

## Approaches to Arthurian Fiction: The Case of *Torec*

One of the aims of the fifteenth triennial congress of the International Arthurian Society, which took place in the Belgian city Louvain, July 1987, was to focus on medieval Dutch Arthurian literature. In line with this intention, the participants were offered the exhibition “King Arthur in the Low Countries in the Middle Ages”.<sup>1</sup> In addition to this exposition, the conference organizers scheduled two plenary lectures on medieval Dutch Arthurian literature. The Belgian critic Jef Janssens discussed the status of the “roman arthurien non historique en moyen néerlandais”, wondering whether they should be seen as translations or indigenous works.<sup>2</sup> Wim Gerritsen, at that time preparing the first-ever edition of *Lantsloot vander Haghedochte*, discussed this remarkable thirteenth-century Flemish verse adaptation of the French Prose *Lancelot*.<sup>3</sup> This Bristol plenary is the first one devoted to medieval Dutch Arthurian literature since the Louvain meeting.<sup>4</sup> It would make sense, therefore, to summarize here the research on Middle Dutch

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1. *Arturus Rex Volumen I: Catalogus. Koning Artur en de Nederlanden. La matière de Bretagne et les anciens Pays-Bas*, ed. W. Verbeke, J. Janssens, M. Smeyers (Leuven: Leuven UP, 1987).

2. Jozef D. Janssens, “Le roman arthurien ‘non historique’ en moyen néerlandais: traduction ou création originale?,” in *Arturus Rex Volumen II: Acta Conventus Lovaniensis 1987*, ed. Willy Van Hoecke, Gilbert Tournoy, Werner Verbeke (Leuven: Leuven UP, 1991), pp. 330–51.

3. See *Lantsloot vander Haghedochte: Fragmenten van een Middelnederlandse bewerking van de Lancelot en prose*, ed. W. P. Gerritsen, in co-operation with A. Berteloot, F. P. van Oostrom and P. G. J. van Sterkenburg (Amsterdam etc.: Noord-Hollandsche Uitgevers Maatschappij, 1987).

4. The oral version of this article was presented at the 23rd triennial congress of the International Arthurian Society, organized by the University of Bristol (25–30 July 2011).

Arthurian literature carried out between then, 1987, and now, 2011. However, Dutch Arthurian scholarship, including the just mentioned period, has been documented elsewhere.<sup>5</sup> I prefer, therefore, to take a different point of view in this paper. Focusing on a single narrative, I intend to show, in a loosely chronological order, the scholarly approaches that were applied by Dutch and Belgian critics and the results they have achieved. And I will add, of course, my own observations to their readings. I have selected the romance of *Torec* as my example, because this text is highly intriguing as a narrative and eminently suited to my methodological purpose.

*Torec* is a verse narrative of nearly 4,000 lines. The eponymous hero is a young knight, who goes on a quest for a *cyrkel van goude* (l. 35), a “circlet of gold”, which is *een di beste hoetbant / Diemen in die werelt vant* (“one of the best diadems ever found in all the world,” ll. 15–16).<sup>6</sup> The precious object was stolen from Torec’s grandmother, and had passed into the hands of a damsel, named Miraude. After a great number of knightly adventures and mysterious incidents Torec wins both the diadem and Miraude, whom he marries after meeting her outrageous condition to defeat all the knights of the Round Table. This narrative has been transmitted only in the so-called *Lancelot Compilation*, a text collection consisting of ten Middle Dutch

5. See Bart Besamusca, “The Low Countries,” in *Medieval Arthurian Literature: A Guide to Recent Research*, ed. Norris J. Lacy (New York & London: Garland, 1996), pp. 211–37; Bart Besamusca, “The Medieval Dutch Arthurian Material,” in *The Arthur of the Germans: The Arthurian Legend in Medieval German and Dutch Literature*, ed. W. H. Jackson and S. A. Ranawake (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000), pp. 187–228; Frank Brandsma, “The Lancelots of the Lowlands,” in *A Companion to the Lancelot-Grail Cycle*, ed. Carol Dover (Cambridge: Brewer, 2003), pp. 205–18; Bart Besamusca, “Dutch Arthurian Literature,” in *A History of Arthurian Scholarship*, ed. Norris J. Lacy (Cambridge: Brewer, 2006), pp. 158–68; *Germania Litteraria Mediaevalis Francigena: Handbuch der deutschen und niederländischen mittelalterlichen literarischen Sprache, Formen, Motive, Stoffe und Werke französischer Herkunft (1100–1300)*, Vol. V: *Höfischer Roman in Vers und Prosa*, ed. René Perennec and Elisabeth Schmid (Berlin & New York: de Gruyter, 2010), pp. 169–220 (by René Perennec), 249–310 (by Geert Claassens & Fritz Peter Knapp), 311–330 (by Willem Kuiper & Geert Claassens), 393–458 (by Fritz Peter Knapp & Frank Brandsma).

6. I quote *Dutch Romances, Vol. III: Five Interpolated Romances from the Lancelot Compilation*, ed. and trans. David F. Johnson and Geert H. M. Claassens, with the assistance of Katty De Bundel and Geert Pallemans (Cambridge: Brewer, 2003), pp. 562–727.

Arthurian verse romances which dates from around 1320. I will return to this collection in due course; at this point I just need to mention that the *Torec* in the *Lancelot* Compilation is the result of an uncertain genesis. The compiler of the text collection most certainly adapted an older Middle Dutch version of the tale, which was in all probability written by the Flemish author Jacob van Maerlant around 1262. The complete evidence to support Maerlant's authorship is lacking since his romance has not survived independently. However, in the prologue to his *Historie van Troyen*, History of Troy, written around 1264, he lists his earlier works, including a *Toerecke*:

Hier toe voren dichten hy Merlyn  
 Ende Allexander uyten Latyn,  
 Toerecke ende dien Sompniarys,  
 Ende den cortten Lapidarys. (ll. 57–60)<sup>7</sup>

(Earlier he [that is: Maerlant] composed Merlin, and from the Latin Alexander, Torec and the Sompniarys, and the short Lapidarys.)

Dutch critics are unanimous in their assumption that the title *Toerecke* in line 59 indicates that Maerlant wrote, in addition to the extant Grail-Merlin and Alexander texts and the lost works about dreams and stones, a romance about Torec, and that it was this tale that was adapted for insertion into the *Lancelot* Compilation.

The next question is, of course: did Maerlant compose an indigenous Middle Dutch tale, or did he use a French source? The extant corpus of French Arthurian narratives does not feature a romance about the knight Torec who wins a diadem, but once again a lost text is of considerable interest to *Torec* research. According to an inventory of the library of the Kings of France, queen Isabella of Bavaria removed, on 11 November 1392, a volume from the royal collection entitled *Torrez chevalier au Cercle d'or, rymé, bien historié et escript*.<sup>8</sup> In his admirable 1960 study on the evolution of French Arthurian prose romance, Cedric Pickford noted that *Torrez* was “un roman qui est peut-être arthurien”.<sup>9</sup> He was obviously unaware of the

7. Jacob van Maerlant, *Dit is die Istory van Troyen*, ed. Napoleon de Pauw and Edward Gailliard, 4 vols. (Gent: Siffer, 1889–92).

8. See *The Arthur of the French: The Arthurian Legend in Medieval French and Occitan Literature*, ed. Glyn S. Burgess and Karen Pratt (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2006), pp. 33–34 (by Roger Middleton).

9. Cedric E. Pickford, *L'Évolution du roman arthurien en prose vers la fin du Moyen Âge d'après le manuscrit 112 du fonds français de la Bibliothèque Nationale* (Paris: Nizet, 1960), p. 281.

Middle Dutch *Torec*, since the French inventory's description clearly corresponds to the contents of this tale. Dutch scholars assume, therefore, that Maerlant made use of the French *Torrez* to compose his *Toerecke*.<sup>10</sup>

Applying a Dutch-oriented metaphor one could say that anyone studying the *Torec* is skating on thin ice. Since we do not know how the French *Torrez* and Maerlant's *Toerecke* really looked like, the origins of every single narrative element in the extant version is uncertain. *Torec* criticism should be constantly aware of this state of affairs.

### The Folkloristic Approach

Following the only edition of the entire *Lancelot* Compilation, produced by W.J.A. Jonckbloet in the years 1846–49, *Torec* was the first of the ten narratives to be edited separately, in this case by Jan te Winkel in 1875.<sup>11</sup> This publication attracted the attention of the Celticist A. G. van Hamel. His 1916 essay on *Torec* marks the beginning of the first scholarly approach to Arthurian fiction that I would like to discuss.<sup>12</sup> Van Hamel introduced a folkloristic point of view, focusing on an episode featuring the knight Melions (ll. 1620–1901). In the company of another knight, called Raguel, Melions goes in search of a princess who is abducted by an ogre. When they have found her with many other women in a cave, Melions uses a rope to go down, kills the monster and sets all women free. But as soon as he is the last one in the cave, he is betrayed by his companion, who leaves him behind and claims the hand of the princess. However, Melions is lucky. A horse and two greyhounds guide him to the exit of the cave and, later, he is recognized at the court of the princess's father to be the liberator of the women. While he marries the princess, Raguel is killed. Van Hamel argued that this episode was indebted to folklore. Analogues such as the abducted princess who informs the hero how to kill the monster, the treacherous companion and the helping animals

10. Cf. Frits van Oostrom, "De oorspronkelijkheid van de *Torec*, of: de vrije val van een detail door de Nederlandse literatuurgeschiedenis," *Spiegel der Letteren*, 21 (1979), 197–201.

