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The Self-Conscious Continuator: Reflections on Literary Continuation in Medieval Romances and their Manuscripts

Abstract

Medieval romance is characterised by its openness to rewriting, and the specific practice of literary continuation—extending unfinished works—has received considerable attention, albeit less so with regard to the anxieties felt by the authors of such narratives in undertaking their task. This article examines how continuators in Old French and Middle Dutch romances articulate their relationship to predecessor texts, arguing that continuation constitutes a distinct and especially self-conscious mode of rewriting. Focusing chiefly on prologues, epilogues and material transmission, the study revisits a range of French case studies—including the Continuations of Chrétien de Troyes’s *Perceval*, Chrétien’s *Le Chevalier de la charrette* and the *Roman de la Rose*—to analyse how their authors articulate the task of continuation, and compares these reflections in detail with similar, but less well-studied statements found in Middle Dutch works such as *Reinaerts historie*, *Moriaen*, *Walewein* and *Parthonopeus van Bloys*. Across both linguistic traditions, continuators variously obscure their authorial presence, criticise unfinished sources, emphasise patronal authority or claim legitimacy through completion, revealing acute awareness of their inevitable comparison with the originating text and/or author. Manuscript evidence further complicates these authorial concerns, often demonstrating strong audience acceptance of continuations despite visible hierarchies of prestige. By bringing French and Dutch material into dialogue, this article identifies shared strategies and pressures that hint at a broader, transnational medieval poetics of continuation.

In an era in which originality is often fetishised as a seal of authorial excellence, a modern reader may be surprised to discover that medieval romance writers, unfettered by notions of creative ownership, proudly wore their debts to earlier texts as a badge of honour, rather than concealing them as a source of shame. But to those familiar with medieval literature, the notion of authors embracing their dependence on pre-existing works, typically making a virtue of their creative debt, is a commonplace. As Jane Taylor has shown, rewriting was by no means a form of “poetic piracy”.¹ This medieval acceptance of rewriting as best practice is, however, somewhat complicated by the phenomenon of literary continuation,

¹ Jane H.M. Taylor: “Rewriting: Translation, Continuation and Adaptation”, in: *Handbook of Arthurian Literature: King Arthur’s Court in Medieval European Literature*, ed. by Leah Tether and Johnny McFadyen. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017, pp. 167–181, p. 117.

in which a writer undertakes to expand, and possibly complete, an unfinished or open-ended work.² As this study will show, in such cases a certain level of self-consciousness is often perceptible in the way that such authors – or continuators – refer to, and discuss, their task. For example, continuators' assessments of the preceding writer and/or work range from biting critique to effusive praise, implying that writers perceived challenges specific to the task of continuation, ones not necessarily shared by other forms of rewriting, since they arise from the fact that the new work must always be read in relation, and even as a subordinate, to the original text.³

Working across French and Dutch romances, we will investigate how continuators articulate the relationship of their works with those of their predecessors, with prologues and epilogues often serving as the exposition sites for that dialogue. These two linguistic communities were highly intertwined during the Middle Ages and the locus for some of the earliest and most popular vernacular works of literary continuation in Europe. Furthermore, the connectedness of the French and Dutch literary circuits and cultures in the northern regions of France and the southern Low Counties allowed for both the mobility of romance texts and the cultural exchange of literary influences, making them the ideal sources for this enquiry.⁴ Some considerable work on continuation in Old French narratives has already been undertaken,⁵ though the particular anxieties felt by

² Rewriting takes a variety of forms, including translation and adaptation, but it is perhaps most important for our purposes here to distinguish continuation from other forms of expansion, such as sequel. Leah Tether theorises that continuations chiefly respond to unfinished works and their narrative promises, while sequels usually follow a finished work, responding instead to narrative possibilities: *The Continuations of Chrétien's Perceval: Content and Construction, Extension and Ending*. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2012, p. 58.

³ The vital matter here is the level of knowledge required to engage with the work: a sequel can stand alone since knowledge of a predecessor is useful but not crucial, while for a continuation an audience must know what came before; it cannot operate with autonomy in the way other forms of rewriting, including sequel, can; Tether: *The Continuations* (fn. 2), p. 59.

⁴ A recent study emphasising the connectivity of French and Dutch literatures is Adrian Armstrong and Elsa Strietman (eds.): *The Multilingual Muse. Transcultural Poetics in the Burgundian Netherlands*. Oxford: Legenda MHRA, 2017; see also Nicola Morato and Dirk Schoenaers (eds.): *Medieval Francophone Literary Culture Outside France. Studies in the Moving Word*. Turnhout: Brepols, 2018, and Jane Gilbert, Simon Gaunt and William Burgwinkle: *Medieval French Literary Culture Abroad*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020.

⁵ Tether's *The Continuations* (fn. 2) and Taylor's "Rewriting: Translation, Continuation and Adaptation" (fn. 1) are cases in point, but see also, for example, Thomas Hinton: *The Conte du Graal Cycle: Chrétien de Troyes' Perceval, the Continuations, and French Arthurian Romance*. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2012, and Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner, *Chrétien Continued: A Study of the Conte du Graal and its Verse Continuation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009, as well as the various essays in *Rewriting Medieval French Literature: Studies in Honour of Jane H.M. Taylor*, ed. by Leah Tether and Keith Busby. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021.

continuator in extending an original has so far not received detailed attention. As such, this study will start by revisiting, briefly, several key works of Old French continuation to nuance our existing knowledge about their mechanics by reflecting specifically on instances where continuators discuss (or do not discuss) their task. We will then turn to comparing and contrasting in greater detail similar kinds of statements, as well as associated narrative refashionings, in works of continuation in Middle Dutch. Such works are almost equal in abundance to French ones, but their continuatory mechanics have been subject to far less scrutiny. This article will demonstrate that medieval continuators consistently exhibit a high degree of self-awareness, and even self-consciousness, in respect of their craft and the reception of their works. It will also examine the validity of continuators' anxieties in light of the material transmission of their works, revealing the complex interplay between an author's assumptions about audience reception and the reality of how the work was actually received.

* * *

Among the most celebrated works of continuation in Old French literature are the four *Continuations* of Chrétien de Troyes's late twelfth-century *Perceval* (or *Conte du Graal*), which emerged within a generation or so of Chrétien's original endeavour. These narratives collectively extend Chrétien's famously unfinished Grail story by tens of thousands of lines. The *First* and *Second Continuations*, the former anonymous and the second purportedly written by Wauchier de Denain,⁶ delve deeper into the character development and story arcs of Gauvain (*First Continuation*) and Perceval (*Second Continuation*). Meanwhile, the final two, authored by Gerbert de Montreuil and Manessier, steer the tale toward a conclusion in which the Grail Castle is revisited successfully. The *First* and *Second* Continuators, who appear to have composed their respective continuations between 1200 and 1210, thus significantly expand Chrétien's narrative but do not resolve the plot, leaving crucial threads unresolved, including, but not limited to, Perceval's quest for the Grail and Gauvain's for the lance. Remarkably, neither of them offers an acknowledgement of their undertaking as an act of continuation, both failing to mention that they have taken over from a predecessor. The *First Continuator* in fact says nothing at all of his authorial agency, apparently intending to appear invisible (or perhaps to give the impression that Chrétien is still writing), while the *Second Continuator* makes the briefest statement of

⁶ Active around the beginning of the thirteenth century, Wauchier de Denain wrote a series of other works including, it is believed, the *Histoire ancienne jusqu'à César*. The essays in *Wauchier de Denain, polygraphe du xiii^e siècle*, dir. Sébastien Douchet. Aix-en-Provence: Presses universitaires de Provence, 2015, are useful for gaining an overview of his oeuvre and craft.

authorship with no allusion whatsoever to his continuatory task:⁷ “*Gauchiers de Dondain, qui l'estoire / Nos a mis avant an memoire, / Dit et conte que Perceval...*” (ll. 21415–21417).⁸

Gerbert and Manessier, writing some years later and at roughly the same time in c. 1225, profess their role much more openly, with Gerbert even giving us the reason for his (and presumably the other Continuators’) intervention: that Chrétien died prior to completing the work.⁹ Within the same passage Gerbert is also clear that he is continuing an existing narrative, as well as that he is doing something exceptional because, where others have abandoned the enterprise, he undertakes not only to continue the work, but also to finish it, and to do so according to the true story as it appears in the book where it is written down.¹⁰ Gerbert thus favourably positions his activity not against that of Chrétien per se, but instead against that of the preceding continuators. They, he intimates, have met with failure in their attempts to continue the narrative because they did not bring the story to a close.¹¹

Manessier also sets his effort apart from those of previous continuators on the same basis: no one, Manessier says, has previously set about completing the story, and this he emphasises not once but twice.¹² While Gerbert acknowledges

⁷ For the text of the *Continuations*, we use William Roach (ed.): *The Continuations of the Old French Perceval of Chrétien de Troyes*, 5 vols. Vol. I: Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1949; vol. II: Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1950; vol. III: Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1952; vol. IV: Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1971; vol. V: Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1983, and Gerbert de Montreuil: *La Continuation de Perceval*, ed. by Mary Williams (I and II) and Marguerite Oswald (III), 3 vols. Paris: Champion, 1922–1925 (I and II), 1975 (III). A more recent edition of Gerbert’s work is available in Gerbert de Montreuil: *La Continuation de Perceval: Quatrième Continuation*, ed. Frédérique le Nan. Paris: Droz, 2014.

⁸ “*Wauchier de Denain, who has pursued the story for us, recounts that Perceval...*” Translations are provided where paraphrase is not, and they are our own unless otherwise stated.

⁹ “*Ce nous dist Crestiens de Troies / Qui de Percheval comencha, / Mais la mors qui l’adevancha / Ne li laissa pas traire affin[...]*” (ll. 6984–6987).

¹⁰ “*Si con la matere descoeuvre / Gerbers, qui a reprise l’oeuvre, / Quant chascuns trovere le laisse, / Mais or en a faite sa laisse / Gerbers, selonc le vraie estoire; / Dieus l’en otroit force et Victoire / De toute vilenie estaindre / Et qu’il puist la fin ataindre / De Percheval que il emprent, / Si con li livres li aprent / Ou la meterre en est escripte;*” (ll. 6997–7007).

¹¹ Of course, whilst Gerbert appears to have set out to complete the story, and we have no reason to disbelieve him (the narrative does appear all but wrapped up), there is a complexity in that the two extant manuscripts to contain his work (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MSS fr. 12576 and NAF 6614) replace his closing lines with a repetition of the final lines of the *Second Continuation* before adding Manessier’s *Continuation* as the closing section of the textual ensemble, creating the effect of a narrative loop. These two manuscripts are the product of a common workshop. See Bruckner: *Chrétien Continued* (fn. 5), p. 190, and Tether: *The Continuations* (fn. 2), pp. 165–89.

