OLD FRENCH NARRATIVE CYCLES

Heroism between ethics and morality

Luke Sunderland

Gallica

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Volume 15

OLD FRENCH NARRATIVE CYCLES
HEROISM BETWEEN ETHICS AND MORALITY

This is a study of four colossal medieval works – the *Cycle de Guillaume d'Orange*, the *Vulgate Cycle*, the *Prose Tristan* and the *Roman de Renart* – that are normally considered separately. By placing them side-by-side for analysis, Luke Sunderland is able to argue for an aesthetic of cyclicity that cuts across genre. He combines detailed readings of the narrative infrastructure of each cycle with attention to the shifts and transformations that come with successive acts of rewriting.

Old French Narrative Cycles focuses in particular on revisions and controversies around heroic figures, arguing that competition between alternative heroes within these texts makes them a discourse on heroism. Using a theoretical framework deriving from Lacanian psychoanalysis, the author reveals anxieties surrounding the hero's relationship to the "good": the hero oscillates between support for moral ideals and subversive assertions of freedom that can lead to evil and death. Ultimately, it is contended that the instability of the hero as conduit for morality produces textual confusion and generates the myriad differing versions of these vast and perplexing works.

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MANUSCRIPTS OF THE *CYCLE DE GUILLAUME*

Cyclical Manuscripts

A1	BNF 774
A2	BNF 1449
A3	BNF 368
A4	Milan, Trivulziana 1025
B1	London, British Library, Royal 20 D XI
B2	BNF 24369–70
C	Boulogne-sur-Mer, Bibliothèque Municipale, 192
D	BNF 1448

See Tyssens, *La Geste*, pp. 44–45 for full guide to all manuscripts, including non-cyclical codices.

Texts (in order of appearance in B2)

Title	Date	Edition used	Abbreviation
Aymeri de Narbonne	c. 1170–1225	Gallé (B1 version)	*AN*
Narbonnais (start)	c. 1210	Suchier	*N*
Enfances Guillaume	c. 1200–1225	Perrier	*EG*
Narbonnais (end)	–	–	–
Couronnement de Louis	c. 1130	Lepage (AB version)	*CL*
Charroi de Nîmes	c. 1130–1140	McMillan	*CN*
Prise d'Orange	c. 1140–1150	Régnier	*PO*
Enfances Vivien (start)	c. 1200–1225	Rouquier	*EV*
Siège de Barbastre	c. 1200–1225	Guidot	*SB*
Guibert d'Andrenas	c. 1220–1225	Ott	*GA*
Enfances Vivien (end)	–	–	–
Chevalerie Vivien	c. 1200	McMillan (S version)	*CV*
Aliscans	c. 1185–1190	Régnier	*A*
Bataille Loquifer	c. 1200–1210	Barnett	*BL*
Moniage Rainouart (start)	c. 1190–1200	Bertin (MR1 version)	*MR*
Mort Aymeri de Narbonne	c. 1200–1220	Rinoldi	*MA*
Moniage Rainouart (end)	–	–	–
Enfances Renier	c. 1250–1300	Cremonesi	*ER*
Moniage Guillaume	c. 1170	Andrieux-Reix	*MG*

Texts not appearing in *B2*

Title	Date	Manuscripts	Ed. used	Abbrev.
Chanson de Guillaume	c. 1150–1170	No cyclical MS	Bennett	*CG*
Chanson de Garin de Monglene	c. 1250–1300	*B1*	Schuppe	*CGM*
Girart de Vienne	c. 1180	*B1*, *D*	Van Emden	*GV*
Folque de Candie	c. 1185	*A1*, *B1*, *C*	Schultz-Gora	*FC*
Prise de Cordres	c. 1190–1195	*D*	Densusianu	*PC*
Enfances Garin de Monglane	c. 1275–1325	No cyclical MS	Bisinger	*EGM*
Geste de Monglane	c. 1350	No cyclical MS	Dougherty/ Barnes	*GM*

Dates based on those given by the respective editors of the texts, but also using Bennett's account of the cycle's development (*Carnaval*). The dates are intended to illustrate the growth of the cycle rather than to place the texts within precise historical contexts. Phrases such as 'second half of the thirteenth century' have been converted to numerical ranges.