11. *Roman van Lancelot (XIIIe eeuw)*, ed. W. J. A. Jonckbloet, 2 vols. (The Hague: Van Stockum, 1846–49); Jacob van Maerlant, *Roman van Torec*, ed. Jan te Winkel (Leiden: Brill, 1875).

12. A. G. van Hamel, "Een episode van den *Torec*," *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandsche Taal en Letterkunde*, 35 (1916), 241–61.

pointed, in his view, to a folktale as the source of the Middle Dutch episode. The folktale type Van Hamel tried to identify is nowadays known as Aarne-Thompson 301, entitled “The Three Stolen Princesses”.<sup>13</sup> Various Dutch critics have subscribed to Van Hamel’s view.<sup>14</sup>

Another folkloristic interpretation of *Torec* was presented by Jan Hogenhout in his 1976 dissertation. His point of departure was a list of the romance’s alleged problematic narrative elements. He wondered, for instance, how one should explain that Torec falls in love with a damsel, Miraude, who is a contemporary of his grandmother, according to the tale’s first episode (ll. 1–128), and how one should explain that Miraude is said to have been in love with Torec already for three years (ll. 3090–97), although she had never met him and even though his quest does not take longer than a couple of months.<sup>15</sup> Hogenhout claimed that the narrative’s illogical elements, inconsistencies and mistakes were due to its complicated genesis: two folktale types, which were combined at a certain stage, were ultimately the source of *Torec*. Aarne-Thompson’s type 560, “The Magic Ring”, was modified and expanded under the influence of type 400, “The Man on a Quest for his Lost Wife”.<sup>16</sup> This conclusion has not met critical approval. Scholars have dismissed Hogenhout’s reconstruction for being too simple and too speculative.<sup>17</sup>

13. Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson, *The Types of the Folktale: A Classification and Bibliography*, 2nd rev. ed. (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedekatemia, 1964), pp. 90–93. See also Maartje Draak, *Het verloop van het Nederlandse sprookje* (Amsterdam: Noord-Hollandsche Uitgevers Maatschappij, 1960), pp. 7–8, and Ton Dekker, Jurjen van der Kooi and Theo Meder, *Van Aladdin tot Zwaan kleef aan. Lexicon van sprookjes: ontstaan, ontwikkeling, variaties* (Nijmegen: SUN, 1997), pp. 289–92 (where the type is called “The Princesses in the Underworld”).

14. See Draak, *Het verloop* (see note 13); Jan Hogenhout, *De geschiedenis van Torec en Miraude. Een onderzoek naar de oorsprong en de ontwikkeling van een Arthurroman* (Leiden: New Rhine Publishers, 1976), pp. 109–19; Roel Zemel, “Over drie romans in de *Torec*,” *Voortgang, jaarboek voor de Neerlandistiek*, 20 (2001), 47–71, here 48.

15. Hogenhout, *De geschiedenis van Torec en Miraude* (see note 14), pp. 15–16.

16. Cf. Aarne and Thompson, *The Types of the Folktale* (see note 13), pp. 202–04, 128–31. See Hogenhout, *De geschiedenis van Torec en Miraude* (see note 14), in particular pp. 149–55.

17. See H. Vekeman, *Torec, een middeleeuws kunstwerk* (Nijmegen: Alfa, 1980), pp. 5–7; Geert H. M. Claassens, “De *Torrez* à *Torec*: un roman arthurien

Research based on folktale types came under theoretical attack in a 2008 article. According to the folklorist Willem de Blécourt, we should be aware that the Aarne-Thompson typology identifies types by applying modern criteria, and that it is based on tales which are very often post-medieval, written texts.<sup>18</sup> This warning should be taken seriously, I think, but it does not mean that we have to refrain from *all* folkloristic research.<sup>19</sup> Identifying folklore *elements* instead of folktale *types*, for example, may enhance our understanding of a romance. James Morey has shown this with regard to *Torec* in a recent article.<sup>20</sup> He shows that folkloristic elements are used to mark the existence of two worlds. The tale features, as one might expect, a chivalric space in which Torec, Arthur and other characters move. A parallel world is indicated by fairytale elements. At the beginning of the narrative, the otherworld manifests itself in the story of Torec's grandmother, Mariole, who resembles, as Roel Zemel has noted, the heroine of a "conte mélusinien".<sup>21</sup> Her future husband finds her sitting in a tree, wearing the circlet (ll. 11–14). Her father has put her there, so she explains, because he wanted her to be claimed by the first man to pass by (ll. 31–34). The folktale atmosphere is reinforced by Mariole's statement that the diadem will bring its owner wealth and honor (ll. 37–39), and by her marriage condition to be protected from abduction by a character called the Red Lion, since her father has predicted that this kidnapping would result in a lot of sorrow (ll. 52–56). After having lost the circlet and her husband, Mariole gives birth

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en moyen néerlandais et sa source inconnue en ancien français," in *Lors est ce jour grant joie nee: Essais de langue et de littérature françaises du Moyen Âge*, ed. Michèle Goyens and Werner Verbeke (Leuven: Leuven UP, 2009), pp. 159–75, here p. 165, note 8.

18. Willem de Blécourt, "'De gouden vogel', 'Het levenswater' en de Walewein," *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandse taal en letterkunde*, 124 (2008), 259–77.

19. Cf. Friedrich Wolfzettel, *Le Conte en palimpseste. Studien zur Funktion von Märchen und Mythos im französischen Mittelalter* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2005); Fritz Peter Knapp, "Märchenhaftes Erzählen im Mittelalter. Die Anverwandlung des Märchens im Artusroman, insbesondere in der *Krone* Heinrichs von dem Türlin," in F.P. Knapp, *Historie und Fiktion in der mittelalterlichen Gattungspoetik (II). Zehn neue Studien und ein Vorwort* (Heidelberg: Winter, 2005), 191–224.

20. James H. Morey, "Torec, Cosmic Energy, and Pragmatism," *Arthuriana*, 17/1 (2007), 32–41.

21. Zemel, "Over drie romans," (see note 14), 50.

to a daughter, and *deedsi in ene tonne beslaen / Ende cledere ende gout, sonder waen, / Ende enen brief, daer in sal staen, / Hoe al haer saken sijn vergaen* ("had her put in a barrel together with clothing and gold, to be sure, and a letter that was to contain the story of all that had befallen her," ll. 141–44). Folklorists will know what happens next: the barrel is then tossed into the sea and is fished out of the water in another land (ll. 152–58).

After the opening episode, the readers are reminded regularly of the existence of an otherworld. This is the case, for instance, in the episode in which Torec visits the so-called Chamber of Wisdom. He is brought to that place by means of the Ship of Adventure (l. 2286), which is snow-white, appears only once a year (ll. 2286–91) and sets out at the speed of an arrow without a steersman (ll. 2310–18). No one who has ever boarded this object has returned (ll. 2290–91). The contact with the otherworld is established, in addition, by a mysterious knight, who encounters Torec thrice.<sup>22</sup> Their first fight ends abruptly with the vanishing of the hero's opponent, who is dressed in black (ll. 381–95). The narrator announces: *Men saelt hier na wel secgen u / Waeromme hi daer also quam nu* ("Hereafter you will be told why he had appeared thus," ll. 397–98). The second and third encounter are repetitions of the first one, albeit that the knight who suddenly disappears is dressed in red and white, respectively (ll. 1309–28, 1910–24). The explanation of the threefold disappearance is given when Torec has reached Miraude's castle. He meets an unknown knight, who reveals that he has fought against the hero three times, once in black, once in red and once in white (ll. 3173–78). He is, moreover, the man who led Torec to the Chamber of Wisdom (ll. 3179–80).<sup>23</sup> This knight, who informs Torec about the history of the circlet and foretells the hero that he will win the diadem and Miraude, states at the end of their meeting *dat hi in alfs gelike es* ("that he was an elf," l. 3198). This omniscient representative of the otherworld turns out to have been Torec's tutor throughout his quest.

The folkloristic approach allows one more observation. Torec's fairy mentor is related to him. The elf states: *Ik ben oem van uwer*

22. See also Vekeman, *Torec, een middeleeuws kunstwerk* (see note 17), pp. 13–24.

23. In accordance with the Index of Names (p. 761) in *Dutch Romances, Vol. III* (see note 6), Morey, "*Torec*" (see note 20), states that the elf is called Ydras (35). However, Ydras is the lord of the castle from where the Ship of Adventure leaves (ll. 2261–91) and not the knight who brings Torec to the Chamber of Wisdom (ll. 2236–373).

