CONTENTS

Above: Jacob van Maerlant in a miniature in the *Spieghel Historiael*, c. 1325-1335. MS. KA XX. (Source: kb.nl)

1. Introduction

In an undated letter, J.R.R. Tolkien, one of my favourite authors, once wrote that he had a 'basic passion' for what he called 'heroic legend on the brink of fairy-tale and history'.[1] As someone with a similar taste in literature, I think that the story of King Arthur is exactly one of such a nature. In this thesis, I will investigate a small part of a century long process of what we might call a 'mythologization' of history. However, to Tolkien *mythopoeia* (or myth-making) was a conscious and aesthetically motivated choice, which testified not only to his very conscious notion of fiction, but also to his radical stance towards its (especially escapist) function. This was, of course, not the case with Jacob van Maerlant (c. 1235-1300), the Flemish poet and historian who is the main focus of this thesis. In Maerlant's case, we are dealing with an author who became an unwilling and involuntary (albeit not unsuspecting) accessory to the process of myth-making. How our medieval poet manoeuvred himself into such a peculiar position is what this thesis is all about.

When I first started working on the subject of Maerlant's *Grail-Merlin*[2] in February 2014, I became fascinated with Maerlant's attitude towards the matter of Britain. Especially in relation to the *Grail-Merlin*. Concerning this work, most Dutch scholars argued that Maerlant erroneously gave a historical treatment to what was basically a work of fiction. The most obvious argument for this is that Maerlant himself refers to this work in the prologue as a 'hoger historie' ('high history') in verse 14-19:

Desse historie van den grale	This history of the Grail
Dichte ick to eren hern Alabrechte,	I wrote in honour of my lord, Albrecht,
Den heer van vorne wal myt rechte;	lord of Voorne,
Want hoge lude myt hoger historie	because high men with high history
Manichfolden zulen er glorie	shall find much glory
Vnde korten dar mede er tijt.	and pass their time in an agreeable way.
(Sodmann1980, 115)	(My translation)[3]

But this passage might deceptively suggest that Maerlant's attitude towards the matter of Britain (or the *matière de Bretagne*, basically the stories concerning King Arthur) was unambiguous or unproblematic. During his career, Maerlant would work with the matter of Britain on three separate occasions: in the *Historie van den Grale/Merlijns Boeck* (c. 1261), in the *Torec* (c. 1262) and in the *Spiegel Historiael* (c. 1285). But in each case Maerlant's attitude towards this subject

---

[1] See Carpenter, H. (ed.) *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, London, HarperCollins, 2006, p. 144, letter 131.
[2] Dutch scholars tend to use different titles for this particular work. Van Vloten mostly refers to *Merlijns Boeck*, while Van Oostrom prefers *Historie van den Grale*. However, these correspond to two different parts of Robert de Boron's original. In this thesis I will discuss both parts, but to avoid confusion, when I refer to the story of Joseph of Arimathea, I will use the title *Historie van den Grale* and when I refer to the story of Merlin, I will use the title *Merlijns Boeck*. When I refer to the whole of Maerlant's work, that is *Historie van den Grale* and *Merlijns Boeck* together, I will refer simply to the '*Grail-Merlin*'.
[3] Because of differences in syntactic structure between Middle Dutch/Middle Low German and modern English, it has not always been possible to give an exact literal translation of verses. In these cases I have chosen to paraphrase these passages as best as I could in an effort to approximate their original meaning or simply to construct an intelligible sentence.

matter would be conspicuously different and when Maerlant revisited the story of Arthur for the last time in his world history of the *Spiegel Historiael* (more than twenty years after he finished his *Grail-Merlin*), his treatment of the subject had changed dramatically. By this time it was clear, even to Maerlant, that the story of King Arthur (or at the very least some versions of it) bordered on the brink of fairy-tale and history. But which events were actually historical and which were fictional? Maerlant must have been confronted with these questions quite a number of times. Because of this, Maerlant's attitudes, considerations, choices, arguments and/or apologies can be of great interest to those who want to develop a better understanding of the relation, function and status of fiction, historiography and literature in the 13th century.