MANUSCRIPTS OF THE *ROMAN DE RENART*

Alpha Family

A	BNF 20043
D	Oxford, Bodleian Library, Douce 360
E	London, British Library, Additional 15229
F	New York, Pierpont Morgan, 932
G	BNF 1580
N	Vatican, Reg. Lat. 1699

Beta Family

B	BNF 371
K	Chantilly, Musée Condé 472
L	Arsenal 3335

Gamma Family

C	BNF 1579
M	Turin, Biblioteca Reale, cod. varia 151

Independent/Composite Manuscripts

H	Arsenal 3334
I	BNF 12584
O	BNF 12583

There are also nineteen incomplete, partial or fragmentary manuscripts. For details, see Varty, *The 'Roman de Renart'*.

Comparative Table of *Renart* Manuscripts

Alpha (MS *D*)	Beta (*B*)	Gamma (*C*)	Branch in *C*
Jugement (I)	Jugement (I)	Prologue (IIa)	
Siège (Ia)	Siège (Ia)	Enfances (XXIV)	1
Teinturier/jongleur (Ib)	Teinturier/jongleur (Ib)	Viol d'Hersant (IIf)	
Prologue (IIa)	Puits (IV)	Escondit (Va) (start)	
Chantecler (IIb)	Prologue (IIa)	Les poissons (IIIa)	2
Mésange (IIc)	Enfances (XXIV)	Moniage Isengrin (IIIb)	3
Tibert (IId)	Chantecler (IIb)	Pêche à la queue (IIIc)	4
L'andouille (XVa)	Mésange (IIc)	Chantecler (IIb)	
Les deux prêtres (XVb)	Tibert (IId)	Tibert (IId)	5
Tiécelin (IIe)	L'andouille (XVa)	L'andouille (XVa)	
Viol d'Hersant (IIf)	Les deux prêtres (XVb)	Cellier du vilain (XIVa)	6
Les poissons (IIIa)	Isengrin/beliers (XX)	Primaut (XIVb)	7 8
Moniage Isengrin (IIIb)	La monstrance (XXI)	Escondit (Va) (end)	9
Pêche à la queue (IIIc)	Tiécelin (IIe)	Jugement (I)	10
Duel judiciaire (VI)	Viol d'Hersant (IIf)	Siège (Ia)	
Puits (IV)	Escondit (Va)	Teinturier/jongleur (Ib)	11 12 13
Le grillon (V)	Duel judiciaire (VI)	Bertaut (XVIa)	14
Escondit (Va)	Pèlerinage (VIII)	Partage des proies (XVIb)	
Vêpres de Tibert (XII)	Liétart (IX)	Les deux prêtres (XVb)	15
Confession Renart (VII)	Vêpres de Tibert (XII)	Isengrin/beliers (XX)	16
Pèlerinage (VIII)	Les poissons (IIIa)	La monstrance (XXI)	17
Liétart (IX)	Moniage Isengrin (IIIb)	Tiécelin (IIe)	18
Cellier du vilain (XIVa)	Pêche à la queue (IIIc)	Isengrin/Martin (XVIII)	19
Primaut (XIVb)	Labourage/Connin (XXII)	Isengrin/jument (XIX)	20
Renart le noir (XIII)	Confession Renart (VII)	Mésange (IIc)	21
Renart médecin (X)	Isengrin/Martin (XVIII)	Le grillon (V)	22
Renart empereur (XI)	Isengrin/jument (XIX)	Puits (IV)	23
Bertaut (XVIa)	Le grillon (V)	Confession Renart (VII)	24
Partage des proies (XVIb)	Bertaut (XVIa)	Pèlerinage (VIII)	25
Mort Renart (XVII)	Partage des proies (XVIb)	Duel judiciaire (VI)	26
	Renart médecin (X)	Labourage/Connin (XXII)	27
	Renart empereur (XI)	Liétart (IX)	28
		Renart médecin (X)	29
		Renart empereur (XI)	30
		Mort Renart (XVII)	31

The Roman numerals given are the branch numbers established by Varty ('De l'appellation'). The branches of *C* are numbered in Arabic numerals in the right-hand column. The titles are those established by Varty ('De l'appellation').