*moder* ("I am your uncle on your mother's side," l. 3181). And the great-uncle adds that he is the brother of the anonymous lady who sent Torec the unrivalled pavilion when he arrived before Miraude's castle (ll. 3182–84).<sup>24</sup> This is an interesting remark, because it shows that Torec's supernatural guidance is motivated by family ties. The Middle Dutch romance, therefore, underscores the importance of relatives for a person.<sup>25</sup>

### Literary-Critical Readings

Under the influence of Russian Formalism and Anglo-American New Criticism, the issue of structure and meaning of Middle Dutch Arthurian romances became important in the 1970s and 1980s. Klaas Heeroma was the first critic to analyze *Torec's* composition, in a paper which was published posthumously in 1973.<sup>26</sup> Jeannette Koekman modified and complemented Heeroma's findings.<sup>27</sup> They rightfully agree in proposing a tripartite structure.<sup>28</sup>

#### *Introductory Episodes*

Mariole, the three sisters and the circlet

Tristoise and Torec

#### *First Phase*

Castle Fellon

Great-uncle (the Black Knight)

24. The translation of *der gerre broder* in l. 3182, "the brother of the man", is wrong, since it was stated earlier that the pavilion was sent by a woman (ll. 3041–46).

25. See also Morey, "*Torec*" (see note 20), 35.

26. K. Heeroma, *Maerlants Torec als 'sleutelroman'* (Amsterdam: Noord-Hollandsche Uitgevers Maatschappij, 1973), pp. 27–57.

27. Jeannette Koekman, "*Torec*, een vorstelijk verhaal. Zinnvolle verbanden in een complexe tekst," *De nieuwe taalgids*, 81 (1988), 111–24, Jeannette Koekman, "Torec in de Kamer van Wijsheid: over het interpreteren van Middelnederlandse teksten," in *Monniken, ridders en zeevaarders. Opstellen over vroeg-middeleeuwse Ierse cultuur en Middelnederlandse letterkunde aangeboden aan Maartje Draak*, ed. D. R. Edel, W. P. Gerritsen and K. Veelenturf (Amsterdam: Gerard Prods, 1988), pp. 141–53. The objections which Hogenhout raises against Heeroma's interpretation (*De geschiedenis van Torec en Miraude* (see note 14), pp. 13–15) are not convincing.

28. See Koekman, "*Torec*" (see note 27), 121: ll. 273–668, 669–1905, 1906–3422. The structure Heeroma proposes (*Maerlants Torec* (see note 26), p. 29) is slightly different (ll. 377–1308, 1309–1906, 1907–3422) because Torec's encounters with his great-uncle are his point of departure.



Melions  
Bruant vander Montangen

*Second Phase*

Claes van den Briele  
Mabilie, damsel of Montesclare  
Melions and Raguel  
Great-uncle (the Red Knight)  
The Vagabond  
Ford of Adventure  
Druant  
Melions and Raguel

*Third Phase*

Great-uncle (the White Knight)  
Ywein  
The Red Knight  
Ypander  
Chamber of Wisdom  
Myduel  
Rogard and the Red Knight  
Miraude

*Concluding Episodes*

Ypander  
Arthur's Court  
Torec

The composition in three phases is announced in the narrative's opening episode (ll. 71–128). Three sisters, two of them having a lover and one of them single, are in the possession of fifty castles, which they have to divide among themselves, together with the diadem, which one of the two lovers has stolen from Torec's grandmother Mariole. The eldest sister, the one without a lover (and who will later on turn out to be Miraude), chooses the circlet, each of the other two gets twenty-five castles. This outcome makes one expect that the hero will have to confront each of these two sisters and their lovers before finding the circlet.

Koekman has convincingly argued that the three phases are related to the hero's development.<sup>29</sup> In the first phase Torec meets his great-uncle for the first time and he vanquishes the lover who has stolen the circlet, Bruant vander Montangen. This phase is concerned with

29. Koekman, "Torec" (see note 27), 121–23, and Koekman, "Torec in de Kamer van Wijsheid" (see note 27), p. 144.

Torec's growing social and chivalric status. He defeats all his opponents, who become his vassals, such as the knights of Castle Fellon (ll. 300–64). The second phase, which features the second meeting with the great-uncle and the defeat of the other lover, Druant, makes the hero aware of various positive and negative aspects of love. In the third phase, which includes Torec's third encounter with his relative and his meeting with Miraude, the hero receives practical and theoretical schooling concerning the essential qualities of knighthood.

Critics have noted an interesting change in the motivation for Torec's quest.<sup>30</sup> Initially, and understandably, he intends to avenge his grandmother Mariole and to win back the circlet for his mother Tristoise (ll. 240–43, 252–57). As prophesized by her husband (ll. 195–97), Tristoise (I will return to her name later) laughs but three times in her life: first when she sees that her new-born child is a boy (ll. 185–87), secondly when Torec announces that he will win back the circlet for his mother (l. 258), and finally, near the end of the romance, when she sees her son's future wife wearing the circlet (ll. 3759–61). Her limited cheerfulness highlights the avenging theme. However, at the end of the first phase, when Torec is told that the circlet is owned by Bruant's *swegerinne* (l. 636), "sister-in-law," *die scoenste die in die werelt leeft* ("the most beautiful woman in the world," l. 637), a second motivation is introduced. A little later, the hero will declare to be in love (ll. 974–75), and halfway through the tale the narrator informs us that Torec deeply loves Miraude. She is *di fine / Daer hi int herte om dogede pine, / Want hi minetse so over sere / Dats vergeten can die here* ("the fair damsel for whom his heart ached, for the knight loved her so deeply that he could by no means forget her," ll. 1610–13). I do not think it is right to conclude, as has been done, that a quest for revenge has changed into a bridal quest.<sup>31</sup> In fact, Torec's initial aim, winning the circlet, dovetails nicely with the second one, the winning of Miraude.

From the tale's second phase onwards, the love theme is given prominence by various means. A number of episodes, for instance, present different types of lovers. The knight Melions, whose adventure I discussed earlier, is shown to be an inspiring example.<sup>32</sup> As a result

30. See Koekman, "Torec" (see note 27), 117, and Zemel, "Over drie romans" (see note 14), 51.

31. See Hogenhout, *De geschiedenis van Torec en Miraude* (see note 14), p. 30.

32. See Koekman, "Torec" (see note 27), 114–16, and Koekman, "Torec in de Kamer van Wijsheid" (see note 27), pp. 146–49.

of his chivalrous excellence and courtly behavior he wins the hand of a princess. However, the example of the honorable lover Melions is outweighed by a series of despicable lovers. Mabilie of Montesclare is the only female character who behaves disgracefully. We learn that she has provoked the siege of her castle to get a knight of the Round Table to save and marry her. I will return to this narrative element later. When Torec relieves the siege, Mabilie intends to take him as her husband, against the advice of her knights, who blame her for an ill-considered decision (ll. 958–62). Torec's refusal to marry her causes a dishonorable deed: despite the objections of her knights, Mabilie imprisons her rescuer (ll. 978–86).

The other three examples of bad lovers are male characters. The first, Raguel, is a treacherous knight, who infamously tries to attack Melions from behind (l. 1151), and later on betrays him by leaving him in the cave in order to win the princess (ll. 1754–63). The actions of the second lover, the Red Knight, are excessive: in reaction to a damsel's refusal to love him, he takes all her property (ll. 2121–24). Ypander, finally, responds to a damsel's refusal to love him by preventing the burial of her beloved (ll. 2189–211), and he abducts Miraude later on to avenge his defeat against Torec (ll. 3461–72). The common feature of these four dishonorable lovers is clearly their excessiveness.<sup>33</sup> A good lover practices moderation.<sup>34</sup>

The importance of the love theme is highlighted by two notable passages featuring Torec. In the first passage, Torec is in Mabilie's dungeon. Expressing his thoughts aloud, he addresses *Minne*, Love, characterizing her as the one around whom all the world turns, the source of all courtliness and the one whom all the world praises (ll. 1228–31). Speaking for more than twenty lines (ll. 1228–49), he wonders if it is Love whom he has to blame for his misery, or Mabilie. He concludes by forgiving the damsel her wrongdoing, believing that Love pressed her too hard (l. 1248). Torec's love soliloquy, which is part of a medieval convention derived from classical literature (Virgil and Ovid), underlines the danger of excessive love.<sup>35</sup>

Torec's contribution to the love theme reaches its zenith in a passage which is, as far as I know, unique in medieval Dutch narrative literature. When the hero has arrived before Miraude's castle, he

33. Cf. also Torec's first adventure: before arriving at Castle Fellon, he defeats seven robbers who want to rape a damsel (ll. 282–90).

