

PREFACE

Very few scholars would challenge the contention that Chrétien de Troyes played the primary role in the formation of medieval romance. Yet, that contention, which is almost one of the givens of the criticism of romance, has escaped close scrutiny for far too long. Just how and to what extent, in fact, did Chrétien influence the development of romance during the thirteenth century and beyond? In what direction was that influence felt: in themes, in structural or stylistic terms, in the very conception of romance? It is fair to say that the proper assessment of Chrétien's role was not possible until recently. Generations of scholars have assumed not simply that Chrétien exerted significant influence on later romancers, but also that his works both imposed a paradigm for romance and set a standard for his successors.

As recently as 1974, W. T. H. Jackson lamented the fact that "...the romances of Chrétien de Troyes have come to be regarded as the standard by which others should be judged." That is, other romances were all too often evaluated, at least implicitly, in terms of the extent to which they resembled Chrétien's, and condemnation was all but assured for those that differed significantly from his.

However, the critical climate has evolved significantly in the dozen years since Jackson's observation, and his essay itself (in *YFS*, 51 [1974], 12-25) reflects such an evolution. In recent years, critics have turned their attention more often and more productively to the Vulgate cycle, the Continuations of the *Perceval*, and all the individual works that constitute the romance canon; in the process, comparatively few studies have taken Chrétien's texts as obligatory models for later romances. Ironically, only when we can appreciate and evaluate romances as autonomous creations are we also in a position to draw appropriate conclusions about "intertextual" influences. We may now, at long last, have achieved the necessary distance and perspective to make the present study feasible.

A good number of authors and works explicitly acknowledge their debt to Chrétien de Troyes, and certain others leave no doubt about that debt when they make passing reference to him or borrow from his works. In at least one case, a poet's conspicuous denial that he was influenced by

Chrétien confirms that very influence: the author of *Hunbaut* protests too much that he is not plagiarizing from “les bons dis Crestien de Troies,”) 1. 187). The appendix to volume I of the present study lists romance references to Chrétien, but the essays offered here go well beyond such explicit references and provable influences. Implied or probable influence, and in a few cases a possible negative influence (as in the case of a poet who makes an apparent attempt to assert his originality), will engage the attention of the authors.

In an attempt to define romancers' debts to Chrétien, this first volume both develops the necessary background for such a study (considering, for example, Chrétien's contemporaries, his world, and the typology of Arthurian romance) and also deals with specific problems of theory or technique, such as the role of the narrator or the “shapes” of texts. The essays in the second volume study specific works or groups of works, in order to offer more concrete illustrations and assessments of Chrétien's role in shaping medieval romance.

The contributors have concentrated almost exclusively on French romance. That focus is not, of course, intended to imply that Chrétien's influence stops at the geographical or linguistic borders of France. Indeed, scholars have long recognized his influence on other literatures and have documented some aspects of that subject, particularly in regard to German. Our present emphasis on French romance simply acknowledges the immediacy of the Gallic debt to Chrétien and the need to define that debt carefully before dealing more systematically with other literatures. Nonetheless, volume II does include studies of English, Occitan, and Dutch romances, alongside considerations of a number of French texts.

In neither volume has an approach or method been imposed on contributors, who were free to develop the subject as they saw fit. Thus, some base their studies on a detailed analysis of a few texts, while others refer more briefly to a large number of romances. In the editors' view, uniformity of approach was neither essential nor necessarily desirable. What we sought instead was a broad and authoritative examination of various problems concerning the formation and direction of medieval romance. The nature of the subject in general has led to occasional overlaps between certain chapters, particularly in the early parts of volume I; we have let these stand, however, rather than introduce unwieldy cross-references.

By no means are we presenting these chapters as the definitive treatment of the subject. We do not claim to have had the final word, and we recognize in fact that such an immodest claim would be no less premature than presumptuous. Rather, the purpose of these essays is to

identify areas of concern and offer preliminary conclusions. We intend for them to point the way to further studies and thereby advance a process that, in our view, is certain to continue and expand. This is therefore an early step but, we hope, a substantial one in the assessment of the legacy of Chrétien de Troyes.

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Bibliographical Note:

Whilst we are acutely aware of the unsatisfactory state of Chrétien editions, we have for the sake of convenience decided to refer to most of his romances in the CFMA editions published in Paris by Champion (*Erec et Enide*, ed. M. Roques, 1952; *Cligés*, ed. A. Micha, 1957; *Lancelot (Le Chevalier de la charrete)*, ed. M. Roques, 1958; *Yvain (Le Chevalier au lion)*, ed. M. Roques, 1960. For the *Perceval*, we use the edition of William Roach (Geneva: Droz/Paris: Minard, 1959²). Titles of periodicals are generally abbreviated according to the list of MLA acronyms.