REFERENCES AND ABBREVIATIONS

Manuscripts

Arsenal	Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal
BNF	Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, fonds français
Vienna	Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek

Chapter 1 (*Cycle de Guillaume*)

Line numbers are given in references. See pp. ix–x for lists of editions used and of manuscripts.

Chapter 2 (*Vulgate Cycle*)

Volume number (where appropriate) and page number are given. The following editions were used:

E	*L'Estoire del Saint Graal*, ed. Ponceau
L	*Lancelot en prose*, ed. Micha
LPF	*Les Premiers Faits du roi Arthur*, ed. Poirion, in *Le Livre du Graal I*
Mer	*Merlin*, ed. Micha
Mor	*La Mort le Roi Artu*, ed. Frappier
Q	*La Queste del Saint Graal*, ed. Pauphilet

Chapter 3 (*Prose Tristan*)

Volume number and page number are given. The following editions were used:

C	*Le Roman de Tristan en prose*, ed. Curtis (=V2)
M	*Le Roman de Tristan en prose*, ed. Ménard (=V2, 9 vol edition)
V1	*Le Roman de Tristan en prose*, ed. Ménard (=V1, 5 vol edition)

For the verse Tristan tradition, line numbers are given:

B	Béroul, *Tristan et Iseut*, ed. Lacroix and Walter
T	Thomas, *Roman de Tristan*, ed. Lecoy

Chapter 4 (*Roman de Renart*)

Only the edition by Fukumoto, Harano and Suzuki was used. Branch number and line numbers are given. See pp. xi–xii for a list of manuscripts and for a table showing the order of the material in different manuscript groups.

INTRODUCTION

Medieval literary culture was as much concerned with rewriting as with original composition. The majority of medieval texts exist in multiple versions, each different from the last, for scribes were seldom content simply to reproduce an existing literary work; rather they made alterations as they copied, ranging from the elimination of inconsistencies to changes in form and even to complete reinterpretations. Though modern editors have frequently sought to establish a canonical version of texts, there can never be a definitive version of most works; the texts exist in a state of repeated revision or *mouvance*.[1] One reason for this is the paucity of authorial figures, especially before the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries; two of the twelfth century's 'big name' authors – Marie de France and Chrétien de Troyes – are in fact shady figures, about whom we know virtually nothing.[2] Perhaps they and undoubtedly other authors are simply products of the fictional texts which name them, most being the works of clerks whose identity is unknown. Because there was a much weaker notion of intellectual ownership of material, early medieval texts are the multi-authored, multi-layered products of collective literary subjectivity, the agglutinative substrates of series of successive continuations and reworkings. Furthermore, texts were collected and compiled in a wide variety of manuscript contexts, thus being repeatedly recast.

The phenomenon of cyclicity, the subject of this book, grows out of the medieval tendency to rewrite, prolong and compile. The term 'cycle', however, is not a medieval one.[3] Cyclical manuscripts in fact bear various titles: *estoire*, *livre*, *roman* or *geste*.[4] 'Cycle' is a modern term created to encapsulate what

[1] The term *mouvance* comes from Zumthor's *Essai*, the seminal work on the plurality of the medieval text.

[2] Cerquiglini (*Éloge*, p. 57) sees Marie de France as an invention of editors. On Chrétien, see Kay, 'Who was Chrétien?', and on the medieval author see Greene, 'What Happened?'

[3] As Staines ('The Medieval Cycle') notes, the term 'cycle' was first pejorative, used by the ancient Greeks to designate an inferior epic poet. Andrieux-Reix ('La dernière main') dates its first use in French to the sixteenth century: *cyclique* was an adjective used to describe a writer telling of mythical, heroic times.