34. Cf. Koekman, "Torec" (see note 27), 116.

35. See Thomas Kerth, "Arthurian Tradition and the Middle Dutch *Torec*," *Arthuriana*, 17/1 (2007), 5–31, here 15.

decides to write a *saluut* (l. 3229), a “salutation”, since he has *perkement ende inct* (l. 3228), “parchment and ink,” at his disposal. He composes a “salut d’amour” of twenty-one lines (ll. 3231–51).<sup>36</sup> This type of love letter, which was introduced in Old French literature by the *Roman d’Eneas*, was a favorite of the authors of the Prose *Tristan*.<sup>37</sup> In Torec’s text, elements of the usual five-parts structure of these letters are recognizable.<sup>38</sup> Following the rhetorical rules, he opens his letter with the “salutatio”, mentioning the addressee and the sender (ll. 3231–34). He continues by stating, as fitting in the “narratio”, how much suffering he has endured, waiting and longing for his *cuesce smale*, his “pure and beautiful lady” (ll. 3235–41). Then follows the reason for writing the letter, the “exordium” (which usually precedes the “narratio”). Torec’s letter allows him to send Miraude his heart and soul, metaphorically (ll. 3242–47). The hero’s final lines combine the “petitio”, in which the lover as a rule begs his beloved to accept him as her servant, and the “conclusio”, in which the lover habitually expresses his hope to be granted the addressee’s love. However, Torec’s phrasing is much less humble: he announces that he will fight against the knights of the Round Table in order to win his *soete lief*, his “sweet love” (ll. 3248–51). Torec’s statement that his love for Miraude will stimulate his prowess is, I would argue, a proper ending of a “salut d’amour” which conspicuously underscores the narrative’s love theme, which is, as I noted before, given prominence from the tale’s second phase onwards.

### Intertextuality

Klaas Heeroma was not only the first scholar who analyzed the narrative structure of *Torec*, he also served as the pioneer for the study of the tale’s intertextual dimensions. In his 1973 essay, he pointed at parallels with indigenous Middle Dutch Arthurian romances such as *Walewein* and *Moriaen* and the Charlemagne romance *Karel ende Elegast*.<sup>39</sup> Other critics contributing to the intertextual approach, which flourished in Arthurian studies in the 1980s and 1990s, have

36. Cf. Zemel, “Over drie romans” (see note 14), 52–53.

37. See Ernstpeter Ruhe, *De amasio ad amasiam. Zur Gattungsgeschichte des mittelalterlichen Liebesbriefes* (München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1975), pp. 119–23, 171–77.

38. Cf. Ruhe, *De amasio ad amasiam* (see note 37), pp. 110–11.

39. Heeroma, *Maerlants Torec* (see note 26), pp. 5–12 (*Walewein*), 12–24 (*Moriaen*), 24–27 (*Karel ende Elegast*).

focused on the narrative's debt to various Old French texts.<sup>40</sup> In this context, Roel Zemel's inspiring 2001 essay should be mentioned in particular.<sup>41</sup> My present analysis of *Torec's* intertextual relations is limited to the use of the Tristan tradition and a number of Chrétien romances. I ought to mention that the parallels which I am about to discuss, may be due to the Old French author of the *Torrez*, the Middle Dutch poet Jacob van Maerlant or the compiler of the *Lancelot* Compilation.

As mentioned earlier, Torec's mother, who laughs only three times in her life, is called Tristoise. As a baby, she is fished out of the sea in a barrel, along with a letter explaining what has befallen her parents. Subsequently, she is baptized Tristoise *omdat met rouwen was gedragen* ("because she was born in sorrow," l. 171). This is obviously reminiscent of Tristan, whose name commemorates the death of his mother, who, grieving for the loss of her husband, died immediately after giving birth to her son.<sup>42</sup> Another parallel to Tristan is provided by Tristoise's life-long earnestness, since Tristan is characterized, in Chrétien's *Erec et Enide*, as the knight who never laughs.<sup>43</sup>

The connection with the Tristan tradition, evoked by the name and the behavior of Torec's mother, is strengthened in the episode in which Torec fights Bruant vander Montangen (the final episode of Phase 1).<sup>44</sup> Having wounded his victorious opponent with a poisoned sword (l. 604), Bruant declares that Torec's life is in the hands of the damsel who owns the circlet, *Want ens in die werelt wijf / Die bat an gevenijnde wonden* can ("for in all the world there is no woman who knows better how to deal with poisoned wounds," ll. 651–52).<sup>45</sup> The parallel with Tristan is obvious. As a young knight he defeats Morholt, who has dealt him a poisoned wound, which can only be cured by Morholt's sister Yseut, the Queen of Ireland (or, in a different version, her daughter Yseut la Blonde). In this way Torec is compared to Tristan. The striking difference between the two heroes concerns their

40. For the intertextual approach, see my essay in *A History of Arthurian Scholarship* (see note 5), pp. 164–65.

41. Zemel, "Over drie romans" (see note 14).

42. Zemel, "Over drie romans" (see note 14), 54–55, and Kerth, "Arthurian Tradition" (see note 35), 8.

43. See Kerth, "Arthurian Tradition" (see note 35), 8.

44. See Zemel, "Over drie romans" (see note 14), 55–58.

45. Although it is said that Torec's life is in Miraude's hands, the hero is, in fact, healed by the second sister (ll. 1606–08). See Heeroma, *Maerlants Torec* (see note 26), pp. 32–33.

destiny as lover. Whereas Tristan's love for Yseut is connected to suffering, including a tragic death due to another poisoned wound, Torec's love for Miraude leads to happiness.<sup>46</sup>

Various narrative elements in *Torec* remind the reader of no less than three Chrétien romances. A parallel to *Lancelot* occurs in Torec's duel against the Red Knight. Championing the forester Rogard, Torec has defeated his opponent and is on the verge of decapitating him. While the Red Knight begs for mercy, Rogard insists on his enemy's death. Torec's solution for this dilemma is comparable to Lancelot's decision when he wants to spare the life of a defeated knight while a passing damsel demands the man's head. Like Lancelot, Torec allows his opponent to fight again and kills him (ll. 2977–99).<sup>47</sup>

An episode in Chrétien's *Yvain* is meaningfully rewritten in the *Torec* part in which the hero visits Arthur's court for the first time. In the Old French romance, Yvain acts as the champion of a damsel who has been wrongfully disinherited by her elder sister, whose champion is Gauvain. The judicial duel is interrupted when the two well-matched knights recognize each other. Arthur wisely decides the dispute in favor of the younger sister.<sup>48</sup> In the Middle Dutch narrative, Torec meets a damsel who has lost thirty castles to Arthur because she failed to appear in court thrice (ll. 1930–39). The hero, remarking that a man of honor would never be proud of such a verdict (ll. 1940–41), takes up her cause. At court, everyone stands by Arthur's judgment, except for Walewein (the Dutch Gauvain). Calling the verdict a *dorper geluut*, a "base decree" (l. 1973), Torec defeats Arthur's champion Yvain in the ensuing judicial combat (ll. 1981–2064), and Arthur is forced to return the castles to the damsel (ll. 2065–76). A comparison of the two episodes reveals that both Torec and the French eponymous hero defend a fair cause. In the Middle Dutch tale, however, Yvain is the

46. Cf. Zemel, "Over drie romans" (see note 14), 57.

47. Chrétien de Troyes, *Lancelot or, The Knight with the Cart (Le Chevalier de la Charrete)*, ed. and trans. William W. Kibler (New York & London: Garland, 1984), ll. 2808–924. See Bart Besamusca, *Walewein, Moriaen en de Ridder metter mouwen. Intertekstualiteit in drie Middelnederlandse Arturromans* (Hilversum: Verloren, 1993), pp. 192–93, and Kerth, "Arthurian Tradition" (see note 35), 20. The Lancelot scene is repeated in the Prose *Charrette*, see *The Vulgate Version of the Arthurian Romances*, ed. H. Oskar Sommer, vol. 4 (New York: AMS Press, 1979), p. 197, l. 33–198, 25.

48. *Les Romans de Chrétien de Troyes, édités d'après la copie de Guiot (Bibl. nat. fr. 794), IV: Le Chevalier au lion (Yvain)*, ed. Mario Roques (Paris: Champion, 1975), ll. 5836–6440.

hero's opponent, acting as the champion of *injustice*, and he is defeated. Walewein, furthermore, is on the right side, in contrast to Chrétien's Gauvain. In deviation from Chrétien's romance, finally, Arthur's court is portrayed negatively in the Dutch tale.<sup>49</sup> I will return to these features later.

Near the end of Torec's quest, the Middle Dutch narrative inserts a playful wink at Chrétien's romance.<sup>50</sup> Chasing Ypander, who has abducted Miraude, Torec arrives at his enemy's castle. When he rides through the gates, the portcullis suddenly drops. This scene is reminiscent of Yvain's pursuit of Laudine's first husband Esclados le Ros. The amusing difference between the two passages concerns the effect of the falling portcullis. Yvain's horse and saddle are sliced in half, and both his spurs are cut off right at his heels, causing the hero to fall down.<sup>51</sup> Torec's entrance is less exciting. While he does not fall off his horse, the animal just *liet [...] sinen staert* ("left its tail behind," l. 3498).