¹² “*Si con Manesier le tesmoigne, / Qui met a chief ceste besoigne / El non Jehanne la contesse, / Qu’est de Flandres dame et mestresse, / La vaillant dame et la senee / Que Damedieix a assenee / A sens, a valeur, a biauté, / A cortoisie, a loiauté, / A franchise,*

Chrétien as the originating author, though, Manessier entirely sidesteps his agency, referring only to that of Chrétien's patron, Philippe de Flandres, in whose name the story was begun. Even then, the reference is tangential, since Philippe is referred to not by name but merely as the ancestor ("*aiol*") of Manessier's own patron, Jeanne de Flandres. On the one hand, this elevation of Philippe's contribution over Chrétien's might reasonably be read, due the connected lineage, as integral to the customary flattery that Manessier extends to Jeanne as patron. At the same time, it provides a means by which to divert a reader from making (potentially) unfavourable comparisons with an originating author whose literary prowess and reputation were considerable.

In these brief reflections, all the continuators appear to express at least some reluctance to have their work directly compared with Chrétien's.¹³ The First Continuator neglects to mention the matter of authorship at all, obscuring the change of authorship entirely, while Wauchier places the emphasis on his own act of composition, eschewing any mention of predecessors. Gerbert and Manessier, meanwhile, avoid direct comparisons with Chrétien by diverting the reader's attention to the shortcomings of previous continuators, with Manessier additionally directing the reader away from Chrétien's agency by pointing instead to that of successive patrons. Unlike the First and Second Continuators, though, both Gerbert and Manessier acknowledge their task as one specifically of expanding an original. Could this be read as an indication that continuation that leads to completion is somehow a safer, even preferable, prospect than continuation that merely extends?

Either way, these texts' presentation in the manuscripts provides support that their strategies are born out of self-consciousness. For example, there is clearly an attempt to avoid acknowledging, visually, the commencement of a new author's work in the *mise-en-page* of most manuscripts; scholarship has shown that the moments of authorial transition typically mask textual junctures, rendering them almost invisible to all but the most discerning, well-informed readers.¹⁴ But manuscript evidence also suggests that the Continuators' anxieties

a largesce, a pris. / [...] El non son aiol commença, / Ne puis ne fu des lors en ça / Nus hons qui la main i meist/ Ne du finner s'antremeist. / Dame, por vos s'en est pené / Manessier tant qu'il l'a finé / Selonc l'estoire proprement, / Qui commença au soudement / De l'espee sanz contredit." (ll. 42644–42661).

¹³ Beate Schmolke-Hasselmann's seminal *The Evolution of Arthurian Romance: The Verse Tradition from Chrétien to Froissart*, trans. by Margaret Middleton and Roger Middleton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) discusses the similarly delicate relationship of other post-Chrétien epigones with Chrétien as the preceding "master".

¹⁴ Tether has argued that the inclusion of decorated initials at textual junctures in the *Continuations*, which often tally across codices, indicates some awareness, at least among scribes/manuscript planners, of authorial transition; *The Continuations* (fn. 2), pp. 21–56. But it is also true that the average reader might not be as alert to such visual cues. The "Guiot" manuscript (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS fr. 794) is in fact the only one to acknowledge, explicitly, the end of Chrétien's work; the scribe, Guiot, inserts a line reading "*Explicyt Perceval le uiel*" (fol. 394v) before continuing with the *First Continuation* and the first part of the *Second*.

might have been at least somewhat misplaced. With just one exception,¹⁵ all manuscripts containing the *Continuations* present the texts (whether the *First Continuation* in isolation or a series of them) together with Chrétien's original. This trend surely indicates that audiences accepted the continuations as *Perceval's* legitimate successors.¹⁶ Indeed, while earlier manuscripts of *Perceval* and the *Continuations* often include some or all of Chrétien's other works, as time goes on it actually becomes more common to see these texts transmitted without Chrétien's remaining oeuvre, hinting that the Continuator might indeed have worried unnecessarily.¹⁷ And yet, in the five illuminated manuscripts of the works the distribution of images still suggests a higher reverence for the Ur-Text overall: the text of *Perceval* (as well as *Perceval's* adventures in the *Continuations*) contains a higher proportion of illumination.¹⁸ Even if audiences accepted the texts as a unit, therefore, Chrétien's work still received the most lavish treatment in material presentation.

This notion of continuators experiencing anxiety in the act of continuing an unfinished romance is illustrated by another of Chrétien's works, *Le Chevalier de la charrette* (or *Lancelot*) (c. 1160–1180). The reason for Chrétien's cessation is nowhere stated, though some scholars have concluded that Chrétien became uncomfortable with the adulterous subject matter about which he was tasked to write by his patron, Marie de Champagne. This, such scholars claim, is palpable in the manner of Chrétien's prologue, which contains little of the laudatory matter he extends to Philippe in *Perceval*. Instead, Chrétien gives almost all of the credit for the story (*matière et san*, as he puts it in l. 26)¹⁹ to Marie rather

¹⁵ Bern: Burgerbibliothek, MS 113, which contains only the *Second Continuation* with a short concluding passage that wraps up events at the Grail Castle with remarkable haste; this itself says something about the desire and/or expectation for continuations to bring closure.

¹⁶ Thomas Hinton has made a similar point: *The Conte du Graal Cycle* (fn. 5), p. 165, as has Keith Busby: "Narrative Genres", in: *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval French Literature*, ed. by Simon Gaunt and Sarah Kay. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008, pp. 139–152, p. 148.

¹⁷ Leah Tether: "Revisiting the Manuscripts of *Perceval* and the *Continuations*: Publishing Practices and Authorial Transition", in: *Journal of the Arthurian Society* 2 (2014), pp. 20–45, pp. 27–28.

¹⁸ The illuminated manuscripts are Montpellier, Bibliothèque interuniversitaire, Section Médecine, MS H249; Mons, Bibliothèque publique, MS 331/206; Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MSS fr. 1453, fr. 12576 and fr. 12577. For a discussion of the distribution of illumination in these manuscripts, see Keith Busby: "The Illustrated Manuscripts of Chrétien's *Perceval*", in: *Zeitschrift für französische Sprache und Literatur* 98 (1988), pp. 41–52; this article is reproduced in *Les Manuscrits de Chrétien de Troyes/The Manuscripts of Chrétien de Troyes*, ed. by Keith Busby, Terry Nixon, Alison Stones and Lori Walters, 2 vols. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1993, I, pp. 351–364. The same book contains a discussion of illumination distribution in the *Continuations* in particular: Keith Busby: "Text, Miniature, and Rubric in the *Continuations* of Chrétien's *Perceval*", *ibid.*, I, pp. 365–376.

¹⁹ We use Christian von Troyes: "Der Karrenritter (Lancelot)", in: *Sämtliche Werke, nach allen bekannten Handschriften*, ed. by Wendelin Foerster. 4 vols. Halle: Niemeyer, 1899, IV, pp. 1–252.

than presenting the endeavour as a labour shared with his patron.²⁰ It is only in the epilogue that the reader learns that Chrétien handed the reins to one Godefroi de Leigni, who under Chrétien's instruction/with his consent brought the narrative to a close.²¹ Without this acknowledgement, one could be forgiven for thinking that Chrétien had never stepped away, because unlike the *Perceval* Continuator, Godefroi does not route his continuation via alternative, lengthy narrative diversion(s), but rather brings the narrative, economically, to a logical close (even if he admits it lacks complete resolution: "an travers"). Godefroi even adopts a style that is so close to Chrétien's as to make the two authors' respective sections practically indistinguishable.²² The success of Godefroi's imitation has led some scholars to question his existence,²³ though recent evidence suggests he might indeed have been a historical figure.²⁴ Whether they represent the words of Godefroi or of Chrétien channelling Godefroi, the final four lines of this passage are revealing – Godefroi is emphatic that no man can blame him for the work at hand because it was done with Chrétien's express consent ("le boen gré"). As with the *Perceval* Continuator, Godefroi thus attempts to prevent readers from drawing unfavourable comparisons with the Ur-Text, this time by underscoring that Chrétien himself has authorised it. Godefroi's statement has the effect of shifting the responsibility almost entirely away from his own pen, suggesting a reluctance, genuine or contrived, to be seen as operating with autonomy.

²⁰ See, for example, Tony Hunt: "Chrétien's Prologues Reconsidered", in: *Conjunctures: Medieval Studies in Honor of Douglas Kelly*, ed. by Keith Busby and Norris J. Lacy. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1994, pp. 153–168, esp. pp. 160–162; June Hall McCash: "Chrétien's Patrons", in: *A Companion to Chrétien de Troyes*, ed. by Norris J. Lacy and Joan Tasker Grimbert. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2005, pp. 23–24, and Lori J. Walters: "Jeanne and Marguerite de Flandre as Female Patrons", in: *Dalhousie French Studies* 28 (1994), pp. 15–27, p. 17. A fuller bibliography is given in *Tether: The Continuators* (fn. 2), p. 89.

²¹ "Ci faut li romanz an travers. / Godefroiz de Leigni, li clers, / A parfinee la charrette, / Mes nus hom blasme ne l'an mete / Se sor Chrestien a ovré, / Car ç'a il fet par le boen gré / Crestien qui le comança." (ll. 7124–7129).

²² See, for example, Ellen Thorington's analysis in her "'De conter un conte par rime': rimes riches dans *Le Chevalier de la Charrette* (*Lancelot*)", in: *Œuvres et critiques* 27 (2002), pp. 132–153, pp. 147–154.

²³ See, amongst others, Roger Dragonetti: *La vie de la lettre au Moyen Âge*. Paris: Seuil, 1980, p. 14; Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner: "Chrétien de Troyes", in: *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval French Literature*, ed. by Simon Gaunt and Sarah Kay. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008, pp. 79–94, p. 86.

²⁴ See Ambrogio Camozzi Pistoja's "Tracing Proteus: A Possible Identity for 'Godefroi de Leigni', the Continuator of the *Charrette*", in: *Viator* 55.2 (2024), pp. 53–67. The identification is compelling, but in respect of the perception of the continuatory work, Tether and Busby argue that in a sense it does not matter whether Godefroi exists or is an invention because the effect on the reader is the same: "If Godefroi was real, his resumption [...] of a narrative written for a designated patron of considerable status is no less awkward than if Chrétien had invented Godefroi as a means to cover up his lack of investment in the work"; "'Que nus contes de ce n'amende': Chrétien de Troyes and the assertion of copyright", in: *Journal of the International Arthurian Society* 11 (2023), pp. 1–18, p. 11.