[4] *Estoire* and *livre* simply mean 'story/history' and 'book' respectively; *roman* connotes 'romance', but also vernacular writing in general (*mettre en roman* can have the meaning 'translate into the vernacular'). The term *geste* is the most complex: associated

these manuscripts have in common: their aim for completeness (the reason for the element of circularity in the term), and their production in a long, complicated, multi-layered and multi-authored procedure called *mise en cycle*. Cyclification begins in the twelfth century with the continuation of existing literary works to create longer narrative sequences; in the thirteenth century, further amplification, accretion and finally consolidation led to the production of monumental texts, copied and bound in magnificent cyclical codices. And in the fourteenth century and beyond, more (and often longer) versions of cycles were produced.

The cycle proved to be a highly successful format. One particular type of cycle – the prose romance Arthurian history – became an early international bestseller, with hundreds of manuscripts produced, especially in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. These histories were to have a lasting vogue: codices continued to appear until the sixteenth century; printed editions were produced beyond even that date.[5] French Arthurian texts were copied beyond the borders of modern France, with large numbers found in Italy and England; translations were also made in these two countries, including Malory's famous *Morte D'Arthur*, as well as in Spain, Portugal, Holland, Germany and elsewhere. The cycle, in short, enjoyed durable and widespread popularity.

Cyclicity nonetheless remains an understudied element of medieval textuality. Despite its obvious appeal to medieval readers, the cycle has not been well received by modern criticism, and early critics lambasted cycles as boring, derivative and repetitive.[6] Others have neglected cycles, or broken them up into more manageable individual texts, thereby divorcing them from their manuscript context. Thus the *Prise d'Orange* is most often studied as a twelfth-century epic, though it survives only in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century *Cycle de Guillaume d'Orange* codices. Elsewhere, modern aesthetic judgments – including the preference for shorter, twelfth-century versions of the same narratives found in expanded form in thirteenth-century cycles – have determined the cycle's fate; for example, critics have long enthused about the Tristan poems to the detriment of the *Prose Tristan*. More recently, however, alongside more sympathetic attitudes towards repetition in medi-

with epic, it means 'deeds', 'lineage' and 'story'. I study its implications more closely in Ch. 1.

5 See Middleton, 'The Manuscripts', pp. 8–9.

6 Bédier dismissed the *Prose Tristan* as an 'énorme fatras d'inventions chevaleresques' [a great hotchpotch of fabrications about knights] (quoted by Baumgartner, *Le 'Tristan en prose'*, p. 173). Few studies have been devoted to the concept of cyclicity or to texts in cyclical form. One should note here the edited volumes *Cyclification* (ed. Besamusca and others), *Transtextualities* (ed. Sturm-Maddox and Maddox), as well as the work on the *Cycle de Guillaume* by Bennett (*Carnaval*) and on the *Vulgate Cycle* by Griffin (*The Object*).

eval texts, there have been more nuanced attempts to understand the cycle.[7] Scholars such as E. Jane Burns and Miranda Griffin, in their work on the *Vulgate* (or *Lancelot-Grail*) Cycle, have revealed the deep structure of the texts, seeking in the very repetition of motifs the meaning and appeal of these works.[8]