The most surprising link-up of *Torec* and a Chrétien romance concerns *Perceval*.<sup>52</sup> In the Middle Dutch text, Mabilie, the damsel of Montesclare, informs Torec after his release from her prison that she had provoked the siege of her castle for a very specific reason. Here is her explanation:

Doen sindic saen in Arturs hof,  
 Dien al di werelt gevet lof,  
 Ende ontboet daer al over waer,  
 Dattie joncfrouwe van Montesclaer  
 Beseten ware in haer lant  
 (Also es mine borch genant).  
 Dit dedic te dien stonden

49. See Zemel, "Over drie romans" (see note 14), 60–64, and Kerth, "Arthurian Tradition" (see note 35), 17–18.

50. See Zemel, "Over drie romans" (see note 14), 64–66.

51. See *Les Romans de Chrétien de Troyes*, ed. Roques (see note 48), ll. 944–53.

52. See Bart Besamusca, "The Damsel of Montesclare in the Middle Dutch *Lancelot Compilation*," in *King Arthur in the Medieval Low Countries*, ed. Geert H. M. Claassens and David F. Johnson (Leuven: Leuven UP, 2000), pp. 87–96; Bart Besamusca, *The Book of Lancelot: The Middle Dutch Lancelot Compilation and the Medieval Tradition of Narrative Cycles*, trans. Thea Summerfield (Cambridge: Brewer, 2003), pp. 131–32; Zemel, "Over drie romans" (see note 14), 59–60; Claassens, "De Torrez à Torec" (see note 17), pp. 166–67.

Om dat ic waende vander Tafelronden  
 Hebben gehad enen den besten  
 Om te bescuddene mine vesten,  
 Ende dan dien te manne genomen. (ll. 1270–80)

(I then sent a message to the court of Arthur, who is praised the world over, and had it announced that the damsel of Montesclare – that is the name of my castle – was besieged in her country. I did this at that time because I thought to have one of the best knights of the Round Table to protect my castle, after which I would have him as my husband.)

This statement connects the Dutch romance to the *Perceval* episode in which the hideous damsel announces various adventures at Arthur's court, including the liberation of the besieged damsel of Montesclare.<sup>53</sup> It was, surprisingly enough, Mabilie who sent the hideous damsel to Arthur, according to the Dutch narrative. As a result, the incidents of *Torec* are placed in a chronological relationship with those of *Perceval*. The Middle Dutch tale belongs, therefore, to a group of Arthurian romances which aimed at synchronization with Chrétien's last romance. This set of texts includes the Old French romances *Meraugis*, *Beaudous*, *Durmart* and *Fergus*, as Beate Schmolke-Hasselmann has shown, and the Middle Dutch romance *Moriaen*.<sup>54</sup>

Elsewhere I have argued that Mabilie's statement fits Chrétien's *Perceval* much better than the narrative context of the *Lancelot* Compilation.<sup>55</sup> After all, whereas her explanation implies that no knight of the Round Table had come to her rescue before the arrival of Torec, the preceding compilation version of the Middle Dutch *Perchevael* has already related that the damsel is set free by a group of Arthurian knights. This incongruity indicates that the narrative's link with *Perceval* had already been established in Maerlant's *Toerecke* or in the Old French *Torrez*. At the time I was following this line of reasoning, I was unaware of a valuable piece of information concerning the manuscript context of Chrétien's *Perceval*. Roger Middleton has noted that the successive 1523 and 1556 inventories of

53. See Chrétien de Troyes, *Le Roman de Perceval ou Le Conte du Graal*, ed. Keith Busby (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1993), ll. 4701–14.

54. See Beate Schmolke-Hasselmann, *The Evolution of Arthurian Romance: The Verse Tradition from Chrétien to Froissart*, trans. Margaret and Roger Middleton (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998), pp. 212–15; Besamusca, *The Book of Lancelot* (see note 52), pp. 78–79.

55. See Besamusca, *The Book of Lancelot* (see note 52), pp. 131–32.



the Burgundian library mention a manuscript (probably the same) entitled “Le livre du Chevalier cherche d’or et de Parcheval le Galoy”.<sup>56</sup> This description allows me to suggest here that an Old French compiler combined *Torrez* and *Perceval* because he realized that the author of *Torrez* had created a chronological parallel between his work and Chrétien’s romance. Consequently, we may conclude that it was the French *Torrez* poet rather than Jacob van Maerlant who was responsible for the synchronization of Torec’s tale with Chrétien’s *Perceval*.

### Cultural-Historical Context

Under the influence of, among others, Joachim Bumke’s monumental *Mäzene im Mittelalter*, Frits van Oostrom initiated the so-called historical-functional approach in the 1980s, arguing that scholars of Middle Dutch might gain a better understanding of their texts when they focussed on the significance of these works for patrons and audiences.<sup>57</sup> His research resulted in major contributions on Dutch court literature around 1400, published in 1987, and on Jacob van Maerlant’s oeuvre, which appeared in 1996.<sup>58</sup> In the last-mentioned study, Van Oostrom also discusses *Torec*. I should add, however, that with regard to this narrative, Klaas Heeroma – he again!<sup>59</sup> – was Van Oostrom’s precursor, since he was the first to interpret *Torec* from a cultural-historical point of view.

Dutch scholarship agrees that Jacob van Maerlant’s surname does not refer to his place of birth, which presumably was the Bruges area,

56. See *The Arthur of the French* (see note 8), p. 34.

57. See Joachim Bumke, *Mäzene im Mittelalter. Die Gönner und Auftraggeber der höfischen Literatur in Deutschland 1150–1300* (München: Beck, 1979).

58. Frits van Oostrom, *Het woord van eer. Literatuur aan het Hollandse hof omstreeks 1400* (Amsterdam: Meulenhoff, 1987); Frits van Oostrom, *Maerlants wereld* (Amsterdam: Prometheus, 1996). *Het woord van eer* was translated into English: *Court and Culture: Dutch Literature, 1350–1450*, trans. Arnold J. Pomerans, foreword James H. Marrow (Berkeley, etc.: University of California Press, 1992).

59. I readily admit that in overviews of Dutch Arthurian scholarship that I have published elsewhere, Heeroma’s importance for the study of Arthurian literature in the Low Countries has not been acknowledged adequately. See *Medieval Arthurian Literature* (see note 5), pp. 211–37, and *A History of Arthurian Scholarship* (see note 5), pp. 158–68.

but to the location where he stayed for some years.<sup>60</sup> Maerlant was a hamlet near the little town Brielle on the island of Voorne. What was he doing there? In the prologue to his *Graal-Merlijn*, he calls himself *Jacob de coster van Merlant*, “Jacob the sacristan of Maerlant”.<sup>61</sup> These words imply that he had to look after the local church of Saint Peter. His duties left him more than enough time for writing, however, since he states in his *Spiegel historiael* (“Mirror of History”) that he composed his voluminous *Historie van Troyen*, “History of Troy”, *te Maerlant*, “at Maerlant”.<sup>62</sup>

The parish church of Maerlant was part of a manor that belonged to the powerful Lord of Voorne, who was appointed Viscount of Zeeland by the Count of Holland in the thirteenth century.<sup>63</sup> The suggestion that the Lord of Voorne may have commissioned the writings of Jacob the sacristan is strengthened by the prologue to the *Graal-Merlijn*, which mentions that the text was written in honor of Albrecht van Voorne.<sup>64</sup> Subsequently, one may ask whether Albrecht also was the patron of Maerlant’s *Toerecke*. Heeroma has boldly argued that the narrative was meant to demonstrate Jacob’s poetic competence. The Flemish author wished to be employed by the Lord of Voorne, and *Toerecke* functioned as his letter of application.<sup>65</sup> Van Oostrom’s reconstruction of *Torec*’s cultural-historical context is even more daring. He assumes that the Arthurian romance was part of a didactic program aimed at a group of young aristocrats, including Albrecht van Voorne and Florens V, the future Count of Holland, who was only two years old when his father, Willem II, was killed in 1256. In Van Oostrom’s view, the young Florens lived on Voorne in the company of Albrecht and the children of his aunt Aleid of Avesnes, who was his guardian between 1258 and 1263. From around 1260 onwards, she commissioned Jacob, according to Van Oostrom, to write

60. See Frits van Oostrom, *Aanvaard dit werk. Over Middelnederlandse auteurs en hun publiek* (Amsterdam: Prometheus, 1992), pp. 185–96.

61. Jacob van Maerlant, *Historie van den Grale und Boek van Merline*, ed. Timothy Sodmann (Köln & Wien: Böhlau Verlag, 1980), I, 37.

62. Jacob van Maerlant, *Spiegel historiael, met de fragmenten der later toegevoegde gedeelten, bewerkt door Philip Utenbroeke en Lodewijk van Velthem*, ed. Matthias de Vries and Eelco Verwijs, 4 vols. (Utrecht: HES, 1982), Part 1, Book 2, Ch. 16, ll. 21–26.