A further instructive example of continuation in Old French is one of the most widely transmitted medieval romances in any language, the *Roman de la rose*.²⁵ It was commenced by Guillaume de Lorris c. 1230 (his section running to c. 4000 lines) and continued by Jean de Meun forty or so years later with an addition of c. 17000 lines; Jean himself tells us this is so *in medias res*.²⁶ Jean's reflection on his task in this passage appears more confident than for our other continuators, at least at first glance. There are still some echoes of the anxieties we have previously seen, in that Jean acknowledges that he can make mistakes, as all men do (*"qu'il en aucune chose faille / (car il n'est pas hon qui ne peche, / tourjorz a chascuns quelque teche"*). However, he will be able to repent (*"se repentira"*) in the act of completing Guillaume's work (*"tout parfiner"*), which was unfinished due to the latter's death. Jean thus makes no bones about his task being one of continuation, seeming relatively unconcerned about perceptions of either him or it. However, the passage is couched in an unusual manner of expression, in which we are listening not to Jean's voice, but rather that of a first-person, but third-party, narrator, which puts distance between the reader and Jean.²⁷ This might reasonably be read as a defensive move, aimed at protecting Jean from censure. But he is far from overt in signalling concern, and this might have to do with the specific conditions in which he was working.

To begin with, forty or more years have passed since Guillaume ceased writing, more than a generation, perhaps giving Jean a greater sense of freedom. Additionally, Guillaume's opening section seems not in any case to have experienced the same levels of success as, say, Chrétien's *Perceval*. There are, for instance, no allusions in contemporary literature to the *Rose* until after Jean wrote his continuation.²⁸ What is more, out of an extant corpus of well over 300 manuscripts, not one survives with Guillaume's work copied in isolation. Curiously, seven extant manuscripts contain a 78-line closing passage (usually referred to as the Anonymous Conclusion) that wraps up Guillaume's story with remarkable

²⁵ Many of the manuscripts are digitised on the Johns Hopkins *Roman de la Rose* Digital Library: <https://dlmm.library.jhu.edu/romandelarose/>.

²⁶ *"Puis vendra Johans Chopinel, / au cuer jolif, au cors inel, [...] / Et s'il avient, comment qu'il aille, / qu'il en aucune chose faille / (car il n'est pas hon qui ne peche, / tourjorz a chascuns quelque teche), / le queur vers moi tant avra fin / que tourjorz, au mains en la fin, / quant en corpe se sentira, / du forfet se repentira, / ne me voudra pas lors trichier. / Cist avra le romanz si chier / qu'il le voudra tout parfiner, / se tens et leus l'en peut venir, car quant guillaumes cessera, / Jehans le continuera, / enprès sa mort, que je ne mente, / Anz trespassez plus de .XL."* (ll. 10535–10560). We use Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun: *Le Roman de la rose*, ed. by Félix Lecoy. 3 vols. Paris: Champion, 1965–1970.

²⁷ David F. Hult has questioned whether this might be indicative of the work's dual authorship being a fiction: *Self-fulfilling Prophecies: Readership and Authority in the Roman de la Rose*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986, esp. Chapter 1. Hult has also discussed the first-person narrator and its effect in detail: "Closed Quotations: The Speaking Voice in the *Roman de la Rose*", in: *Yale French Studies* 67 (1984), pp. 248–269, esp. pp. 249–250.

²⁸ F.M. Warren: "On the Date and Composition of Guillaume de Lorris' *Roman de la Rose*", in: *PMLA* 23 (1908), pp. 269–284, p. 269.

speed.²⁹ Six of these seven compile Jean de Meun's section immediately after the Anonymous Conclusion, in effect offering two possible endings.³⁰ This means there is just one *Rose* manuscript, BnF fr. 12786, that does *not* contain Jean de Meun's work at all, rather just that of Guillaume de Lorris and his Anonymous Concluder. It is thus unsurprising that many readers, including medieval ones, have assumed these 78 lines belonged to Guillaume himself, chief amongst them Gui de Mori, a *remanieur* who rewrote Guillaume's part of the text (including the Anonymous Conclusion) in 1290. Some time later, though, Gui appears to have discovered Jean's continuation and returned to the *Rose* in order to rework this latter section to align with his efforts on Guillaume's earlier part; Gui's *remanement* of both sections has survived in fourteen manuscripts.³¹ We are aware of these two stages of development thanks to a transitional passage included in two of the extant manuscripts, both of which also retain the Anonymous Conclusion.³² Here Gui explains his belief that Jean suppressed Guillaume's original ending to make space for his own.³³ Scholarly consensus is, however, that there is no obvious reason to disbelieve Jean's account of Guillaume's passing prior to completing the narrative (as there is no need to disbelieve Gerbert on Chrétien's demise). Thus, since the 78 lines of the Anonymous Conclusion do

²⁹ The manuscripts are Amiens, Bibliothèque municipale, MS 437; Cambridge, Harvard University, Houghton Library, MS fr. 39; Manchester, John Rylands Library, MS French 66; Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MSS fr. 12786, NAF 28047 and Rothschild 2800; Tournai, Bibliothèque de la Ville, MS 101; a further manuscript containing this sequence of texts is referenced in Ernest Langlois' study of *Rose* manuscripts on the basis of a description from 1860 by Étienne Rouard: *Les manuscrits du Roman de la rose. Description et classement*. Lille: Tallandier / Paris: Champion, 1910), pp. 207–8. The manuscript was sold in 1879 and its whereabouts have since been unknown; nonetheless Langlois included it in his subsequent edition of the text: *Le Roman de la Rose: par Guillaume de Lorris et Jean de Meun*. 5 vols. Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1914–24. For a study of this text, see Leslie C. Brook: "The anonymous conclusion attached to Guillaume de Lorris's *Roman de la Rose*", in: *Neophilologus* 79 (1995), pp. 389–395.

³⁰ Tether describes this phenomenon as possibly offering a mode of reading akin to that of a modern interactive narrative, whereby the reader decides where the story should go next from a couple of options, *The Continuations* (fn. 2), p. 92. The lost manuscript described by Rouard appears also to have contained all three texts.

³¹ Three others have been documented, but their current locations are unknown. See the full list on ARLIMA: https://www.arlima.net/eh/gui_de_mori.html.

³² BnF NAF 28047 and Tournai 101. The sequence in these manuscripts runs: Guillaume's section, the Anonymous Conclusion, Gui's transitional statement, Jean's section.

³³ Gui's proposed reason for Jean's intervention is slightly different from one manuscript to the other. In BnF NAF 28047, he claims the rose was won too easily, whereas in Tournai 101, it was too quickly. The lost manuscript described by Rouard appears also to have contained this sequence of texts, and Gui's statement followed the same reasoning as BnF NAF 28047. Brook discusses other writers of the period who seem to have made the same assumption, "The anonymous conclusion" (fn. 29), pp. 389–390. For this summary of chronology, we are indebted to Sylvia Huot: *The Romance of the Rose and its Medieval Readers: Interpretation, Reception, Manuscript Transmission*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, pp. 85–86.

bring closure to the story (unsatisfactory though it is), it is unlikely Guillaume wrote them. Either way, all evidence suggests that Guillaume's section (on its own or with the Anonymous Conclusion) did not catch on, perhaps giving Jean stronger self-assurance in composing his continuation.

What is remarkable for our purposes is that, even with Jean's dramatic shift of content from Guillaume's discussion of idealised courtly love to an allegorical exploration of love, philosophy and social critique, it was only once Jean had completed his work that the *Rose* not only became popularised but actually went on to enjoy some of the greatest influence of any medieval narrative. It attracted attention (not always positive) from major figures such as Christine de Pizan,³⁴ and was translated into other vernaculars, such as the anonymous and partial Middle English *Romaunt of the Rose* (fourteenth century)³⁵ and two separate Dutch translations, one by the Brabantine writer Heinric known as *Die Rose* (c. 1280–1325) and one by an anonymous Flemish translator known as the Flemish *Rose* (c. 1290).³⁶ There are even several manuscripts which visibly celebrate the change of authorship with, for example, portraits of Guillaume and Jean side by side, the former passing the story to the latter.³⁷ So here we have a case in which it is the continuation that medieval audiences revered the most, providing support for our contention that even if Jean de Meun already experienced fewer concerns about writing a continuation than his colleagues, any remaining reservations were groundless when set against the reality of his continuation's considerable success.

Having briefly revisited the comments made by continuators of some of the more well-known Old French narratives with a specific focus on their perceptions of their task, we have been able both to refine our understanding of their confidence (or lack thereof) in undertaking this form of rewriting and to evaluate

³⁴ Christine's response to what she perceived as antifeminism and glorification of immorality in Jean's continuation gave rise to the famous *Querelle de la Rose* (Debate of the Rose); for more information, see David Hult's study, edition and translation: Christine de Pizan: *Debate of the Romance of the Rose*, ed. and trans. by David F. Hult. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010.

³⁵ There is some controversy over authorship. Chaucer certainly translated it, probably during the 1360s, because he says so in *The Legend of Good Women*. The text is preserved in three fragments (A, B and C) in Glasgow, MS Hunter 409, but it is less certain that Chaucer is the author of all three, with consensus favouring A and possibly C, but not B. See the introduction to the edition: *The Romaunt of the Rose*, ed. by Charles Dahlberg. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999, pp. 3–24.

³⁶ On these Middle Dutch translations, see Dieuwke van der Poel: *De Vlaamse Rose en Die Rose van Heinric. Onderzoekingen over twee Middelnederlandse bewerkingen van de Roman de la Rose*. Hilversum: Verloren, 1989, and "A Romance of a Rose and Florentine: The Flemish Adaption of the *Romance of the Rose*", in: *Rethinking the Romance of the Rose*, ed. by Kevin Brownlee and Sylvia Huot. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992, pp. 304–315.

³⁷ See Lori Walters: "Appendix: Author Portraits and Textual Demarcation in Manuscripts of the *Romance of the Rose*", in: *Rethinking the Romance of the Rose* (fn. 36), pp. 359–373.

how justified such perceptions stood against the largely positive reception of continuations according to the manuscript evidence. With this foundation, we can now turn our attention to the Dutch tradition, whose mechanics of continuation have been far less studied.

* * *

Like their French counterparts, and despite the existence of various original creations, medieval Dutch writers frequently engage in conscious acts of rewriting, often drawing inspiration from French romances.³⁸ Such rewritings similarly range from prequels and sequels to continuations of unfinished works, which are the core subject of our interest here, and once again it tends to be in prologues and epilogues that motivations for acts of literary continuation are articulated. These similarities in both form and practice suggest the potential for commonalities related to self-awareness and introspection as well. In some instances, however, these categories can be more difficult to distinguish, since several Dutch authors appear to blur the lines between them deliberately.