In this book, I examine four cycles. Two of these are in verse: the epic (or *chanson de geste*) *Cycle de Guillaume d'Orange* and the comic (mock or beast epic) *Roman de Renart*; and two in prose: the Arthurian romances known as the *Vulgate Cycle* and the *Prose Tristan*. This corpus might at first blush seem slightly disparate, but one of my principal contentions is that the aesthetic of cyclicity cuts across genre. These works are furthermore chronologically intertwined: some of the earliest cyclic material is found in the *Guillaume*, and it was perhaps an inspiration for the development of cycles in romance. Conversely, cyclical manuscripts of the *Vulgate* and the *Tristan* seem to have been in circulation before those of the *Guillaume* and *Renart*, and the aesthetic of these prose manuscripts might have influenced the compilers of verse cycles. Finally, as their names suggest, each of these texts is partly heroic biography: there is a central hero, whose entire life is narrated. But in each case, other heroes upstage him, and his narrative comes into competition with competing counter-narratives. Biography is thus always in conflict with the cyclical drive to create and integrate more text, which leads to the addition of sub-plots and alternative heroes or even 'doubles' of the main character. Each cycle exists in multiple manuscript versions, with a new, precarious balance between the proliferation of narrative and overall consistency found each time. Some versions retain focus on heroic biography; others seek broader, historical scope. All, I argue, are shaped by ethical and aesthetic tensions gathered around the figure of the hero, tensions which can be phrased as two questions. First, because the focus of attention shifts, we ask: who is the hero? And second, because these figures embody different heroic modes, we ask: what is a hero? These tensions are manifest within individual cyclical works and are productive of different manuscript versions, meaning that controversies about heroes and heroism are integral to these works.

In the rest of this Introduction, I will first set the cycles studied here within a wider literary-historical context, and second, I will discuss the Lacanian theory which I deploy to examine the phenomenon of heroism within them.

7 Accounts of medieval repetition include Haidu's 'Repetition' and Méla's *La Reine*.
8 Burns, *Arthurian Fictions*; Griffin, *The Object*.

The History of Cyclicity

The development of French vernacular cycles was a long process: at least fifty and often hundreds of years separate the writing of individual source texts and the production of cyclical manuscripts. However, three principal stages can be distinguished: first, the continuation of existing literary texts in the twelfth century to produce longer narrative sequences.[9] Many of these 'additions' are in fact transmitted only by later cyclical manuscripts, but they have been dated to an earlier period by their editors, allowing us to discern the gradual agglomeration of material. This process is evident from an early stage in epic: the oldest surviving text about Guillaume, the *Chanson de Guillaume*, though found in no cyclical manuscript, is arguably a gesture towards cyclicity because it is a composite text: its earliest part, featuring Vivien's death and dating from the early twelfth century, seems to have invited continuation, and accordingly, a second part narrating the vengeance of Vivien was added later. The surviving compound poem is dated to c. 1150–1170.[10] The oldest surviving text found within cyclical manuscripts, on the other hand, is *Le Couronnement de Louis* (c. 1130), which was also swiftly extended by two sequels: *Le Charroi de Nîmes* (c. 1130–1140), and *La Prise d'Orange* (c. 1140–1150).[11] This group of three poems became the core around which later material clustered, including the *Moniage Guillaume* (c. 1170), and an early version of the cycle, containing five texts about Guillaume – the *Couronnement*, the *Charroi*, the *Prise*, either an early version of *Aliscans* or a revised *Chanson de Guillaume*, and finally the *Moniage* – was probably in place by this stage.[12] Elsewhere, *La Chanson de Roland* (c. 1100) seems to have quickly inspired a number of successors, prequels or sequels to Roland's tragic death at Roncevaux; those appearing in the twelfth century included *Aiquin*, *Aspremont* and *Fierabras*. Such groupings were probably part of the inspiration for the oft-quoted taxonomy found in the prologue to *Girart de Vienne* (c. 1180), which gathers epic poems into three *gestes*: *la geste du roi* (the feats of Roland and of Charlemagne and the kings of France); *la geste de Doon de Maience* (a lineage of rebels and traitors), and *la geste de Garin de Monglane* (or *geste de Guillaume*; Garin is Guillaume's

[9] Boutet (*Formes*, p. 167) points to the establishment of continuity and coherence within genres in the twelfth century, though it is the thirteenth that is generally seen as the century of *summae*.

[10] See edition, p. 9.

[11] A primitive version of *Prise* is thought to date to c. 1120; this was reworked c. 1140–1150 to become part of a trio with the *Couronnement* and the *Charroi*, and then perhaps again c. 1190 to fit into developing cyclical manuscripts. See Tyssens, *La Geste*, pp. 153–62, and Bennett, *'La Chanson de Guillaume' and 'La Prise d'Orange'*, p. 13.