63. See Van Oostrom, *Maerlants wereld* (see note 58), pp. 94–95.

64. Jacob van Maerlant, *Historie van den Grale und Boek van Merline* (see note 61), ll. 14–19.

65. Heeroma, *Maerlants Torec* (see note 26), p. 60.

various texts which would prepare the young noblemen for their later duties. In this context, *Torec* demonstrated to the audience how a young nobleman gains a crown which rightfully belongs to him. The tale served as a pedagogical mirror for princes.<sup>66</sup>

Van Oostrom's reconstruction has not passed unchallenged. The historian Jan Burgers, for example, argued that a continuous stay of Florens on Voorne between 1258 and 1266 is unlikely, and he doubted whether Aleid would have entrusted Florens' education to a humble Flemish sacristan instead of one of her own chaplains.<sup>67</sup> However, concerning one particular episode all critics agree. Like Van Oostrom they assume that the overtly didactic nature of the Chamber of Wisdom episode, which clearly stands out against the non-reflective rest of the tale, indicates that Jacob van Maerlant has invented (rather than translated) this section of *Torec*.<sup>68</sup> The episode of around three hundred lines (ll. 2319–625) provides both the hero and the tale's audience with knowledge *Van wijsheden ende van hoveschede Ende van vrouden alre tire* ("of wisdom, and courtliness and joys," ll. 2354–55). During his stay of three days in the precious Chamber, Torec listens to debates. Old wise men criticize the lack of virtue among high nobles and rulers, who give a bad example to the common people. Next, they discuss the virtues of courtliness, generosity, courage, prudence and moderation, which all are said to come from love. They agree that moderation is vital for the world. Then they note that wisdom is no match for richness any longer, that poverty obscures a man's virtues, and that greed flourishes. After that, an unresolved debate ensues between a damsel, who states that the love of maidens

66. See Van Oostrom, *Maerlants wereld* (see note 58), pp. 127–36. See also Willem P. Gerritsen, "Mittelniederländische Artusliteratur und Hofgesellschaft," in *Kulturnachbarschaft. Deutsch-niederländische Werkstattgespräch zur Mediävistik*, ed. Urban Küsters, Angelika Lehmann-Benz, Ulrike Zellmann (Essen: Item-Verlag, 1997), pp. 79–84, here 79–81.

67. See J.W.J. Burgers' review of *Maerlants wereld* in *Holland 29* (1997), pp. 316–19. See also Janet F. van der Meulen, "Avesnes en Dampierre of 'De kunst der liefde'. Over boeken, bisschoppen en Henegouwse ambities," in *1299: één graaf, drie graafschappen. De vereniging van Holland, Zeeland en Henegouwen*, ed. D. E. H. de Boer, E. H. P. Cordfunke, H. Sarfatij (Hilversum: Verloren, 2000), pp. 47–72, here 51–53, 67.

68. See Van Oostrom, *Maerlants wereld* (see note 58), p. 130. It is noteworthy that precisely in this episode a (fake) reference to a French source occurs: *Also alsiet int Romanis hore* ("As I have heard it said in French," l. 2378).

is superior to that of women, and a lady, who argues the opposite. The narrator uses the *Unsagbarkeitstopos* to round off his description of the debates in the chamber, which is also called the *Cameren vanden Jugegente*, the Chamber of Judgments (l. 2614).

The Chamber of Wisdom episode has attracted a lot of scholarly attention.<sup>69</sup> Critics have stressed that Torec, while listening to the wise men and women, receives theoretical instruction, in addition to the practical lessons he learns during his adventures. His instructors, so to say, are clearly not interested in religious subjects. They stress the importance of love and the chivalric virtues of courtliness and generosity. Furthermore, they make their pupil aware of the cardinal virtues *fortitudo* (Middle Dutch: *vromecheit*), *prudentia* (*sin*) and *temperantia* (*mate*), praising moderation above all.<sup>70</sup> It remains unclear why Maerlant did not incorporate the fourth cardinal virtue, *iusticia*.<sup>71</sup>

Another interpretative riddle is offered by the episode which features Claes vanden Briele (ll. 669–742). While the character's first name, Claes, shows that he was invented by a Dutch-language author, his surname, 'of Briele' (l. 732), makes it very likely that this Dutch inventor was Jacob van Maerlant. The episode relates how Torec meets a sad knight, who declares:

69. See Heeroma, *Maerlants Torec* (see note 26), pp. 61–66; W. P. Gerritsen, "Wat voor boeken zou Floris V gelezen hebben?," in *Floris V. Leven, wonen en werken in Holland aan het einde van de dertiende eeuw* (Den Haag: Nijhoff, 1979), pp. 71–86, here 83–85; Vekeman, *Torec, een middeleeuws kunstwerk* (see note 17), pp. 16–19, 36–40; Koekman, "Torec" (see note 27), 117–19; Koekman, "Torec in de Kamer van Wijsheid" (see note 27), pp. 144–46; Dieuwke van der Poel, "Minnevrage in de Middelnederlandse letterkunde," in Frank Willaert *et al.*, *Een zoet akkoord. Middeleeuwse lyriek in de Lage Landen* (Amsterdam: Prometheus, 1992), pp. 207–28, 386–91, here 214–15; Marian Andringa, "Vorstenethiek in het werk van Maerlant," in J. Reynaert *et al.*, *Wat is wijsheid. Lekenethiek in de Middelnederlandse letterkunde* (Amsterdam: Prometheus, 1994), pp. 37–53, 362–70; Kerth, "Arthurian Tradition" (see note 35), 18–19; Sian Echard, "'Seldom does anyone listen to a good exemplum': Courts and Kings in *Torec* and *Die Riddere metter Mouwen*," *Arthuriana*, 17/1 (2007), pp. 79–94, here pp. 88–89.

70. Cf. also my "Bruun's Wisdom: Moderation in Middle Dutch Literature," in *'Por le soie amisté': Essays in Honor of Norris J. Lacy*, ed. Keith Busby and Catherine M. Jones (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000), pp. 1–14.

71. See Gerritsen, "Wat voor boeken" (see note 69), p. 85, note 39; Andringa, "Vorstenethiek" (see note 69), p. 52. An occasional explanation would be to blame the compiler of the *Lancelot* Compilation for curtailing his source thoughtlessly.

Ic ben betoverd sware:  
 Hier sal een riddere comen saen  
 Die min hovet af sal slaen,  
 Dat donct mi. Ende over waer,  
 Ic hebbe di pine daer af so swaer  
 Als oft ment mi af sloge gereet.  
 Ende dit lidic alle dage, Godweet,  
 Driewerf oft vire. (ll. 675–82)

(I have been grievously enchanted: a knight will arrive here soon who will cut off my head, so it seems to me.<sup>72</sup> And what is more, I feel a pain so great, it is as if they had already cut it off. I must endure this every day, God knows, three or four times.)

The poor man suffers from delusions, believing that his head is about to be cut off several times daily. His enemy, who tortures him in this way because he thinks that Claes slept with his wife, is defeated by Torec, who forces the knight to cure Claes and reconciles the opponents. What is the meaning of this rather bizarre and self-contained incident? Heeroma guessed that Jacob intended to bring a former author to the mind of his audience: the pitiable and perhaps deceased court poet of Voorne, whose position Maerlant tried to take. This predecessor, Heeroma surmises, may well have been the author of *Lantsloot vander Hagedochte*, *Karel ende Elegast* and *Moriaen*.<sup>73</sup> Van Oostrom, quite understandably reluctant to accept Heeroma's speculations, suggested that Jacob wanted to insert a wink at a well-known local in his romance.<sup>74</sup> It seems certain to me that the episode will remain enigmatic to us. The name Claes vanden Briele is doubtless part of an inside joke, directed at Jacob's primary audience and no longer understandable today.

### The Dynamics of the Manuscript

Since the 1990s scholars have returned increasingly to the manuscripts, acknowledging that their material features, such as illustrations, the use of rubric and the placing of the texts within a particular codex, greatly enhance our understanding of medieval literature. As *pars pro*

72. In *Dutch Romances, Vol. III* (see note 6), Johnson and Claassens translate *Dat donct mi* (l. 678), 'so it seems to me', incorrectly as 'this I know for sure'.

73. Heeroma, *Maerlants Torec* (see note 26), pp. 69–79.

74. Van Oostrom, *Maerlants wereld* (see note 58), p. 130.

*toto* examples of this worldwide critical orientation, I would like to mention the impressive two-volume *The Manuscripts of Chrétien de Troyes*, which appeared in 1993, and Keith Busby's 2002 study *Codex and Context*.<sup>75</sup> Dutch critics endorsed this approach, focusing on miscellanies. In 1994, for instance, an edition of a complete Middle Dutch text collection, preserved in the so-called Geraardsbergen codex, was published.<sup>76</sup> This was the first volume in a new series, "Medieval Miscellanies from the Low Countries", which counts eleven editions of text collections at the moment.<sup>77</sup>

With regard to the manuscript context of Middle Dutch Arthurian romances, codex The Hague, Royal Library, 129 A 10 is of vital importance, because it preserves the *Lancelot* Compilation, which collects no less than ten pre-existing Arthurian romances. *Torec* is one of them. There is codicological evidence that the manuscript was produced in a number of phases.<sup>78</sup> Phase 1: the original plan was to copy three texts, the Flemish verse translation of the Old French *Lancelot-Queste-Mort Artu*, made around 1280. Phase 2: at a certain moment, while work on the manuscript was in progress, the compiler wanted to insert the Middle Dutch translation of Chrétien's *Conte du Graal*. Thus he created a narrative cycle, consisting of *Lanceloet – Perchevael – end of Lanceloet – Queste – Arturs doet*. This sequence was given initials, paragraph signs and penwork, which suggests that the sequence was considered to have a definitive status.<sup>79</sup> Phase 3: for

75. *The Manuscripts of Chrétien de Troyes / Les Manuscrits de Chrétien de Troyes*, ed. Keith Busby, Terry Nixon, Alison Stones and Lori Walters, 2 vols. (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1993); Keith Busby, *Codex and Context: Reading Old French Verse Narrative in Manuscript*, 2 vols. (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002).