An example of one such writer is the author of the fifteenth-century beast epic, *Reinaerts historie*, which is a continuation of the thirteenth-century *Van den vos Reynaerde*, but which at the same time responds to a different prompt than most other works of continuation. Unlike Chrétien's *Perceval* or Gottfried von Straßburg's *Tristan*, which were in an incomplete state when they reached would-be continuators, the *Reynaerde* was by all accounts a complete text, as evidenced by multiple manuscripts that transmit the text in isolation, as well as by a contemporary Latin translation.³⁹ On the face of it, this suggests that *Reinaerts historie* functions as a sequel to the *Reynaerde* in a manner not dissimilar

³⁸ See Wim Gerritsen: "Les relations littéraires entre la France et les pays-bas au moyen âge. Quelques observations sur la technique des traducteurs", in: *Moyen Age et Littérature Comparée. Actes du septième congrès national, Poitiers 27–29 mai 1965*. Paris: Didier, 1967, pp. 28–46, and Frits van Oostrom: *Stemmen op schrift. Geschiedenis van de Nederlandse literatuur, vanaf het begin tot 1300*. Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2006, pp. 218–233. On translation and medieval Dutch literature, see also Dirk Schoenaers: "Tot 1550: Advocaten van de volkstaal", in: *Vertalen in de Nederlanden: een cultuurgeschiedenis*, ed. by Dirk Schoenaers, Theo Hermans, Inger Leemans, Cees Koster and Ton Naaijken. Amsterdam: Boom, 2021, pp. 29–183.

³⁹ The manuscript transmission of the *Reynaerde* is discussed in *Of Reynaert the Fox. Text and Facing Translation of the Middle Dutch Beast Epic 'Van den Vos Reynaerde'*, ed. by André Bouwman and Bart Besamusca, trans. by Thea Summerfield. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009, pp. 34–36. For the Latin translation *Reynardus vulpes* and its relationship with the *Reynaerde*, see Marinus Jonkers: *Reynardus en Reynaert: verkenningen rond de Reynaert-receptie in de Reynardus Vulpes van Balduinus, nomine Iuvenis*. Groningen: De Bink, 1985, and L. Engels: "Van den vos Reynaerde and Reynardus vulpes. A Middle Dutch Source Text and its Latin Version, and vice versa", in: *Media Latinitas. A Collection of Essays to Mark the Occasion of the Retirement of L.J. Engels*, ed. by Renée Nip. Turnhout: Brepols, 1996, pp. 1–28.

to the various sequential French branches of the *Roman de Renart*.⁴⁰ Yet upon closer inspection it becomes clear that both the writer of *Reinaerts historie* and the person responsible for its presentation in a later manuscript intended for the work to be read together with the *Reynaerde*. To bring about this result, the canonical composition of the *Reynaerde* had to be altered.

Traditionally, the *Reynaerde* ends with the titular character and his family fleeing the realm of King Nobel the lion after his many misdeeds have come to light and he manages, barely, to escape the court with his life through a clever ruse. By removing the titular character from the action and separating him from his natural enemies, the text creates a sense of finality that is absent from most of the branches of the *Renart*, which tend to return Renart home safely, thus resetting the conditions for a new story. Evidently, the author of *Reinaerts historie* was unsatisfied with this ending and made efforts to keep Reynaert in the realm of King Nobel.⁴¹ In order to accomplish this, in *Reinaerts historie*, which incorporates the entirety of the *Reynaerde* with slight alterations, the ending of the *Reynaerde* is changed: this time, when Reynaert asks his family to leave with him, his wife Hermeline convinces him instead to stay in their fortified burrow where she believes no one will be able to harm them. This decision postpones the traditional ending and makes way for a new confrontation between Reynaert and the animals of Nobel's court, resulting in a duel between the fox and his archnemesis, Ysengrijn the wolf (inspired by branch VI of the *Renart*, "Le Duel").⁴² This sees Reynaert, in his role as victor, rise to the position of sovereign bailiff.⁴³

By undoing the canonical ending of the *Reynaerde*, the author of *Reinaerts historie* manufactures a cue for continuation similar to that of unfinished romances, one that in effect creates a textual basis for his own dissatisfaction with the original conclusion of the story.⁴³ His efforts to present his work as a diptych

⁴⁰ Much has been written about the *Roman de Renart* and its individual branches. An overview of publications both old and new is presented on ARLIMA: https://www.arlima.net/qt/renart_roman_de.html. On the literary tradition of the *Roman de Renart* specifically, see the earlier works of Hans Robert Jauss: *Untersuchungen zur mittelalterlichen Tierdichtung*. Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1959, pp. 178–239, and John Flinn: *Le Roman de Renart dans la littérature française et dans les littératures étrangères au moyen âge*. Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1963.

⁴¹ On this, see *Reynaert in tweevoud. Deel II: Reynaerts historie*, ed. by Paul Wackers. Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2002, p. 331.

⁴² On the structure of *Reinaerts historie*, see Klaas Heeroma: *De andere reinaert*. The Hague: Bert Bakker, 1970, pp. 115–151; Paul Wackers: *De waarheid als leugen. Een interpretatie van Reynaerts historie*. Utrecht: HES, 1986), pp. 166–215, and Amand Berteloot: "Reynaerts historie", in: *Tiecelijn* 21 (2008), pp. 96–121. For the position of sovereign bailiff, see Marc Boone: "Soeverein-baljuw van Vlaanderen (1372–1733)", in: *De gewestelijke en lokale overheidsinstellingen in Vlaanderen tot 1795*, ed. by Walter Prevenier and Beatrijs Augustyn. Brussels: Algemeen Rijksarchief, 1997, pp. 115–122.

⁴³ A similar situation is produced in the *Merlijn Continuation*, a translation by the Brabantine pastor Lodewijk van Velthem (c. 1270–1330) of the *Suite-Vulgate du Merlin*, which sets out to continue the *Boec van Merline*, a translation by the Flemish Jacob

in conjunction with the *Reynaerde* were also understood by a later scribe of his work, who in the single complete manuscript of the romance (Brussels, KBR, MS 14601) established a clean transition between the two works, concealing any trace of authorial changeover.⁴⁴ Considering the popularity of the *Reynaerde* from as early as the late Middle Ages and its transmission as a complete text, this choice was to some extent daring on the part of both author and scribe, yet also a testament to the variability of historical texts.⁴⁵ This sentiment is also expressed by the author of *Reinaerts historie* in the epilogue of the text, where he encourages others to alter his text if they think they can improve it, but also adds that they should not be too critical of everything they read (ll. 7784–7791).⁴⁶ These modest comments alongside the textual innovations and compositional decisions made by the author of the *Reinaerts historie* reveal a highly self-conscious continuator.

A different, more critical stance of a continuator towards a source text is found in the *Lancelot Compilation* (The Hague, KB, MS 129 A 10). This manuscript, compiled around 1320 in Brabant, combines a total of ten Arthurian romances in one narrative cycle, consisting of verse translations of the Old

van Maerlant (c. 1230–1290) of Robert de Boron's *Merlin*: where the *Boek van Merline* normally ends with Arthur's coronation ushering in a time of peace ("vreden"), Velthem changes this last word to "onvreden" (war) to introduce new adventures that allow for the growth of King Arthur's character through the continued guidance of Merlin. On this, see Bart Besamusca and Frank Brandsma: "What Makes a Narrative Cycle Work? The example of the Burgsteinfurt manuscript", in: *Rewriting Medieval French Literature. Studies in Honour of Jane H.M. Taylor*, ed. by Leah Tether and Keith Busby. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021, pp. 157–179.

⁴⁴ A second, fragmentary manuscript (The Hague, KB, MS 75 B 7) only contains roughly the final thousand lines of the romance. Both manuscripts are produced around 1470 in Holland. See Jan Deschamps: *Middelnederlandse handschriften uit Europese en Amerikaanse bibliotheken. Tentoonstelling t. g. v. het honderdjarig bestaan van de Koninklijke Zuidnederlandse Maatschappij voor taal- en letterkunde en geschiedenis, Brussel, Koninklijke Bibliotheek Albert I, 24. okt.-24 dec. 1970*. Leiden: Brill, 1972, pp. 81–83. Interestingly, both the *Reynaerde* and *Reinaerts historie* contain acrostics in the final lines of the narrative that reveal the authors' names – perhaps another way in which the continuator strived to operate on an equal footing with the original author.

⁴⁵ On this variance, see Bernard Cerquiglini: *Éloge de la variante: Histoire critique de la philologie*. Paris: Seuil, 1989. Cf. also the adjacent terminology of "mouvance" coined by Paul Zumthor: *Essai de poétique médiévale*. Paris: Seuil, 1972, denoting the high degree of textual variation that results from the mobility of sources.

⁴⁶ "Is dair oec yet in myssel, / Diet beteren can, die maket bet. / Ic weets hem danck. Wie in sijn maken / Sijn best doet, en is niet te laken. / Mer wie alle dinck wil berichten, / Wie soud hem yet willen dichten? / Doch wie dit gedicht laet so hijt vijnt. / En mysdoet tegens my niet wijnt." *Reynaert in tweevoud*. Deel II: *Reynaerts historie*, ed. by Paul Wackers. Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2002. In this edition, Wackers notes specifically that while writers often ask later adaptors of their text to remove any errors, the author of *Reynaerts historie* shows himself to be particularly self-conscious of his work and art (p. 414).