[12] See Bennett, *Carnaval*, pp. 12–13. This version would presumably have worked as a biography of Guillaume. The surviving *Aliscans* is generally dated to c. 1185–1190, a later date taking into account alterations made to fit the text into the developing cycle.

ancestor). This taxonomy may, in turn, have given rise to subsequent cyclical ensembles, which actualize in manuscript form the cyclical potential set out in *Girart de Vienne*.[13]

The *Roman de Renart* grew in a way analogous to epic cycles. It consists of over thirty different episodes (called 'branches'), written between c. 1170 and 1250 by at least twenty authors, mostly anonymous. One of the earliest branches is held to be the account of Renart's greatest crime, the rape of his rival's wife. A number of branches appearing later in the twelfth century picked up on this theme, and staged attempts to bring Renart to justice for his misdeed; thus a sequence of events – spread across different texts – was discernible at an early stage.[14] Another model of cyclicity was, however, developing in romance: Chrétien de Troyes's texts about the Arthurian world featured attempts made to link individual works together chronologically, as presentations of a particular world with its own genealogy and customs; the unfinished *Conte du Graal* (c. 1185) in particular is cyclic in its weaving together of narrative strands about Gauvain and Perceval.[15] Finally, late twelfth-century collections of Mary miracles, such as Adgar's *Le Gracial*, should also be considered part of the early movement to cyclicity.

The second stage of cyclification comes around the turn of the thirteenth century: existing groups of material were adapted and extended through the addition of further texts to 'complete' sequences. Prequels (especially *Enfances* texts recounting the hero's youth) and sequels (such as *Mort* texts, narrating his demise) are a feature of this period and were probably written with cyclical manuscripts in mind. In the *Renart*, branches with clear cyclical intent appeared, including the accounts of Renart's childhood, the 'Enfances Renart' (c. 1250), and of his death, the 'Mort Renart' (c. 1205–1210). And there was a flurry of activity in epic, most notably the development of the vast Crusade Cycle, a fantastical account of the ancestry of Godfroi de Bouillon and a quasi-historical description of his feats in the first crusade.[16] Thirteenth-century additions to the *geste du roi* include *Anseïs de Carthage* and *Gaydon*. The *Cycle des Narbonnais*, a set of texts about Guillaume's father Aymeri and Guillaume's six brothers, also grew around the turn of the thirteenth century. It consists of *Aymeri de Narbonne* (c. 1170–1225), *Les Narbonnais* (c. 1210), *Le Siège de Barbastre* (c. 1200–1225), *Guibert d'Andrenas* (c. 1220–1225), and *La Mort Aymeri de Narbonne* (c. 1200–

[13] See Heintze, 'Les techniques' on the model of cyclicity here and in epic generally.

[14] The precise dates of composition are hard to determine. Scheidegger (*Le 'Roman de Renart'*, pp. 33–61) gives the most complete summary of dating arguments, and the approximate sequence of composition based on references in branches to other branches; see p. 57 for the table of these.

[15] Sturm-Maddox and Maddox, 'Introduction', pp. 3–6; Bennett, *Carnaval*, pp. 10–11. Chrétien's five romances were ultimately interpolated into Wace's *Roman de Brut* as examples of *fables* in BNF 1450.

[16] *The Old French Crusade Cycle*, ed. Nelson.

1220). Found as a cycle in its own right, this grouping was integrated into the *Cycle de Guillaume* around a century later.[17] The Guillaume material was itself expanded through the addition of *Enfances Guillaume* (c. 1200–1225), which takes Guillaume's narrative back to its earliest possible point. The move beyond individual biography, begun in the tradition's earliest stages, led to the addition of *Les Enfances Vivien* (c. 1200–1225) and *La Chevalerie Vivien* (c. 1200), to complete Vivien's narrative, and of *La Bataille Loquifer* (c. 1200–1210) and *Le Moniage Rainouart* (c. 1190–1200) to finish off the tale of Rainouart.[18]