In this thesis, I will focus on all three of his works which concern the matter of Britain. In chapter 2, I will start off by discussing the medieval notion of fiction. What are its principles and conventions? How is it presented? What structures and techniques do medieval authors use in their narratives and can these help us to identify fictional texts? Consequently, in chapter 3, I will consider these principles in Maerlant's explicitly fictional work: the chivalric romance of *Torec*. In chapter 4, I will discuss the *Historie van den Grale* and in chapter 5, *Merlijns Boeck*. I will discuss these, firstly, on the level of *presentation*, i.e. how the narrative is presented in relation to the *Torec* by looking at the narrative techniques and structures that were used . Can we find differences in his treatment of the subject matter between these works? And secondly, on the level of *selection*, i.e. how the Middle-Dutch text relates to the French originals and under which conditions alternative sources are preferred. What did Maerlant change? On the basis of which arguments did he make those changes? And how do these changes affect the text? In chapter 6, I will discuss the previous works in relation to the parts of Arthur's reign in Maerlant's *Spiegel Historiael* and one of his most important sources Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*. In doing so, I will not discuss Maerlant's work in a chronological order, but in a thematic order.

The main goal of this thesis is to investigate Maerlant's treatment of different sources concerning the matter of Britain. In doing so I hope to develop a better understanding of his attitude towards the subject matter and, more generally, the status of fiction and literature in the 13th century. But before we start, I would like to give a word of warning. To the modern mind, the wizard Merlin and the Holy Grail might seem like two of the most obvious fictional elements of the Arthurian legend. But to understand what is going on in Maerlant's works we have to let go of these preconceptions and try to immerse ourselves into a world where magic still exists, where the inexplicable is still commonplace and where supernatural and mysterious forces are a real part of everyday life, in other words: a truly medieval world.

2. The medieval notion of fiction

In order to consider the medieval notion of fiction, the general term 'fiction' should first be clarified. In essence, a work of fiction is a story which relates events that did not take place in reality. An easy example of this is *The Lord of the Rings*, which is a story that takes place in the imaginary lands of Middle-earth, featuring imaginary heroes and villains. Other examples can be more complicated, like Stendhal's *Le Rouge et le Noir,* which still presents the reader with imaginary characters, but places them onto the historical décor of the Bourbon Restoration of 19th century France. Several combinations of historic and imaginary aspects are obviously possible, but even though fiction can be inspired by real events, or use them in some way, a text only qualifies as fiction when the story has been deliberately and arbitrarily invented or modified by the author for artistic purposes.

Here we arrive at the most basic problem of this investigation: when an author or poet decides to use a historical background or character in a work of fiction, he does not always disclose the reasons for the modifications he felt were necessary. Nor is he obligated to emphasise the fact that he has made something up or that he changed a particular aspect of it. In fact, good fiction keeps up the pretention of being 'real' and appeals to what the English poet and literary critic S.T. Coleridge (1772-1834) called *the willing suspension of disbelief*. What this basically means is that when a reader is introduced to a character, like Frodo for instance, he does not immediately put the book away because the text offers no proof of the existence of Hobbits, but he accepts it (i.e. suspends his disbelief) in order to enjoy the story. It should be obvious that if the author would constantly interrupt his story to explain that what he was telling did not actually happen, it would not progress very smoothly, nor would it be very enjoyable. However, when an author uses a historical background or character and uses his artistic freedom to change the facts, without explicitly making note of it, how then is a reader to discern fact from fiction? The problem here, is that history, like fiction, links a number of events in a causal order by means of textual narration. Nowadays we have become very apt at recognizing fiction and already at a very early age we become familiar with its conventions and presentation through paratext. Paratext is a method used by publishers in which other material is presented to guide the reception of a text. This material can include cover art, typography, foot- and endnotes, front and back matter (prologue, epilogue, opening information, colophon), etcetera. Another important aspect of recognizing fiction is that nowadays the average person knows a lot more about the world he lives in. For us, facts can easily be checked in a variety of ways because information is easily accessible through extensive libraries, the internet and other media. But for a medieval poet or historian, to whom information about a faraway people or country was scarce, this would have been immensely difficult. After all, what was told about a certain topic in one dusty old tome could be just as true as what was told in the next.