French *Lancelot-Graal* cycle supplemented by seven other Arthurian romances.⁴⁷ Of these seven romances, two are positioned together but separated from the other five, being sandwiched between translations of the *Lancelot en prose* and *Queste del Saint Graal*: these two are the *Perchevael*, a selective translation of the Gauvain-episodes of *Perceval* and its *First Continuation*, and the *Roman van Moriaen*, an original Dutch composition that continues the unfinished adventure of *Perceval*'s part of the narrative by shifting focus to the hitherto unknown hero, Moriaen. Through the inclusion of these two works, the compiler has managed to combine two Grail traditions in one codex, positioning the story of Chrétien and his continuators as an episode that is part of the larger narrative arc of *Lancelot*'s upbringing, his son Galahad's search for the Holy Grail and the inevitable downfall of Arthur's court.⁴⁸

The prologue of the *Moriaen* sheds some light on the considerable efforts made by the compiler to merge these two stories, but perhaps also reveals the initial sentiment of the author of this romance as he concludes Chrétien's work in a manner very different from his French counterparts. In the first part of the prologue the compiler reflects on the different textual traditions of the *Moriaen*, focusing specifically on the core element of the romance: Moriaen's search for his father, the latter of whom left Moriaen's pregnant mother and caused the loss of the family's possessions, titles and honour. The narrator informs us that "som boke" (some books) list *Perchevael* as Moriaen's father whilst he himself believes it must have been his brother *Acglavael*, since *Perchevael* died a virgin following the quest for the Holy Grail (ll. 4–17).⁴⁹

In the context of the *Lancelot Compilation*, it makes sense for the compiler to prefer the idea of *Acglavael* as Moriaen's father, since it avoids narrative contra-

⁴⁷ On the *Lancelot Compilation*, see Bart Besamusca: *The Book of Lancelot. The Middle Dutch 'Lancelot' Compilation and the Medieval Tradition of Narrative Cycles*. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2003, and Frank Brandsma: "Translations and Adaptations of French Prose Romances, Including the *Lancelot Compilation*", in: *The Arthur of the Low Countries. The Arthurian Legend in Dutch and Flemish Literature*, ed. by Bart Besamusca and Frank Brandsma. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2021, pp. 147–93, pp. 171–185. A codicological description of the manuscript is found in Jan Willem Klein: "De status van de *Lancelotcompilatie*: handschrift, fragmenten en personen", in: *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandse Taal- en Letterkunde* 114 (1998), pp. 105–125.

⁴⁸ For the complicated compositional history of both the *Perchevael* and *Moriaen* in the *Lancelot Compilation*, see Jan Willem Klein: "Codicologie en de *Lancelotcompilatie*: de invoeging van de *Perchevael* en de *Moriaen*", in: *De Nieuwe Taalgids* 83 (1990), pp. 526–539.

⁴⁹ "Som die boeke doen ons weten, / Dat hi Perchevals sone was, / Ende som boeke seggen oec das, / Dat hi was Acglavaels soene: / Perchevals broder was die goene, / Ende so was hi Perchevals broder kint; / Want men wel ter waerheit vint, / Dat Perchevael ende mede Galaet / Beide bleven, dat wel verstaet, / Maget doet biden grale. / Om dit segc van Perchevale, / Dat sijn sone nine mach wesen; / Maer ic hebbe in boken gelesen, / Dat Moriaen was sijns broder sone". References are to *Roman van Moriaen*, ed. by Jan te Winkel. Groningen: Wolters, 1878.

dictions between the *Moriaen* and the text it precedes, the *Queeste vanden Grale*.⁵⁰ It also allows the birth of the new hero *Moriaen* to be positioned credibly in the chronological framework of the *Lanceloet* with which the *Compilation* opens, and in which, as the last lines of the prologue note, Acglovael set out with other knights to find Lancelot.⁵¹ In this journey Acglovael thus not only discovers his brother Perceval – as is also the case in the *Lancelot en prose* – but also a new member of his family echoing the case of Perceval's father Gahmuret, who in the Middle High German *Parzival* also fathered a child with a Moorish lady whom he abandoned during her pregnancy.⁵²

Scholars have, however, argued that the earlier tradition hinted at by the compiler was the original one, implying that the composer of the *Moriaen* did after all craft his text with Perceval as the father of *Moriaen* and, furthermore, positioned his narrative as a part of Perceval's story.⁵³ Evidence for this second point is found at the beginning of the romance, which details how a wounded knight presents himself at Arthur's court after having been defeated by a Welsh-speaking knight in red armour (ll. 205–210). Arthur's response to the wounded knight's appearance makes it apparent that the story is starting when Perceval is still searching for the Holy Grail and Bleeding Lance following the Ugly Damsel's visit at the court (ll. 221–248). When *Moriaen* eventually finds his father (and uncle) in the narrative, the latter is residing with a hermit (ll. 3498–3499), which is of

⁵⁰ Additionally, moving Perceval to the background in exchange for two minor, lesser-known characters allows for more light to be shone on *Moriaen*'s mentor in the story, Walewein (Gawain/Gauvain), who throughout the *Compilation* is afforded a privileged position by the compiler. See Frank Brandsma: "Translations and Adaptations of French Prose Romances" (fn. 47), p. 182, and for the positive depiction of Walewein in Dutch romances in general Bart Besamusca and Jessica Quinlan: "The Fringes of Arthurian Fiction", in: *Arthurian Literature* 29 (2012), pp. 191–242, pp. 198–206.

⁵¹ Other connections between the *Moriaen* and *Lancelot en prose* are discussed in Bart Besamusca: "The Influence of the *Lancelot en prose* on the Middle Dutch *Moriaen*", in: *Arturus Rex. Vol. II: Acta conventus Lovaniensis 1987*, ed. by Willy van Hoecke, Gilbert Tournoy and Werner Verbeke. Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1991, pp. 352–360.

⁵² On possible connections between the *Moriaen* and the *Parzival*, see Hanneke Paardekooper-Van Buuren: "Betrekkingen tussen de Middelnederlandse *Moriaen* en de *Parzival* van Wolfram von Eschenbach", in: *De Nieuwe Taalgids* 62 (1969), pp. 345–367, and David Wells: "The Middle Dutch *Moriaen*, Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Pazrival*, and Medieval Tradition", in: *Studia Neerlandica* 5 (1971), pp. 243–275.

⁵³ Various elements found in the *Moriaen* that suggest this original compositional plan are discussed in Max de Haan: "Een filologische vaderschapstest", in: *De Nieuwe Taalgids* 66 (1973), pp. 110–115, and Soetje Oppenhuis de Jong: "Agloval and the compiler: the variant story of Aglovael in the *Lancelot compilation*", in: *King Arthur in the Medieval Low Countries*, ed. by Geert Claassens and David Johnson. Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2000, pp. 113–124. Connections between *Perceval* and *Moriaen* are also discussed in Wilma Kossen: "Moriaen en de Graalheld", in: "In onse scole". *Opstellen over Middeleeuwse Letterkunde voor Prof. Dr. Margaretha H. Schenkeveld*. Amsterdam: Stichting Neerlandistiek VU, 1989, pp. 95–108; Bart Besamusca: *Walewein, Moriaen en de Ridder metter mouwen. Intertekstualiteit in drie Middelnederlandse Arturromans*. Hilversum: Verloren, 1993, pp. 85–122, and Roel Zemel: "Moriaen en Perceval in 'Waste Land'", in: *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandse Taal- en Letterkunde* 112 (1996), pp. 297–319.

course where Perceval was left in Chrétien's unfinished *Perceval* (ll. 6217–6518).⁵⁴ As such, it would seem the original *Moriaen* – also known as the “Flemish *Moriaen*” – was structured to continue the narrative of Chrétien's *Perceval* in a manner resembling that of the Old French Continuator. Unlike these French counterparts, however, the author of the *Moriaen* does not appear to have set out to close or even extend Chrétien's story arcs, but rather to reject them outright: Perceval's destiny would not be found in the Fisher King's castle or amongst mystical objects with religious connotations as the original text appeared to promise, but instead in the task of reuniting his broken family with the help of his son Moriaen.⁵⁵

(Re)viewing the prologue through this lens, it is tempting to see the last part of it as an amalgamation of both the original author's voice and that of the compiler:

*Ic wane die gene di Lancelote maecte
Dat hem in sijn dichten vaecte
Dat hi vergat ende achter liet
Van Moriane dat scone bediet.
Mi wondert wies si hen onderwinden
Die dichten wilt ende rimen vinden
Sine volbrachten daer af die tale.* (ll. 23–29)

(I believe that whoever made the story of Lancelot must have been dozing off during his writing and neglected to tell the beautiful story of Moriaen. I wonder why people busy themselves with writing and composing poems when they do not finish their tales.)

⁵⁴ We use Chrétien de Troyes: *Le Roman de Perceval ou le Conte du graal*, édition critique d'après tous les manuscrits, ed. by Keith Busby. Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1993. In the *Moriaen*, Gariet, Walewein's brother, explains Perceval went to the hermit after he learned of his mother's death and had given up on finding the lance and Grail (ll. 3054–3081). These lines can also be interpreted to mean Perceval went back to the hermitage a second time, as also occurs in the *Second Continuation*, which is the line taken in Kossen: “Moriaen en de Graalheld” (fn. 53), p. 103, and Marjolein Hogenbirk. “Dutch design: the *Romance of Moriaen* as an example of Middle Dutch Arthurian tradition”, in: *Dialog mit den Nachbarn. Mittelniederländische Literatur zwischen dem 12. und 16. Jahrhundert*, ed. by Bernd Bastert, Helmut Tervooren and Frank Willaert, *Sonderheft zur Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie* 130 (2011), pp. 127–140, p. 135.

⁵⁵ See also Jelmar Hugén and Ad Putter: “Closing Chrétien. The Continuation and Rewriting of the *Conte du Graal* in the Middle Dutch *Moriaen* and Middle English *Sir Perceval of Galles*”, in: *Arthurian Literature* 41 (2026), forthcoming. Other recent interpretations positioning the *Moriaen* as a correction or perfected version of Perceval's quest include Marjolein Hogenbirk: “Intertextuality”, in: *Handbook of Arthurian Romance: King Arthur's Court in Medieval European Literature*, ed. by Leah Tether and Johnny McFadyen. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017, pp. 182–198, pp. 192–193, and Simon Smith and Roel Zemel: “Indigenous Arthurian Romances: *Walewein*, *Moriaen*, *Ridder metter mouwen*, *Walewein ende Keye*, *Lanceloet en het hert met de witte voer*”, in: *The Arthur of the Low Countries: The Arthurian Legend in Dutch and Flemish Literature*, ed. by Bart Besamusca and Frank Brandsma. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2021, pp. 113–146, pp. 120–125.

Whereas the reference to ‘Lancelote’ here fits the material context of the *Lancelot Compilation*, from a narrative perspective the passage makes less sense: neither Acglavael nor Perceval have a particularly important role in the *Lanceloet* (or the *Lancelot en prose*), so it is not a natural leap for their son’s story to become central.⁵⁶ Furthermore, as stated earlier, the narrative of the *Moriaen* is distanced from that of the *Lanceloet* not just in chronological terms, but also in the very literal sense of the text as a whole being physically separated from the *Lanceloet* by the interjection of the *Perchevael*, rendering the *Moriaen* less obviously intrinsic to the *Lanceloet*. Perhaps most importantly, the verb ‘volbrachten’ clearly denotes the presence of an incomplete text, which does not apply to the *Lancelot en prose*.