Although the early thirteenth century saw the development of a verse Grail cycle around Chrétien's *Conte du Graal*,[19] the production of cycles in romance is tightly linked to the contemporary rise of prose as a mode of vernacular expression. Prose is associated particularly with historical chronicles, where its use was accompanied by truth-claims: prose was said to bring veracity whereas verse meant falsehood.[20] Romances of the period using prose also show a concern for truthfulness and authenticity, and obsessively cite books as sources as well as referring to themselves as *livres*, part of an overall fascination with the book as locus of and vehicle for knowledge. So it is in the *Lancelot* material, which was recast to become the so-called 'non-cyclic' prose *Lancelot* (c. 1210–1215), a sort of *Enfances Lancelot* recounting his youth and feats as a new knight.[21] First disseminated on its own, this text was later revized and expanded to become the first part of the *Lancelot* (c. 1215–1220), which also contains a prose version of the 'Charrette' episode drawn from Chrétien's *Le Chevalier de la Charrette* (c. 1175–1180); inspiration came from Chrétien's other Arthurian romances too, especially *Le Conte du Graal* for the Grail material.[22] In the 1220s, prequels (*L'Estoire del Saint Graal*, the *Merlin* and *Les Premiers Faits du roi Arthur*, also known as the *Vulgate Suite de Merlin*) and sequels (the *Queste del Saint Graal* and the *Mort le Roi Artu*) were added to the *Lancelot*, completing the vast narrative sequence known as the *Vulgate Cycle*. The *Prose Tristan* (c. 1230–1235) is modelled on the *Vulgate*, from which it copies large tracts of material. It attempts to do for Tristan what the *Vulgate* does for Lancelot by providing a complete biography that makes its hero the best knight in the world; thus

17 See Tyssens, *La Geste*, pp. 44–5 for a table of manuscripts of the *Cycle des Narbonnais*.

18 Guidot (*Recherches*) gives a detailed and fascinating account of the vitality of the Guillaume tradition in the thirteenth century.

19 See Busby 'The Other Grail Cycle'; Hinton, 'The Aesthetics of Communication'.

20 Godzich and Kittay, *The Emergence of Prose* and Spiegel, *Romancing the Past*.

21 See Kennedy's study (*Lancelot and the Grail*) and her edition of this text (*Lancelot du Lac*).

22 See Bruckner, 'Intertextuality' and 'Redefining'; Combes, *Les Voies*; Dover, 'From Non-Cyclic', Lot-Borodine, 'L'épisode' and Rockwell, *Rewriting*, for accounts of the reuse of Chrétien in the prose cycle.

Tristan here becomes an Arthurian knight and is involved in the Grail quest. The text also incorporates and reworks into prose twelfth-century verse about Tristan, principally the romances by Béroul and Thomas which tell of his love for Iseut, adding original material to complete and extend his narrative, in particular an account of the lives of his ancestors and of his rivalry with other knights. Thus another prose ensemble almost as long as the *Vulgate* was formed.

The third and final stage of cyclification is the recopying of the material to produce a cyclical manuscript. Some editing took place at this stage to link the separate source texts into more or less harmonious wholes, and material was thus adapted to fit the requirements of the 'book'. Connections were created between the separate texts or chapters surviving within the whole, which were arranged in the chronological order of the story recounted (not in the order of the texts' composition). These codices – often huge and magnificent – started to appear from the thirteenth century onwards, fitting into a wider context of increasing manuscript production, of the development of prose and the exploration of vernacular expression outside classical authorities and the Bible, and of the writing of works of historiography, *summae* or encyclopaedias such as those of Thomas Aquinas, Vincent de Beauvais and Brunetto Latini. Carol Chase summarizes the intellectual climate of the period thus: 'thirteenth-century people sought to classify, organize, and synthesize techniques and knowledge';[23] whereas James Wimsatt holds that contemporary 'writers and audiences liked for their verbal structures to begin at the beginning and reach for the end: chronologically, existentially, alphabetically'.[24] The fictional counterpart of this drive for completeness, integrity and coherency, the cycle consecrates a particular textual tradition, making a complete 'book' of it; the pleasure given by a cyclical manuscript is that of owning all the stories, a result of the desire to possess that leads consumers today to collect DVD boxed sets of favourite shows. But 'completeness' was understood in a variety of different ways – biographical, historical, genealogical[25] – and the horizon was constantly being expanded, with thirteenth-century manuscripts being trumped in size and scope in the fourteenth century, the era of the 'grand cycle', and even beyond that.[26]