If we accept this definition of fiction, i.e. a story that did not take place in reality and is primarily a product of imagination (with all its problematic aspects), we can only conclude that there must have been some kind of a notion of fiction in the Middle Ages. But according to the Swiss medievalist Walter Haug (1927-2008) it was the French poet Chrétien de Troyes (c. 1135-1183) who introduced a radically new and controversial concept of fiction with his famous *Erec et Enide* (c. 1170):

> Chrétien de Troyes' *Erec et Enide*, the first Arthurian romance, marks the beginning of an important new phase in Western literature. It represents the first vernacular romance of the Middle Ages which may be described as fictional. Moreover, not only is it fictional in its structure, but there is at the same time a high degree of awareness of this fictional status and the problems and attendant literary possibilities it entails. (Haug, 1997, 91)

Chrétien de Troyes took the history of king Arthur and used its world as a décor for his chivalric romances. In these romances, Haug argues, Chrétien did not merely try to create meaning through a representation of events on a diegetic level[4], but especially through a specific composition of narrative events which he called *conjointure*. In other words, meaning is created by a specific organization or structuring of events instead of just the events themselves.

So how can we recognize the narrative structure of these romances? According to Haug, Chrétien's romances always start and end at court. This court represents an ideal society that is then challenged by an outsider. This challenge is taken up by one of the knights and he sets out to defend the ideals of courtly society. Once this knight has left court, he finds himself in what is called the 'anti-world' where he is forced to demonstrate his superiority in all kinds of *avantures*. These avantures are essentially adventures in which the prowess and courtliness of the Arthurian hero are tested and which present the knight with an opportunity to display his virtue, strength, power, beauty, etcetera. After this first set of adventures a precarious equilibrium is reached and here the Arthurian knight is presented with a new crisis. This is a turning event in the story which divides it into two parts.[5] In *Erec et Enide,* this occurs when Erec, after marrying his beautiful Enide, devotes himself entirely to love. The crisis is then reached when it becomes clear to Erec that he has lost much of his prestige because his courtiers think that he has grown soft now that he only spends time caressing his wife. Unlike the first challenge, which was posed by an outsider, the second cycle starts with an inner crisis. Again, Erec has to leave court to prove his worth:

> He sets out once more in search of an avanture. Enide is obliged to ride on ahead in silence, a decoy for robbers and adventurers. The couple's path takes them through a double series of avantures, each with three stages which mirror each other in a striking fashion. (Haug 1997, 94)

---

[4] For theoretical terms in literary fiction I will use Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan's *Narrative Fiction*.
[5] Because of this bipartite structure *conjointure* is also referred to as the *Doppelwegstruktur.*

These double series of avantures are designed to invite comparison by the audience. In these adventures, Erec demonstrates again his competence in battle and finds a new appreciation for his wife. Now, the equilibrium is again found, but it is not precarious anymore, but harmonious.

Through this narrative structuring the two parts of the romance are thus divided thematically. In the first part, Erec proves his competence in chivalric action and that he is brave and valorous. The theme of the second part is *eros* and finding the correct balance between love and social responsibility. The story ends with a lavish celebration at King Arthur's court. Haug points out that these Arthurian festivities have an unmistakeable Utopian element to them and that the euphoria can be shared by the audience because the story has demonstrated that chivalry is superior; the Arthurian ideal has been tested and prevailed.

These Arthurian romances became immensely popular and would spread like wildfire through the courts of medieval Europe. The literary novelty in itself granted medieval poets quite a bit of artistic freedom in creating such stories:

> The discovery of the new fictional approach made possible by the 'matière de Bretagne' marks a decisive new stage in literary history. Although fiction as a distinct literary category was already recognized and described in ancient Greece, the classical notion of fiction was seen from a completely different perspective and accordingly received quite different theoretical treatment. (Haug, 1997, 105)

The idea of fiction, as a story that had not actually happened, was of course a phenomenon which was already well known before Chrétien. After all, there were many stories and plays in Classical Antiquity which were not based on real events (consider Petronius' *Satyricon*, for example). However, during the Classical period there were a lot of philosophical objections to fiction. In Plato's view, for example, the material world was a reflection of the world of Ideas, which was the real world. Literature, however, was a reflection of the material world as it was experienced by man and in that capacity it was merely a reflection of a reflection – something that could not be further from the truth and therefore all poets were liars. Aristotle had a lighter approach to the concept of fiction. He posed that 'poetry had a truth of its own – the truth of the probable' (Haug, 1997, 105). But according to Haug, it was exactly in this respect that Chrétien's notion of fiction deviated from that of Aristotle:

