁵³ Besamusca (2003: 141).

cyclicality is the precarious nature of the unity it creates; the constituent parts of cycles may be pulled apart, left out or transmitted independently. As a result, each cyclical manuscript represents a potentially unique realisation of cyclicality, based on its choice and arrangement of elements. An archetypal instance of this is MS BNF, fr. 112, completed by Micheau Gonnot in 1470. Gonnot wove bits from various prose romances, some already cyclical, others not – namely, the *Lancelot* proper, the prose *Tristan*, three versions of the *Queste del Saint Graal*, *La Mort le roi Artu*, the *Suite du Merlin*, *Palamède* and the *Prophéties de Merlin* – into what is effectively a continuous Arthurian narrative spread over four books (of which the first is now lost).⁵⁴ The Gonnot manuscript thus exemplifies the totalising drive that characterises a certain kind of cyclicality in its attempt to produce the most complete history of the Arthurian world possible.

A manuscript such as BNF, fr. 112 demonstrates that the third stage of cyclification – the collection of material into cyclical codices – can operate on material not previously subjected to the first two, creating one-off cyclical compilations through the imposition of a binding principle of coherence on its disparate texts. MS BNF, fr. 1450, which as we have seen contains Chrétien's romances and a Branch of the First Continuation interpolated into Wace's *Brut*, has frequently been described as cyclical in this sense.⁵⁵ It contains Benoît de Sainte Maure's *Roman de Troie*, the *Roman d'Eneas*, the *Brut* with its Chrétien interpolation and the *Roman de Dolopathos*, a version of the *Sept Sages de Rome*. This sequence of texts articulates a model of *translatio imperii*, moving from Troy to Rome and then to Britain (a trajectory personified in the figures of Eneas and his descendant Brut), which becomes the manuscript's cyclical narrative, above and beyond the narrative movements of each individual romance. The circular implication of the term 'cycle' is thus materialised in the meta-narrative of the rise and fall of civilisations.⁵⁶ The scribal handling of the material manifests a conscious desire to create this architectonic. The prologue to the *Roman de Troie* is detached from the rest of the text and thereby made to serve as the prologue to the whole collection; Chrétien's romances, meanwhile, are shorn of their prologues and made to read like a continuous narrative, with the exception of the *Cligés* prologue which, famously, includes a celebration of *translatio studii et imperii*. This

⁵⁴ On this manuscript, see Pickford (1960).

⁵⁵ Walters (1985); Maddox (1996: 40); Taylor (1994: 63–4); Besamusca (2003: 150–1).

⁵⁶ Jane Taylor describes this narrative model as 'organic' cyclicality, where the fictional structure is modelled on a conception of time itself as a cycle. She views organic cyclicality as dominant from the fourteenth century onwards, exemplified by cycles such as the *Perceforest*. See Taylor (1994).

prologue, though buried in the middle of the textual sequence, thus becomes a kind of mission statement for the whole manuscript.⁵⁷

The *Conte du Graal* cycle manuscript tradition testifies to the coherence of the corpus as perceived by its audience, but this coherence admits of a degree of instability. The most common grouping (eight out of eleven copies) is CdG-C1-C2-CM, forming a central core into whose orbit the other texts are pulled more occasionally. This might thus be termed the canonical form of the cycle, as Bruckner also suggests; however, as she goes on to note, “canonical” in this context admits of many different actualizations, given the three different redactions of the Gauvain Continuation (Short, Long, and Mixed), the addition of materials preceding Chrétien’s romance, as well as the inclusion of the Fourth Continuation in *TV*.⁵⁸ Indeed, there is a limited amount of evidence for contemporary appreciation of the corpus as made up of separable segments: the rubric in MS *A* distinguishing the ‘old *Perceval*’ from the rest of the ensemble, the four MSS (*BCFH*) where Chrétien’s text is presented on its own and the one instance of a Continuation treated independently, Roach’s MS *K* (Bern, Burgerbibl. 113), where the Second Continuation appears on its own as part of a romance compilation, with a unique ending designed to make it a self-sufficient narrative. We can therefore conclude that the cyclic version of this corpus was more popular than other permutations of the material, even though its unity remained precarious.

The preference for cyclic coherence is itself built into the overarching narrative of the corpus, which bears out certain of Skårup’s criteria: the order of its constituent parts is broadly guaranteed by the progression of the central narrative, and the various parts of the corpus are insistently tied together by what Gomez calls ‘effets de cycle’: signs of a relationship between an individual unit and a cyclic whole, which may be perceivable in the content or the structure of the work.⁵⁹ Moreover, the oldest surviving manuscripts of our cycle are contemporary with the earliest extant cyclical manuscripts in any genre. The first surviving manuscripts of the Vulgate Cycle material are dated to around 1250, with production really taking off in the fourteenth century. Our MS *L*, located by Nixon in the first quarter of the thirteenth century, thus predates the earliest extant copies of a prose romance cycle by some time.⁶⁰ The fact that this manuscript does not contain the later parts

⁵⁷ See Huot (1987: 28): ‘Enfolded in the heart of the book... this classic statement of *translatio* extends its significance throughout the collection.’

⁵⁸ Bruckner (2009: 188–9).

⁵⁹ Gomez (forthcoming). The notion of ‘effet de cycle’ is broader in scope than Skårup’s concept of the ‘cyclic signal’ in that the latter is defined narrowly as a linking passage which establishes continuity with preceding or succeeding texts; Gomez’s ‘effet de cycle’ refers more generally to any element in a text that invites the audience to read it as part of a larger textual whole.

⁶⁰ Note however that Alison Stones (1977) dates one manuscript containing the *Estoire*, *Merlin* and *Lancelot* (Rennes, BM 255) to the 1220s. Busby’s edition of the