A more plausible interpretation emerges if we embrace the notion that these lines were after all composed by the author of the original *Moriaen* and in fact initially read “die gene die *Percevale* maecte” (whoever made the [story of] *Perceval*), referring either to Chrétien, his Continuator or a Dutch translator of his unfinished *Perceval*. This would not only explain the use of “volbrachten”, since *Perceval* was left incomplete, but also the critical stance towards the unfinished source text, whereby the writer of the *Moriaen* actively positions his continuation as a correction of the events that transpired in *Perceval*. While it is perilous to speculate on emendations, it would not be inconceivable for the compiler to inscribe “*Lancelote*” for “*Percevale*”, given both the range of adjustments made in the *Moriaen* to align the narrative with that of the *Lancelot-Graal Cycle* and the compiler’s clear interventions in the first part of the prologue.

Seen in this light, the final lines of the prologue reveal a critical attitude towards unfinished source texts that is substantively distinct from the one found in *Reinaerts historie*. Here the continuator presents himself not as a devoted follower of the source text or as someone simply trying to improve upon what is already there, but rather as a vocal critic who openly denounces the deficiencies of the source text and criticises the work ethos of its maker. In one sense, the continuator presents the unfinished source text as a mere prequel to the “*scone bediet*” that he now positions as the most important part of the entire narrative: any form of reverence such as the Continuator showed for Chrétien is absent.⁵⁷ In another sense, this direct critical stance towards one’s predecessor could be read as another form of self-consciousness, where an emphasis on creative independence reflects an underlying uneasiness with Chrétien’s reputation and influence. This latter option gains traction when seen against a second Middle Dutch example from the same genre. The *Roman van Walewein*, produced around 1260 in Flanders, is not only one of the most important Dutch Arthurian romances, but also arguably the most well-known Dutch work of continuation. Unlike for the *Moriaen*, whose author is unknown to us, the pro-

⁵⁶ This argument becomes even more persuasive if we understood “Lancelote” as referring to the *Lancelot-Graal* cycle in its entirety.

⁵⁷ On this reverence, see Bruckner: *Chrétien Continued* (fn. 5), pp. 72–85.

logue and epilogue of the *Walewein* reveal the names of both the writer who started the romance and the one that completed it.⁵⁸

This first writer, named in l. 23 of the prologue as “*Penninc*”, created a story centred on the titular Arthurian hero, Walewein, who through a series of quests endeavoured to acquire a floating chessboard that appeared in front of King Arthur and his knights.⁵⁹ Halfway through the narrative, a thematic shift occurs, one which sees Walewein’s actions and decisions move away from the exchange quest and restoring order to Arthur’s realm through new episodes and encounters that test and emphasise Walewein’s devotion to his new lover, princess Ysabele.⁶⁰ When we arrive at the epilogue of the romance several thousand lines later, we learn this thematic transition occurred at the same time as an authorial one: a second author by the name of ‘*Pieter Vostaert*’ continued the work that Penninc had left incomplete.⁶¹ As Vostaert introduces himself, he comments on the work of his predecessor:

Penninc, die dichte desen bouc
 – So wiet hort, mine rouc –
Hine was niet wel bedocht
Hine hadde die jeeste ten ende brocht.
Pieter Vostaert maketse vort
So hi best mochte na die wort

⁵⁸ Though recent research has shown it to be likely that the anonymous author of the *Moriaen* also wrote two other romances, the *Lantsloot vander haghedochte* and *Karel ende Elegast*. On this, see Mike Kestemont: *Het gewicht van de auteur. Stylometische auteursherkenning in Middelnederlandse literatuur*. Ghent: Koninklijke Academie voor Nederlandse Taal- en Letterkunde, 2013, pp. 264–272.

⁵⁹ References are to *Dutch Romances*, Volume I: *Roman van Walewein*, ed. by David F. Johnson and Geert H.M. Claassens. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2000, which also has a modern English translation of the text which we cite later in this article. A summary of the complete story, which runs for roughly 11,200 lines, is found in *King Arthur in the Medieval Low Countries*, ed. by Geert H.M. Claassens and David F. Johnson. Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2000, pp. 188–193. On the *Walewein*, see also *Arthurian Literature XVII: Originality and Tradition in the Middle Dutch Roman van Walewein*, ed. by Bart Besamusca and Erik Kooper. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1999, and Simon Smith and Roel Zemel: “Indigenous Arthurian Romances: *Walewein*, *Moriaen*, *Ridder metter mouwen*, *Walewein ende Keye*, *Lanceloet en het hert met de witte voet*”, in: *The Arthur of the Low Countries. The Arthurian Legend in Dutch and Flemish Literature*, ed. by Bart Besamusca and Frank Brandsma. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2021, pp. 113–146, pp. 114–119.

⁶⁰ On this thematic shift, see Toos Verhage-Van den Berg: “Het onderschatte belang van de nevenepisoden in de *Walewein*”, in: *De Nieuwe Taalgids* 76 (1983), pp. 225–244, and Johan Winkelman: “Waleweins dilemma: Venus’ minne of Abrahams schoot. Liefdesperikelen in een Middelnederlandse Arturroman”, in: *Nederlandse Letterkunde* 9 (2004), pp. 326–360.

⁶¹ On this connection in particular, see Jelmar Hugén and Geert Warnar: “Pieter Vostaert en het paragraafteken. De *Roman van Walewein* als onvoltooid verhaal met een zelfstandige voortzetting”, in: *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandse Taal- en Letterkunde* 133.3 (2017), pp. 183–203.

*Die hi van Penninge vant bescreven:
 Het doctem scade, waert achter bleven
 Die jeeste, maer daert ende brect
 Ic wane mens lettelt eren spreect
 Den dichtre; oec verliest hi mede
 Bede pine ende arbeide
 Dat soe niet wert es ere keerse.* (ll. 11173–11185)

(Penninc, who composed this book – I do not care who hears it – was unwise not to have brought it to an end. Pieter Vostaert continued it as best he could according to the text that he found which Penninc left behind: it seemed to him a pity for it to be left unfinished, but seeing as how it lacked a conclusion, I believe little credit would have been accorded to the poet; what is more, without an ending all of his pains and efforts would not have been worth a cherry.)

Similar to the *Moriaen* prologue, here Vostaert openly criticises the work of his predecessor and his decision to leave his work unfinished, saying that it is only with his provision of an ending that the work is worth anything.⁶² The sting of these sentiments is arguably felt even more strongly in the *Walewein*, not only because, unlike for Chrétien in the *Moriaen*, Vostaert mentions his colleague by name, but also because the comments seem to stand in direct contradiction of the lines devoted to Penninc in the prologue when he is first introduced: there, it is specifically stated he had considered the content of his book for many sleepless nights in order to complete it (ll. 23–27).⁶³

In the introduction to his edition of the *Walewein*, G.A. van Es contends that the lines following l. 23 were not actually written by Penninc, but were rather a later addition by Vostaert – ironically creating yet another parallel with the *Moriaen*, whose original prologue was altered by the compiler of the *Lancelot Compilation*.⁶⁴ When compared with the epilogue, these lines in the prologue escalate the level of blame placed on Penninc, emphasising he had started the

⁶² The similarities between *Moriaen's* prologue and *Walewein's* epilogue are even more intriguing when we consider that the writer of the *Moriaen* made intertextual use of the *Walewein* in his romance. See Bart Besamusca: *Walewein, Moriaen en de Ridder metter mouwen* (fn. 59), pp. 100–110, for a discussion of these intertextual references.

⁶³ “Thus prayed Penninc, who made this book. And many a night he sat sleepless over it before he considered in his mind that he had completed the book upon which he had started”. Note also how both descriptions in the prologue and epilogue use the similar rhyming pair of “ghedochte / brochte”.

⁶⁴ *De jeeste van Walewein en het schaakbord van Penninc en Pieter Vostaert. Artur-epos uit het begin van de 13e eeuw*, ed. by G.A. van Es. 2 vols. Zwolle: W.E.J. Tjeenk Willink, 1957, II, p. 342. Further stylometric support for this statement is given in Karina van Dalen-Oskam and Joris van Zundert: “Delta for Middle Dutch: Author copyist distinction in *Walewein*”, in: *Literary and Linguistic Computing* 22 (2007), pp. 345–362. Johan Winkelman: “Biografie of retoriek? Enkele kanttekeningen bij de proloog van de *Walewein*”, in: *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandse Taal- en Letterkunde* 101 (1985), pp. 126–135, disputes some of the claims made by Van Es, showing certain elements to be rhetorical rather than biographical, but is less persuasive when he suggests that this cancels out the possibility of later hands altering elements or adding new lines to these parts.

work knowing precisely how to bring it to a fitting end yet has still refrained from doing so. Lastly, in light of the important role played by Vostaert in completing the work, referencing “*teghin*” (the beginning) in l. 27 also takes on a new meaning: where an audience on first reading might interpret this word as referring either to the prologue itself or to the opening of the romance, for those who returned to it after reading the epilogue it could actually refer to the entirety of Penninc’s contribution.

This notion of readers exploring different elements in continuations through multiple (re-)readings as a form of literary play may well have been the result intended by the composers, compilers and copyists of the *Walewein*, at least according to its transmission in its only complete manuscript, housed at the Leiden University Library as Ltk. 195.⁶⁵ Unlike the *Moriaen*, which informs the reader of a change in authorship through a prologue that interrupts the narrative, readers of the *Walewein* only learn of Vostaert’s involvement at the end of the romance, as is also the case for Godefroi in the *Charrette*. Vostaert’s sentiment that a text is only valuable when complete is thus reflected in its uniform, uninterrupted presentation. At the same time, however, the manuscript demarcates visually where the transition between Penninc’s unfinished text and Vostaert’s continuation occurred through a small, yet wholly unique paragraph marker (or paraphus) included adjacent to l. 7674 (see Fig. 1). Readers are even given help to spot this paratextual “arrow” since the epilogue explains roughly how many lines Vostaert added to the poem (ll. 11186–11187), inviting readers to return to the text to search for the exact moment of transition. The use of paratextual markers, including champies and pen-flourished/decorated initials, to signal authorial changeovers is frequently found in manuscripts of French continuation, perhaps suggesting that this practice was part of a recognised literary poetic of continuation that was in use in multiple linguistic domains.⁶⁶ These examples indicate we can speak not only of self-conscious continuators, who contrast their achievements with the unfinished work of their predecessors to the detriment of the latter, but also self-conscious scribes or book compilers, who through the presentation of these continuation works create different reading experiences not only for those who are experiencing the story for the first time, but also those who in subsequent performances or readings are invited to reinterpret parts of the narrative.

