

PREFACE

In the late Twentieth Century, in the midst of what we could without injustice call a renaissance of medievalism, as new studies of medieval poets and poems appear every day, an examination of the narrative technique of Chrétien de Troyes scarcely requires justification. If Chrétien was not, as some have contended, the creator of the modern novel, he was nevertheless the most important creator of medieval romance and one of the most remarkable writers of the Middle Ages. While his works are not without flaws, he is a superb storyteller, a sensitive poet, a consummate craftsman; and it is that craft—Chrétien's technique and his technical achievement—which will occupy us in this volume.

But perhaps I can best describe the focus of this book by defining first what it is *not*. It is not, for example, a full introduction to Chrétien, his times, and his works. For reasons both practical and theoretical, I have tried to divorce *l'homme* from *l'œuvre*, the historical author from his literary art. It is the latter, the products of literary creation, which are my specific subject, and I shall deal with Chrétien as author only to the extent that he is obviously present as narrator in his poems.

Moreover, I have excluded from this study all philological considerations and questions of manuscript tradition and literary transmission; this exclusion is not intended to imply that such matters are not in themselves important, but only that, with certain obvious exceptions, they are not of consequence for my present emphases. Nor, finally, have I thought it necessary to give a detailed survey of past criticism or to provide a thorough bibliographical tool for readers. I have of course acknowledged all my conscious debts and sources and have offered a number of additional references to related material, but beyond that I have not sought to be exhaustive in my documentation. My focus has remained instead on the texts themselves and on certain critical problems they present. The following chapters, directed to students as much as to specialists, are thus intended as essays in literary criticism, as attempts to describe and analyze certain aspects of Chrétien's narrative technique.

But if I have intentionally excluded much from my study, I have nonetheless taken "narrative technique" in a rather broad sense; the term refers here to the ensemble of methods by which Chrétien assembles his works so as to confer on them the form, meaning, and artistic appeal he is seeking. Consequently, I treat certain subjects—such as thematic concerns and symbolism—that a narrower definition might well exclude but that I consider, for practical reasons, inseparable from Chrétien's narrative methods. Such matters, peripheral but pertinent to technique,

are presented in the first chapter, which is explicitly introductory and general, and in the second, itself relatively general. These two brief sections provide the foundation (themes, characterization, and Chrétien's fictional universe) for the more detailed and lengthy discussions to follow. Yet, the early chapters are not merely prefatory, for the precise way the quest functions, the development of characters, etc. are in fact part of the structural elaboration of the work, whereas—conversely—the formal progression is an important element in the elucidation of character or the revelation of meaning. Theme, form, and character constantly refer to one another. For example, the Grail Castle episode leads to Perceval's quest, illuminates his flawed character, excites our interest by the techniques of Chrétien's presentation, and serves as the central structural component of the Perceval sequence. Thus, that episode belongs by rights in all four major chapters. But despite the consequent problem of duplication, the organization of the present study by topic, dividing narrative procedures into their various elements and proceeding from the general to the particular, seems to me to provide the most effective access to the technical aspects of Chrétien's art.

Many of the critical debts I have incurred in the preparation of this volume will be made apparent by my references in the text itself; I am happy to acknowledge others here. First, to my students at the University of Kansas and at UCLA; they provided the first audience for many of these ideas, and in more than a few instances a question or a criticism from one of them led me to define further an approach or a conclusion. It is a pleasure to express my appreciation to them, but unfortunately, naming some of them would constitute an injustice to too many others.

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I am grateful to the editors of certain journals, who kindly permitted me to use some material which had previously appeared in print. Chapter II uses sections of "Yvain's Evolution and the Role of the Lion," *Romance Notes*, 12, No. 1 (1970), 198-202, and the following chapter includes "Narrative Point of View and the Problem of Erec's Motivation," *Kentucky Romance Quarterly*, 18, No. 4 (1971), 355-62. Chapter IV uses portions of several earlier studies: "Thematic Analogues in *Erec*," *L'Esprit Créateur*, 9, No. 4 (Winter 1969), 267-74; "Form and Pattern in *Cligés*," *Orbis Litterarum*, 25, No. 4 (1970), 307-13; "Thematic Structure in the *Charrette*," *L'Esprit Créateur*, 12, No. 1 (Spring 1972), 13-18; "Organic

Structure of Yvain's Expiation," *Romanic Review*, 61, No. 2 (April 1970), 79-84.

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