76. *Het Geraardsbergse handschrift. Hs. Brussel, Koninklijke Bibliotheek Albert I, 837–845*, ed. Marie-José Govers *et al.* (Hilversum: Verloren, 1994).

77. "Middeleeuwse Verzamelhandschriften uit de Nederlanden," see <http://www.verloren.nl/series>

78. See *Lanceloet. De Middelnederlandse vertaling van de Lancelot en prose overgeleverd in de Lancelotcompilatie, Pars 1 (vs. 1–5530, voorafgegaan door de verzen van het Brusselse fragment)*, ed. Bart Besamusca and Ada Postma (Hilversum: Verloren, 1997), pp. 94–110 (by Jan Willem Klein).

79. In this phase the so-called corrector was active: he added corrections, marginal words and signs to these four texts. See Frank Brandsma, "A Voice in the Margin: The Corrector of the *Lancelot* Compilation," in *King Arthur in the Medieval Low Countries*, ed. Geert H. M. Claassens and David F. Johnson (Leuven: Leuven UP, 2000), pp. 69–86.

some unknown reason, the compiler was not pleased with this insertion of *Perchevael* into *Lanceloet*. The insertion was undone and *Perchevael* was added after *Lanceloet*. Next, the compiler added six other texts; *Torec* was placed right before the Middle Dutch translation of the *Mort Artu*. Since these ten texts are linked by transitional passages and a system of cross-references, it is safe to conclude that the compiler intended to present the individual romances in his text collection as one coherent whole. The *Lancelot* Compilation has been characterized as a narrative cycle.<sup>80</sup>

In a text collection such as the *Lancelot* Compilation, the dynamics of the codex are at play. The rewriting, reordering, and new contextualisation of the texts in the manuscript have resulted in new meanings, which are strongly connected to the relation between the three core texts and the seven inserted romances, including *Torec*. Critics have noticed that the ordering of these texts has influenced the portrayal of Walewein. Whereas in the core sections of the compilation a negative view of Arthur's nephew prevails, his portrayal in the inserted romances is highly positive.<sup>81</sup> This rehabilitation of Walewein in the interpolated narratives, which sometimes occurs at the expense of *Lanceloet*, as in *Lanceloet en het hert met de witte voet*, culminates in his glorification in *Walewein ende Keye*.<sup>82</sup>

80. See my *The Book of Lancelot* (see note 52). For the concept of narrative cycles, see *Cyclification: The Development of Narrative Cycles in the Chansons de Geste and the Arthurian Romances*, ed. Bart Besamusca et al. (Amsterdam etc.: North-Holland, 1994), and *Transtextualities: Of Cycles and Cyclicity in Medieval French Literature*, ed. Sara Sturm-Maddox and Donald Maddox (Binghamton, NY: Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies, 1996). At the Bristol IAS conference, Miriam Muth (Cambridge) critically discussed current scholarly views on the concept in her paper "When is a Cycle not a Cycle? Problems with Late Arthurian Romance Collections".

81. See my *The Book of Lancelot* (see note 52), pp. 167–9, 189, and David Johnson, "Questing in the Middle Dutch *Lancelot* Compilation," in *The Grail, the Quest and the World of Arthur*, ed. Norris J. Lacy (Cambridge: Brewer, 2008), pp. 92–108, here 99–100.

82. For *Lanceloet en het hert met de witte voet*, see Johnson, "Questing" (see note 81), pp. 100–02, and Bart Besamusca, "Tyolet, Lanceloet und Lanzarote auf der Jagd nach dem Hirsch mit dem weißen Fuß," in *Vom Verstehen deutscher Texte des Mittelalters aus der europäischen Kultur. Hommage à Elisabeth Schmid*, ed. Dorothea Klein (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2011), pp. 359–74. For *Walewein ende Keye*, see my *The Book of*

In *Torec*, too, Walewein's role is that of the exemplary knight. In the episode about the damsel who has lost thirty castles to the king, Arthur's nephew is the only knight at court who (to quote David Johnson) "possesses an ounce of integrity".<sup>83</sup> Walewein states that he does not accept responsibility for the verdict since he was absent when it was announced (ll. 1961–63). At the end of the romance, when Torec has to meet Miraude's condition to defeat all the knights of the Round Table, it is Walewein again who takes the hero's side, by persuading a part of Torec's opponents to slice their horses' girths, so that they are unhorsed easily (ll. 3286–3396, 3611–28). It is true, as has been noted, that Walewein is cheating here.<sup>84</sup> However, this deception should be judged positively, since it contributes to the romance's happy ending. Thanks to Walewein, Torec does not lose his beloved (ll. 3288–92).<sup>85</sup>

In recent research it has been stressed that both Walewein and Torec are favourably contrasted with Arthur's court. The hero and his ally criticize Arthurian values.<sup>86</sup> As mentioned, the two knights rightly

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*Lancelot* (see note 52), pp. 119–21, and Marjolein Hogenbirk, *Avontuur en anti-avontuur. Een onderzoek naar Walewein ende Keye, een Arturroman uit de Lancelotcompilatie* (Amsterdam: Stichting Neerlandistiek, 2004). Katty De Bundel and Geert Claassens have argued unconvincingly against the positive portrayal of Walewein in *Walewein ende Keye* and *Torec* in their essay "Alle daveren van Logers. Over de samenstelling van de *Lancelotcompilatie*," in *Maar er is meer. Avontuurlijk lezen in de epiek van de Lage Landen. Studies voor Jozef D. Janssens*, ed. Remco Sleiderink, Veerle Uyttersprot, Bart Besamusca (Leuven: Davidsfonds, 2005), pp. 303–18, here 304–09.

83. Johnson, "Questing" (see note 81), p. 100. See also Zemel, "Over drie romans" (see note 14), 63–64; Echard, "Seldom does anyone listen" (see note 69), 85, 89–90. For a different opinion, see Claassens, "De *Torrez à Torec*" (see note 17), pp. 169–70, and De Bundel and Claassens, "Alle daveren" (see note 82), p. 313.

84. Kerth, "Arthurian Tradition" (see note 35), 21–22.

85. De Bundel and Claassens, "Alle daveren" (see note 82), p. 313, Kerth, "Arthurian Tradition" (see note 35), 21, and Claassens, "De *Torrez à Torec*" (see note 17), pp. 170–71, claim that Torec's fight against the knights of the Round Table is a farce, since Miraude has given the hero a magic ring which makes the wearer invulnerable (ll. 3270–74). However, in my view this gift only confirms Miraude's love for Torec. It is significant that the narrator nowhere refers to the ring and that Torec is defeated by Arthur.

86. See De Bundel and Claassens, "Alle daveren" (see note 82), pp. 310–12; Claassens, "De *Torrez à Torec*" (see note 17), pp. 165–72; Echard, "Seldom does anyone listen" (see note 69), p. 85–90; Johnson, "Questing" (see note 81), pp. 102–07.



oppose the entire court in the case of the innocent damsel. Arthur's unjust judgement calls to mind the Chamber of Wisdom criticism that the ruling class brings the world to ruin (ll. 2401–37).<sup>87</sup> In this context, it is noteworthy that Torec is an outsider, who refuses to join the Arthurian court, even though both the king and the queen ask him to become a member of the Round Table and promise him that he will be provided with goods (ll. 2077–85). The Arthurian court seems to have lost its idealized status.

Critics have related the weakness of Arthur's court in *Torec* to the place of this narrative in the *Lancelot* Compilation.<sup>88</sup> In their view, it is no coincidence that the tale precedes *Arturs doet*, the Middle Dutch translation of the *Mort Artu*. They argue that the interpolation of *Torec* precisely at this point constitutes a prelude to the downfall of Arthur's realm in the compilation's final romance. By criticizing Arthurian values, *Torec* underlines the decay of the Arthurian world, which will be undeniably apparent in *Arturs doet*. The uncorrupted hero leaves the stage in time. At the end of the narrative, Torec becomes king, and proves himself so worthy that *Van sire doget ginc verre tale* ("word spread far concerning his virtue," l. 3849). The narrator declares that Torec and his wife lived in joy for the rest of their lives, and announces straightaway the story of the death of all who belong to the Round Table (ll. 3841–47).