⁶⁵ There also exists a second, fragmentary manuscript (Ghent, University Library, MS 1619), dating and locating to roughly the same time and region as the Leiden manuscript. This manuscript only contains about 400 lines of the romance, all of which are part of Vostaert’s continuation, which may hint at the popularity of his work and an acceptance of his continuation as the authoritative conclusion to Penninc’s text.

⁶⁶ On this practice, see Lori Walters: “Appendix: Author Portraits and Textual Demarcation in Manuscripts of the *Romance of the Rose*”, in: *Rethinking the Romance of the Rose: Text, Image, Reception*, ed. by Kevin Brownlee and Sylvia Huot. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992, pp. 359–373; Tether: *The Continuations* (fn. 2), pp. 21–56, and Leah Tether: “Revisiting the Manuscripts” (fn. 17).

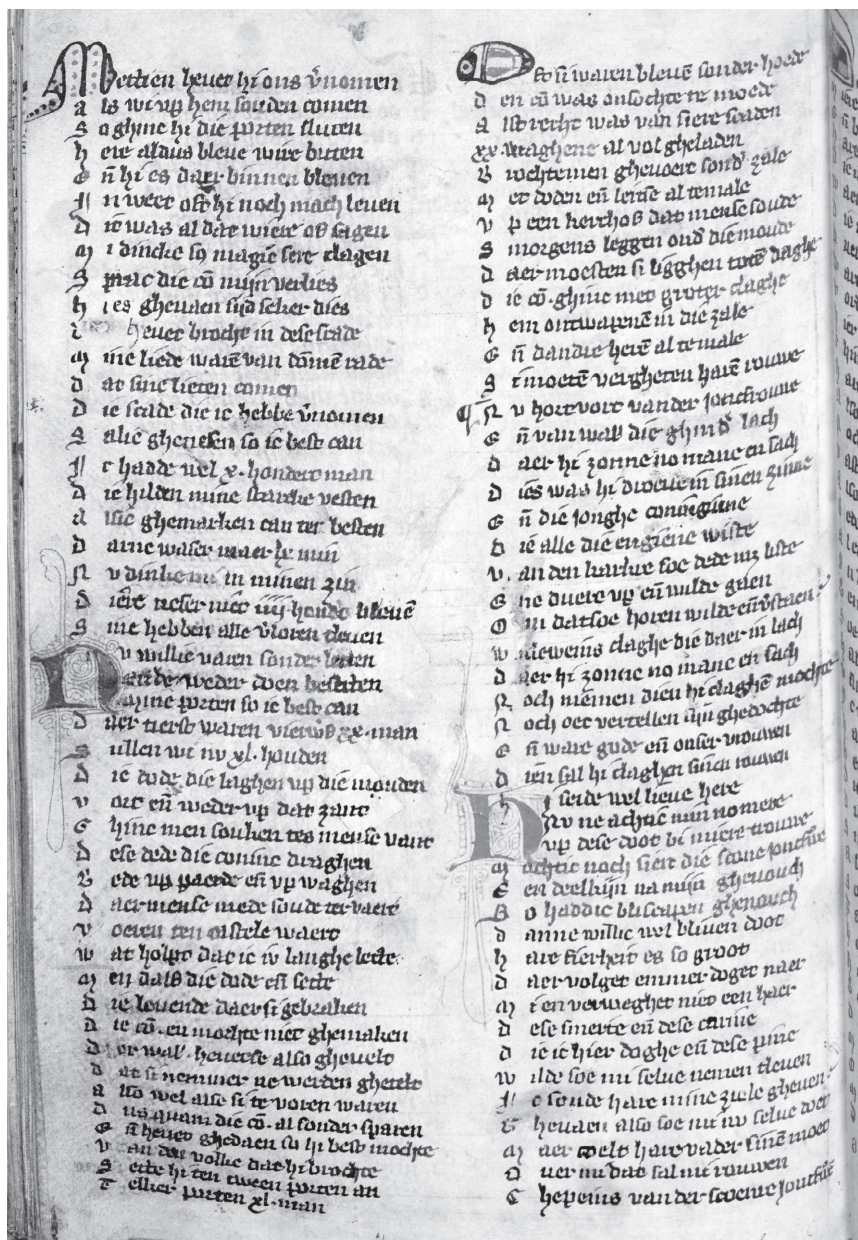


Fig. 1: Paragraph marker highlighting authorial changeover in *Walewein* (Leiden, University Library, Ltk. 195, fol. 162v). Source: Mart van Duijn, Curator, Western Manuscripts and Archives at the Leiden University Libraries.

The interplay of different reading and writing practices also matters for understanding the more complicated epilogue of the Middle Dutch *Parthonopeus van Bloys* (c. 1260), which is a faithful translation of the Old French *Partonopeu de Blois* (c. 1180) with an original continuation affixed to the end.⁶⁷ The French romance, which outlines the romantic tale of the young Partonopeu and the empress of Constantinople, Melior, was highly popular across Europe and has a complex transmission history involving multiple stages in which different writers altered sections of the text and/or added new episodes.⁶⁸ Most of the existing manuscripts conclude with an epilogue in which the author claims he has more to tell but will not do so because he fears it would bore the lady for whom he has written the work (ll. 10511–10656).⁶⁹ Among the stories he would be able to tell if she was willing to listen, however, are the history of Anselot (Partonopeu's squire), the love affair of Gaudin (Partonopeu's companion-in-arms) and the war with the invading sultan, Margaris. Continuators would pick up on some of these suggestions, each expanding the text at different points, with only one manuscript (MS T) containing a definitive ending

⁶⁷ The relationship between the Old French romance and the Dutch translation is discussed in Anne Reynders: *De Middelnederlandse Parthonopeus van Bloys en zijn Oudfranse origineel*. Leuven: Peeters, 2002. While earlier research, such as K. Sneyders de Vogel: "La suite du Parthénopée de Blois en la version hollandaise", in: *Revue des langues romanes* 48 (1905), pp. 5–29, believed the Dutch continuation must have been based on a now lost French continuation, more recent studies such as Reynders: *De Middelnederlandse Parthonopeus van Bloys* (fn. 67) and Viorica van der Roest: "De Middelnederlandse Parthonopeus van Bloys: een getrouwe bewerking met een eigenzinnig einde", in: *Voortgang* 22 (2004), pp. 7–30, have convincingly argued that the continuation was produced by the Dutch translator as a response to an incomplete French exemplar in which it was unclear how Margaris' advances would be resolved. Importantly, this situation would not have been unique, since there is evidence that Konrad von Würzburg's thirteenth-century Middle High German translation *Partonopier und Melior* was also adapted from an incomplete French exemplar. On this, see Albrecht Classen: "The Struggle against Fear as a Struggle for the Self in Konrad von Würzburg's *Partonopier und Melior*", in: *Partonopeus in Europe. An Old French Text and its Adaptations*, ed. by Catherine Hanley, Mario Longtin and Penny Eley, special issue of *Mediaevalia* 25.2 (2004), pp. 225–252, p. 228, and Seraina Plotke: "*Partonopier und Melior*", in: *Konrad von Würzburg: Ein Handbuch*, ed. by Markus Stock. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2022, pp. 283–305.

⁶⁸ For an overview, see Leon Perdue Smith: "The Manuscript Tradition of the *Partonopeus de Blois*", in: *Partonopeu de Blois*, ed. by Joseph Gildea. 2 vols. Villanova: Villanova University Press, 1970, II, pp. 1–34. On the relationship between these manuscripts, see also Penny Simons: "A Romance Revisited: Reopening the Question of the Manuscript Tradition of *Partonopeus de Blois*", in: *Romania* 115 (1997), pp. 368–405. Cf. also Penny Eley: *Partonopeus de Blois: Romance in the Making*. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2011, who identifies at least four adaptors of the French romance, of which two (a thirteenth-century *remanieur* and the fourteenth-century scribe of MS T) inserted new episodes (p. 179).

⁶⁹ References are to *Le Roman de Partonopeu de Blois*, ed. and trans. by Olivier Collet and Pierre-Marie Joris. Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 2005.

in which Melior successfully rejects Margaris' advances, causing him to retreat once and for all. Rather than follow these suggestions, however, the Dutch translator-continuator turned his attention to the character of Urraque (Dutch: Urake), Melior's sister.⁷⁰

The Middle Dutch *Partonopeus van Bloys*, much like its French source text, is transmitted both fragmentarily and in a relatively high number of copies. A multitude of fragments can be linked to five separate Middle Dutch manuscripts and one Ripuarian, all of which represent a single version of the story of which just under 9000 lines have survived.⁷¹ The unique continuation, which consists of just over 1000 lines, is only transmitted in one of these fragment collections (Jena, Universitätsbibliothek, MS Prov. f. 155) and turns the somewhat anticlimactic conclusion of the Old French ending in MS T into a humorous one. Rather than refusing Margaris' pleas, which are delivered by his messenger Lucian, in the Dutch text Melior invites Margaris to his court, where he mistakes Urake for her sister Melior, and falls madly in love with her instead of the woman he has been chasing throughout the romance. Seemingly charmed by the sultan, who in the original romance had already proven himself to be a handsome and talented warrior, Urake appears to respond to Margaris' love, and the latter thus converts to Christianity so that they can marry. The Dutch translator-continuator thus revitalises the role of Urake as Melior's aide not only to bring closure to the most prominent unfinished storyline (i.e., the war-threat of Margaris) but also to present Urake with a suitable partner to address a supposed *lacuna* in the French text.⁷²

As luck would have it, the fragments preserving this Dutch continuation also contain an epilogue, which adds useful nuance. In its first three lines, the

⁷⁰ There also exists an interest in Urraque outside the Dutch tradition. MS A of the French *Partonopeu de Blois* has a unique ending (possibly even the original ending of the romance) in which Urraque marries the French king Lohier and other versions have hinted at a possible romantic link between Urraque and Gaudin. In the thirteenth-century Old Norse translation of the romance, *Partalopa saga*, Uraekia marries Barbarus, the counterpart of Anselot who in the Old French continuation is paired with Euglar, the niece of the emperor of Rome. On this Norse translation, see Sif Ríkharðsdóttir: *Medieval Translations and Cultural Discourse: The Movement of Texts in England, France and Scandinavia*. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2014, pp. 113–151.

⁷¹ A detailed overview of the content of each fragment in relation to the Old French text is presented in Veerle Uyttersprot: "Parthonopeus van Bloys. Braek-liggend terrein voor wetenschappelijk onderzoek", in: *Cultuurhistorische caleidoscoop. Aangeboden aan prof. Dr. Willy L. Braekman*, ed. by Martine de Clercq en Christian de Backer. Ghent: Stichting Mens en Cultuur, 1992, pp. 507–528, pp. 523–526. On the fragments themselves, see Hans Kienhorst: *De handschriften van de Middelnederlandse ridderepiek. Een codicologische beschrijving*. 2 vols. Deventer: Sub Rosa, 1988.