The earliest surviving cyclical manuscripts are romance cycles. Scribes copying these made alterations to eliminate inconsistencies, to add anticipations of events to come and reminders of those past in order to create coher-

23 'The Medieval Public', p. 179.

24 'The Idea of a Cycle', p. 206.

25 Alternative forms of coherence might include 'various configurations of the liturgical calendar, […] the successive reigns of a line of monarchs, the phases of a dynasty, and even the eschatological paradigm of universal history itself' (Sturm-Maddox and Maddox, 'Introduction', p. 5).

26 Taylor, 'Order from Accident'.

ence.[27] The first surviving manuscripts of the *Lancelot* material date from c. 1250,[28] and production boomed in the fourteenth century and continued beyond. There are around 170 manuscripts in total, including a number of combinations of texts and some fragments, making the Lancelot material one of the most popular medieval texts.[29] The most common grouping is *Lancelot–Queste–Mort*, a biography of Lancelot; some codices are entitled *l'estoire* or *li roumains de Lancelot*, showing that they were seen to contain the complete story of Lancelot. But the rarer *Vulgate Cycle* (containing *Estoire–Merlin–Les Premiers Faits–Lancelot–Queste–Mort*) is the longest version, forming a history of the Grail or of Arthur.[30] It uses the Wheel of Fortune as a model for cyclicity, with a long linear narrative finding closure as the Wheel completes one full turn: Arthur's kingdom rises but inevitably falls. The *Vulgate* contains texts with their own character, but they are so successfully integrated into the ensemble as parts of large sweeping movements that it could be referred to as the 'classic' cycle. It is certainly the model copied by the *Prose Tristan*, found in around eighty manuscripts which are also delicate blends of heroic biography and Arthurian history. A similar tension between biography and cyclicity runs through the various manuscripts of the verse *Conte du Graal* cycle, which were copied over the same period.

Even the broad sweep of history narrated by the *Vulgate* could be expanded to produce longer narratives, as witness the fourteenth-century *Perceforest*, which gives the history of the empire of Alexander as a prologue to that of Arthur.[31] At the decline of the former, power is transferred to the latter; two turns of the Wheel of Fortune are thus recounted. Jane Taylor therefore defines the fourteenth-century cycle as

> the construction of a pseudo-historical prose narrative against a conception of history as an organic process of birth, growth, apogee, decay and death, death triggering in turn the next rebirth and thus the next cycle.[32]

The cycle here is modelled on the *translatio imperii* topos – the idea that empires inevitably rise and fall, with each fall preceding the rise of the next empire – which derives from St Augustine. In this conception, history is an

[27] For an account of this process in romance, see Kennedy, 'The Scribe'. Skårup ('Un cycle de traductions') highlights the presence of cyclical signals within the texts (allusions to other texts, adaptations made to provide conformity with the other texts), and between the texts (phrases providing smooth transition from one text to another).

[28] Stones ('The Earliest Illustrated Prose *Lancelot* Manuscript') dates one codex containing the *Estoire*, *Merlin* and *Lancelot* to the 1220s.

[29] See Micha, 'Les manuscrits' and 'La tradition manuscrite'; Middleton, 'Manuscripts of the *Lancelot-Grail Cycle*' and Stones's online survey at http://vrcoll.fa.pitt.edu/stones-www/LG-web/Arthur-LG-LibraryList.html [consulted 5 September 2008].

[30] There only nine manuscripts of the *Vulgate* (see Griffin, *The Object*, pp. 2–3).

[31] The text has not been published in full; for details, see Huot, *Postcolonial Fictions*.

[32] 'The Sense of a Beginning', p. 96.