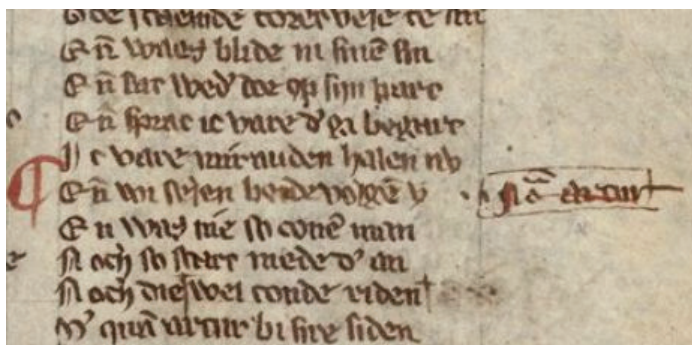
Extremely relevant for our analysis of the place of *Torec* in the *Lancelot* Compilation is a passage which could well be the most surprising one of the whole narrative (ll. 3643–721). Having unhorsed all knights of the Round Table, Torec has to fight one more opponent, that is: the king himself. When their lances are shattered, Arthur suddenly embraces Torec and throws him off his horse. Following Torec's contentment about the identity of his victor, the narrator provides a stunning explanation (ll. 3681–713). Even the best knights of the world, such as Walewein, Lanceloet and Perchevael, have been defeated by Arthur, who took his adversaries in his arms and laid them

87. Perhaps the episode about the *vogaet*, the vagabond, also expresses the weakness of Arthur's court (ll. 1328–88). The man tells Torec that he is a former Arthurian knight, who has been banished from the realm because he stabbed Keye with a knife for slandering him. As a result of this banishment, the man has become a robber knight.

88. See De Bundel and Claassens, "Alle d'aventuren" (see note 82), pp. 314–15; Claassens, "De *Torrez* à *Torec*" (see note 17), pp. 173–74; Johnson, "Questing" (see note 81), pp. 103, 106–07.

across his horse.<sup>89</sup> Because of his invincibility, Arthur was not allowed to take part in tournaments. Only when a giant entered his realm and wanted to fight against the king, Arthur accepted the challenge. To this the narrator adds that Arthur travelled his kingdom secretly in order to decapitate peace breakers (ll. 3714–17). For this reason, everybody feared him. *Nochtan was hi die gemaetste man / Die ter werelt nie lijf gewan / Entie godertierste mede* (“Nevertheless he was the most moderate man ever to live in this world, and the kindest man as well,” ll. 3719–21).

The significance of this passage is underlined by the presence of a marginal notation on folium 200 recto, right at the beginning of the depiction of Arthur:



The contemporary note, made by the scribe, is enclosed in a rectangular frame and highlighted by red ink, and reads: *Nota artur*. There are only four of these nota signs in the whole manuscript, all by the same scribe, and this is the only rubricated one.<sup>90</sup> It is certain that

89. In the discussion following my paper presentation “Über einige Episoden in *Torec*” (Müstair, September 2011), Cornelia Herberichs has suggested that this portrayal of Arthur resembles the characterization of the hero in the German *Nibelungenlied*.

90. Fol. 120r-c: “Nota” next to a saying about moderation (*Moriaen*, ll. 1617–20); F. 123R,b: “Nota” next to a saying about not listening to advice (*Moriaen*, ll. 2659–60); fol. 151r-c: “Nota abel” in a rectangular frame, next to

the reader is made aware of Arthur's portrayal, but to what purpose? One critic has recently noted that Arthur's battle technique is unconventional and unchivalric, which would result in a negative view on Arthur and his court.<sup>91</sup> However, Torec also defeats various opponents by throwing them on the ground (ll. 1359–62, 2971–76) and, more importantly, a negative judgment of Arthur seems incompatible with the portrayal's closing lines, praising the king's moderation and kindness. I agree with other critics, who argue for a positive interpretation of Arthur's depiction.<sup>92</sup>

This point of view implies that the *Torec* version in the *Lancelot* Compilation resists a unequivocal interpretation of Arthur. We see the king undeniably act, on the one hand, as one of those corrupted rulers who are condemned by the wise men in the Chamber of Wisdom. On the other hand, he is described as an invincible and kind king who possesses the cardinal virtues *fortitudo*, *prudencia*, *iusticia* and, in particular, *temperantia*. This double-edged image of Arthur in *Torec* is certainly not at odds with *Arturs doet*, which features Arthur both as a superior leader and a weak one.

The sign *Nota artur* on folium 200 recto is a rare paratextual element in manuscript 129 A 10. As such, it makes the description of Arthur meaningful for the *Lancelot* Compilation as a whole, too. Approaching the collection's final narrative, which will relate the downfall of Arthur's realm, the reader of the manuscript has learnt a lot about Arthur, both to the king's advantage and to his disadvantage. Thereupon, the reader is alerted to an exceptional praise of the king. The marginal notation tips the balance in favor of Arthur's image as a paragon of chivalry. In my view, this is a wonderful illustration of how the dynamics of a codex may work.

### The Expansion of Criticism

The final section of this essay is not concerned with a scholarly approach, but with a critical trend. Since the 1990s Dutch and Belgian

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the passage describing how Adam fathers Abel on Eve (*Queeste*, ll. 8390ff). I would like to thank Vera Westra for collating the relevant references in the manuscript.

91. Johnson, "Questing" (see note 81), pp. 104–05.

92. See De Bundel and Claassens, "Alle aventuren" (see note 82), p. 314; Claassens, "De *Torrez* à *Torec*" (see note 17), p. 171; Echard, "Seldom does anyone listen" (see note 69), p. 89.

scholars have increasingly published essays on Middle Dutch Arthurian literature in other languages than Dutch.<sup>93</sup> By doing so, they made this corpus of romances visible to the international Arthurian community.<sup>94</sup> Dual-language editions of Middle Dutch Arthurian narratives have greatly contributed to this development. Assisted by Geert Claassens and others, David Johnson has produced praiseworthy editions of *Walewein*, *Ferguut* and the five narratives which were inserted between the *Queeste* and *Arturs doet* in the *Lancelot* Compilation.<sup>95</sup> I would like to illustrate the consequences of this development for the study of *Torec*.

Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, ten publications have been devoted, completely or for a significant part, to *Torec*. It may come as a surprise that only two of these contributions were written in Dutch, whereas seven were published in English and one in French. Here is the overview:

Bart Besamusca (2000): “The Damsel of Monstesclare” (see note 52)

Roel Zemel (2001): “Over drie romans in de *Torec*” (see note 14)

*Torec*, ed. David Johnson *et al.* (2003) in *Dutch Romances III* (see note 6)

Bart Besamusca (2003): *The Book of Lancelot* (see note 52)

Katty De Bundel & Geert Claassens (2005): “Alle davenporturen van Logers” (see note 82)

Thomas Kerth (2007): “Arthurian Tradition and the Middle Dutch *Torec*” (see note 35)

James H. Morey (2007): “*Torec*, Cosmic Energy, and Pragmatism” (see note 20)

Siân Echard (2007): “Seldom does anyone listen to a good exemplum” (see note 69)

93. See my essay in *A History of Arthurian Scholarship* (see note 5), pp. 166–68.

94. Examples include *Arthurian Literature XVII: Originality and Tradition in the Middle Dutch Roman van Walewein*, ed. Bart Besamusca and Erik Kooper (Cambridge: Brewer, 1999) and *King Arthur in the Medieval Low Countries*, ed. Geert H. M. Claassens and David F. Johnson (Leuven: Leuven UP, 2000).

95. *Dutch Romances, Vol. I–III*, ed. and trans. David F. Johnson and Geert H. M. Claassens (Cambridge: Brewer, 2000–2003), Arthurian Archives VI, VII, X.

David Johnson (2008): “Questing in the Middle Dutch *Lancelot Compilation*” (see note 81)

Geert Claassens (2009): “De *Torrez* à *Torec*” (see note 17)

A closer look at this list reveals a gratifying development, which I would like to call the across-the-border-criticism of Middle Dutch Arthurian literature. The list makes it clear, first of all, that scholars who do not read Dutch still have ample opportunities to acquire a great deal of knowledge of Middle Dutch romances like *Torec*. Secondly, it shows that *Torec* research includes specialists in other areas than Middle Dutch. David Johnson and James Morey study medieval English literature. Thomas Kerth is a specialist in German literature. Siân Echard works in the field of Latin literature. These critics demonstrate that the expanding accessibility of *Torec* and *Torec* scholarship provides a great potential for comparative studies. This is a scholarly approach that I wish to support wholeheartedly. It is my conviction that studying various literary traditions together improves the quality of the reading of each.<sup>96</sup> The expanding of across-the-border-criticism such as that devoted to *Torec* will be to the benefit of Arthurian studies. It will contribute to its current, and future, flourishing.

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96. See also Echard, “Seldom does anyone listen” (see note 69), p. 80.