> The medieval notion of fiction, as represented in Arthurian romance, is however precisely not based on the idea of the probable; on the contrary, this new category of fiction finds its true identity in free interplay with the *im*probable. Its truth is not that something could really be as the poet invents it; rather, experience of truth is here transposed onto a fictional level and presented as a kind of experiment, so that the very improbability of the plot leads the listener to seek the meaning all the more eagerly. (Haug, 1997, 105-6)

Though Chrétien did not have the conceptual terminology to accurately phrase all these avant-garde ideas on fiction, he did give the reader certain instructions in his prologues on how to deal with the text. He also claimed that what he did in *Erec et Enide* was radically different from the crude handling of the matter of Britain by the lowly minstrels before him:

> According to Chrétien, it is the wandering minstrels who have sold short the subjects of the *matière de Bretagne* which he now wishes to take up. The self-confidence of the scholar-poet, with his awareness of the potential of the written word, is demonstrated by the conclusion of his prologue, where Chrétien prophesies that his poem will be remembered until the end of time! This appears all the more bold in that he just claimed that the material he was presenting would be familiar to many. It is, therefore, crucial that the subject matter be completely transformed by the *conjointure*; only thus can the author hope to offer something outstanding and new to his audience. In terms of the development of poetic theory, then, the transition from an oral to a written tradition opens up important new dimensions for literature; what is more, Chrétien himself must have been highly conscious of the significant threshold in literary history that he was crossing in setting down the Arthurian material in written form. (Haug, 1997, 103)

The matter of Britain, which had mostly been passed down in an oral tradition by bards and minstrels, had now been textualized in Chrétien's fictional romances. In the above, we have seen how this textualization allowed for a much more complicated story, with an intricate structuring of events. The written form of the Arthurian romances allowed the author to break away from the formulaic structure that was characteristic of stories in the oral tradition (and often remained recognizable even after such a story had been codified[6]).

While the verse romances would generally still be read aloud for an audience, the later prose romances were intended to be read in silence (Chase 1992, xiv) and it was mainly in these prose romances that the literary device of *entrelacement* would be developed. One of the earliest examples of *entrelacement* can be found in *La conquête de Constantinople* (c. 1213), which was a historical account by the knight and historian Geoffrey of Villehardouin on the Fourth Crusade (a work which also happens to be the oldest example of French prose). In this work Villehardouin keeps following *all* the crusaders, even after they have split up into several groups and travel to different locations. In this history, he switches between the different groups at their different locations and describes the events that take place there. Through this presentation of events it is suggested that they take place at the same time. In other words, *entrelacement* is created by the interlacing of several narratives which take place more or less simultaneously. However, according to Frank Brandsma we can also find a similar technique in Chrétien's *Le Conte du Graal* (c. 1180), where the narrative switches between the two Arthurian heroes Perceval and Gauvain. But Brandsma points out that the intended effect was not so much to show that the

---

[6] Medieval examples of such a formulaic structure can, for example, be found in *La Chanson de Roland*.

events took place simultaneously, as it was to create a thematic contrast between the traditional hero Gauvain and the new Grail knight Perceval. (Brandsma 2009, 6)

So far I have discussed the nature of narrative texts within a dichotomy of history and literature. However, it should be noted that such a division is not always applicable when dealing with medieval texts. The fact that we can find the narrative structuring through *entrelacement* in both history and literature illustrates all the more the similarities they have through the medium they share.

> o   Summary

In this chapter, the concept of fiction was explored as a phenomenon in itself (namely: a story that did not take place in reality) and its role and development in literary history in the works of Chrétien de Troyes and the vernacular prose romances. The main question was if the presence of literary devices can help us to identify a text as fictional. In the case of *conjointure* this is very likely. When events are structured in such an improbable and artificial way as in *Erec et Enide*, it should be clear that the author is trying to create meaning through an artistic composition of events. But the use of *conjointure* in historiography would severely distort the causality of a history and so would be wholly unfit to give an accurate chronological representation of real events. This, however, is not the case with *entrelacement*. Here a restructuring of events is also possible but not necessary, and it is primarily a technique which is used to suggest a simultaneousness of events. When used in literary fiction, however, *entrelacement* seems to have a thematic function (as we have seen with *Le Conte du Graal*) whereas in history (as we have seen with *La conquête de Constantinople*) this function is mainly practical.