⁷² See also Anne Reynders: "Mélior de Chef d'Oire: manipulatrice habile ou femme résignée? Les réécritures du *Partonopeu de Blois* et le rôle social de l'héroïne dans le roman propre", in: *Neophilologus* 94 (2010), pp. 407–419.

translator comments on the state of both his French source text and his own activities:

*Hier indet in walsche: vondics meere,
Ic dichtet in mijn lieves ere,
Diet mi wel verghelden sal.* (ll. 8401–8403)⁷³

(Here ends the story in French. Were I to find more of it, I would write it down in my poem for my love's honour, who would thank me well for it.)

These lines appear at first to be little more than a trope of conclusion that can be found in many different medieval romances, but given the context in which they were written, we might choose to interpret them literally, perhaps even as criticism. In that sense, they would operate as commentary on the incomplete transmission of *Partonopeu de Blois*, emphasising how the Dutch translator followed his source text faithfully and would have continued to do so if only it had an actual conclusion of its own. By referring to a lady patron or source of inspiration, the epilogue can also be read as a response to the Old French epilogue. While this French epilogue mentioned a lady patron getting bored of the story, in the Dutch translator's epilogue the opposite is true: his female audience appears not to be tiring and if anything wishes for more stories, which, unlike his French predecessor, he has managed to provide. Viewed through this lens, this epilogue both displays a desire to stay true to the source text and delivers a subtle critique of the incomplete state in which the French writers allowed the text to circulate across Europe.

* * *

We can reasonably assume that continuations were produced with an expectation of comparison due to the direct textual and material connection to their preceding texts, and that the level of that expectation was weightier than for other forms of rewriting that operate at a greater distance from their source texts. Our analysis of the commentaries left by continuators in prologues and epilogues not only evidences this burden, but also demonstrates its heft. All four of the Continuators of *Perceval* avoid direct comparison with Chrétien by either obscuring their own presence, drawing attention to their patrons rather than themselves, or positioning themselves vis-à-vis the other continuators rather than Chrétien. Similarly, the translator-continuator of the Dutch *Partonopeus van Blois* comments on the unfinished work of earlier adaptors of the *Partonopeu de Blois* in a veiled manner, while the author of *Reinaerts historie* ends his text addressing possible future continuators rather than voicing his apparent criticism of the original ending of his source text. Godefroi de Leigni, on the other hand, positions himself as an admiring continuator of his predecessor's unfinished works, which

⁷³ References are to *Ouddietsche fragmenten van den Parthonopeus van Blois*, ed. by Jean-Henri Bormans. Brussels: F. Hayez, 1871, which is a highly problematic edition of the text, but sadly the only one we currently have.

he aims to imitate stylistically and complete faithfully.⁷⁴ More critical voices are found among Jean de Meun, Pieter Vostaert and the anonymous author of the *Moriaen*, who each directly compete with their preceding texts, challenging their thematic plot structures and incomplete make-up to draw attention fully on their own crafts and authorial decisions. Notably, these authorial stances often found echoes in the material transmission of the texts: book planners generally blur the transitions between the unfinished source texts and continuations, aiming to produce a work that is experienced by readers as a complete, uniform text. Yet they also use various modes of demarcation either to prioritise the work of the initial writer (as in the case of illustrations in the *Perceval* manuscripts) or to invite readers to interact with the authorial relays of continuators (as in the case of the author portraits in some *Roman de la Rose* manuscripts or the paraphus in the complete manuscript of the *Roman van Walewein*).

By revisiting the comments of Old French writers on the task of continuation, we were able to establish a basis for examining Dutch works; this paved the way to discerning key parallels between the French and Dutch romances not only in how continuators approach their source texts, but also in how at ease they feel in undertaking the work. Based on such common trends and practices it is tempting to ask whether these elements operate within a framework of a shared poetics of continuation extending beyond French and Dutch to continuations found across the European romance tradition as a whole. Even just within the geographical scope of this study, it is notable that the French tradition includes other continuations, such as Wace's *Brut*,⁷⁵ while the Dutch tradition features fragments of continuations in the *chanson de geste* tradition, like the *Roman der Lorreinen*.⁷⁶ But many important examples of continuation can be found further afield, too: in German there is Gottfried von Straßburg's *Tristan*, completed twice by Heinrich von Freiberg and Ulrich von Türlheim,⁷⁷ while in Latin there is the *Chronica* by Frutolf von Michelsberg, which was continued numerous times by several writers.⁷⁸ It is beyond our remit to explore such texts for hints

⁷⁴ The same can be said for Lodewijk van Velthem's *Merlijn Continuation* (see note 34), who is described by Frits van Oostrom in the most recent literary history of medieval Dutch literature as an admirer of Jacob van Maerlant in whose footsteps he tried to follow in his continuation: Frits van Oostrom: *Wereld in woorden. Geschiedenis van de Nederlandse literatuur, 1300–1400*. Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2013, pp. 52–60.

⁷⁵ See Maud Becker's study of it, "Une édition de la Continuation du *Roman de Brut* de Wace, contenue dans le manuscrit British Library Cotton Vitellius A.X." (Unpublished PhD thesis, Aberystwyth University, 2018).

⁷⁶ See Ben van der Have: *Roman der Lorreinen: de fragmenten en het geheel*. Schiedam: Scriptum, 1990.

⁷⁷ See Peter Strohschneider: "Gotfrid-Fortsetzungen: Tristans Ende im 13. Jahrhundert und die Möglichkeiten nachklassischen Epik", in: *Deutsche Vierteljahresschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte* 65 (1991), pp. 70–98, and Jan-Dirk Müller: "Tristans Rückkehr: Zu den Fortsetzern Gottfrieds von Straßburg", in: *Festschrift Walter Haug und Burghart Wachinger*, ed. by Johannes Janota. Tübingen: De Gruyter, 1992, pp. 529–548.

⁷⁸ See Thomas J.H. McCarthy: *The Continuations of Frutolf of Michelsberg*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2018.

of self-conscious continuators here, but a concise proof of concept is provided by Chaucer's "Squire's Tale" from *The Canterbury Tales*.

The text of the "Squire's Tale" is unfinished, and this appears to be the result of a deliberate choice on Chaucer's part, at the very least because the Squire is interrupted by the next storyteller in line, the Franklin, who then proceeds to relate his own story.⁷⁹ Several manuscripts, though, seem to suggest an expectation among medieval readers that at some point, someone would extend this unfinished narrative. They do so by leaving space, sometimes several leaves' worth, at the end of the "Squire's Tale", as if anticipating, even pre-approving, a looming inevitability.⁸⁰ Other early readers, too, including the likes of Wynkyn de Worde and William Caxton, seem to believe that Chaucer intended an end, but no medieval author appears to have attempted to finish the story.⁸¹ In fact, it would not be until the early modern era that anyone would extend the Squire's story, with poets like Edmund Spenser and John Lane providing the continuations to the tale that they clearly thought were lacking, and others such as John Milton indicating in their works their conviction that an ending had been intended.⁸²

Rebecca Newby has argued cogently that Chaucer did indeed intend to leave the "Squire's Tale" incomplete, but not for the narrative reason suggested by the Franklin's interruption. Instead, she argues that Chaucer was experimenting with a mode of romance in which closure was not the point, rather it was playfulness, innovation and an appreciation for the aesthetic value of unfinishedness.⁸³ This, too, would point towards a poetics of continuation, this time signalled in the English romance tradition. Newby may be right, but whatever Chaucer intended,

⁷⁹ Scholars who see this juncture as an interruption include, but are not limited to, Lindsey M. Jones: "Chaucer's Anxiety of Poetic Craft: *The Squire's Tale*", in: *Style* 41 (2007), pp. 300–382, p. 302, and Takami Matsuda: "The Interruption of the 'Squire's Tale': The Disillusionment of Wonder in the *Canterbury Tales*", in: *Chaucer and English and American Literature: Essays Commemorating the Retirement of Professor Masatoshi Kawasaki*, ed. by Yuichiro Azuma, Kotaro Kawasaki and Koichi Kano. Tokyo: Kinseido, 2015, pp. 44–59.

⁸⁰ The manuscripts in question are London, British Library, MSS Harley 7335, Additional 35286, Harley 1758; Oxford, Bodleian Library, MSS Hatton Donat 1, Rawlinson Poetry 149 and Rawlinson Poetry 223. John M. Manly and Edith Rickert first identified these six manuscripts: *The Text of The Canterbury Tales*. 8 vols. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1940, I, p. 232. Rebecca Ellen Newby has since commented on the phenomenon in both her doctoral thesis "The Ends of Romance in Chrétien and Chaucer: Unresolved and Unfinished Texts in the Middle Ages" (Unpublished PhD thesis, Cardiff University, 2020), pp. 14–15, and a related article: "Romance with a Difference: *The Squire's Tale* and *Sir Thopas*", in: *The Chaucer Review* 58 (2023), pp. 60–88.

⁸¹ See John A. Burrow's discussion of this: "Poems Without Endings", in: *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 13 (1991), pp. 17–37, esp. p. 21.

⁸² Spenser continues the story in *The Faerie Queene* (1590), while Lane wrote his continuation in two versions which have survived in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MSS Douce 170 (written 1616) and Ashmole 53 (a revision, written 1630); John Milton makes his statement in his *Il Penseroso* (first composed c. 1631).

⁸³ Newby: "The Ends of Romance" (fn. 80), pp. 288–90.

audiences clearly still carried expectations about what should be done with unfinished texts, and these might most succinctly be summarised as extension at the least, completion if possible. The absence of a medieval continuator for the 'Squire's Tale,' despite the clear expectation (even welcoming) of one, suggests an unease among potential successors so significant that it deterred anyone from attempting to channel (or even appearing to channel) what Chaucer might have written. This example provides persuasive evidence that authors working in traditions beyond French and Dutch felt similarly burdened with the weight of expectation in the act of continuation; they felt constrained, and heavily under scrutiny because of the nuanced relationship with the original that they were expected (or feared they would be expected) to build. Even if unfinished texts could evidently be enjoyed on their own, the reality seems to have been that continuation was the expected outcome of unfinishedness. The fact that we find reflections on this reality and the mechanisms of literary continuation as a mode of rewriting across different linguistic traditions supports the notion of a shared poetic practice of continuation during the (later) Middle Ages. To deepen our understanding of this practice and the mobility of sources and ideas that underpin it, it is essential to pursue further exploration of literary continuation from a comparative, transnational perspective, as exemplified in this article. To that end, our study concludes by inviting further continuation.*

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