Above: A page from the *Lancelot* compilation. Brabant, c. 1320. - 129 A 10, fol. 201r (Source: kb.nl)

3. *Torec* and the Arthurian romance

In the previous chapter I have considered two literary devices which are common in Arthurian romances. It should be noted, however, that *conjointure* and *entrelacement* only deal with the narrative properties of a text on a structural level. Though these will proof very useful in the further investigation of Maerlant's work, they are not the only means by which we can find out more about the properties of a narrative text.

In an article published in 2007, Frank Brandsma investigated the use of narrative agents in French, German and Dutch Arthurian romances. For this research he used concepts which were developed in modern narratology to identify the narrative agents in a number of texts. For the following investigation of *Torec*, I will use a similar method. Like Brandsma, I will use several concepts in Shlomoth Rimmon-Kenan's *Narrative Fiction* in order to dissect the text and identify a number of narrative properties of the *Torec*. In my opinion, this kind of research is valid, because even though the terminology of Rimmon-Kenan's narratology obviously did not exist in medieval poetics, the literary phenomena they describe and identify did exist in medieval literature. In this respect, I completely agree with Brandsma when he says that 'modern narratology works for medieval texts'. (Brandsma 2007, 134)

Before we start I would like to emphasise that I am not trying to prove that the *Torec* is a work of fiction, this would be an unnecessary distraction as it is widely considered to be a work of such a nature. Instead, it will be much more interesting to compare the *Torec*'s narrative properties with that of other works in Maerlant oeuvre which also deal with the matter of Britain. In this chapter, I will therefore consider the narrator, the speech presentation, the characterization of different personae and the narrative structures of the *Torec*.

3.1 The history of the text

Before taking a closer look at the narrative properties of the *Torec*, it is important to consider the history of the text itself. According to Bart Besamusca, the *Torec* is a highly exceptional work in Arthurian literature (Besamusca 2003, 127). The only version of the story that survived can be found in the Middle Dutch *Lancelot* compilation, however, the work is generally considered to be a French work in origin, as the inventory of the library of Charles VI (1380-1422) makes mention of a lost romance named *Torrez, le chevalier au cercle d'or*. The only way we know that Maerlant wrote the *Torec* is because he is credited as the author in the prologue of his *Historie van Troyen*:

Hier toe voren dichten hy Merlyn	Before this he [Maerlant] wrote Merlin,
Ende Allexander uytten Latyn,	and Alexander from Latin,
Toerecke ende dien Sompniarys,	Torec and the Sompniarys,

| Ende den cortten Lapidarys. | and the short Lapidarys. |
| (Verdam 1873, 44) | (My translation) |

Though we know that Maerlant translated the French *Torrez*, the fact that the only version of this chivalric romance survived in a compilation does not make matters easier. The Middle Dutch *Lancelot* compilation is a collection of ten romances which were compiled approximately between 1320 and 1325. (Besamusca 2003, 8) These narratives were edited heavily by the compiler (supposedly Lodewijk van Velthem) in an effort to construct one great Arthurian narrative. In this chapter I will take this matter into consideration, as the copyists and compiler of the *Lancelot* compilation might have had a considerable influence on the story*.*

3.2 The narrative structure of the *Torec*

The romance of *Torec* is basically a quest: Torec's quest for the precious and magical diadem or circlet which was stolen from his grandmother Mariole by the evil knight Bruant vanden Montangen. The kingdom falls after the loss of the diadem and Mariole puts her daughter (with a letter in which she explains everything that has happened) into a barrel which is then thrown into the sea. The barrel finds its way to the castle of Ydor vander Baser Rivire where the child is baptized and named Tristoise. At Ydor's court Tristoise grows into a beautiful woman. He decides to marry the girl and she bears him a son which is named Torec. On his twentieth birthday, Torec asks his father Ydor to dub him a knight. Then Tristoise decides to tell her son what has happened to their family and how they lost their kingdom and their precious heirloom. When Torec has heard his mother's tale, he decides to go out to retrieve the diadem and restore his families honour.

The start of the romance, as I have described above, already reveals a number of similarities with the structure of the Arthurian romances as Walter Haug described. First of all, we are presented with the successful court of Torec's grandparents, but after the loss of the magical diadem the court is challenged by an outsider and falls into the hands of their enemy: Bruant vanden Montangen. Even though there is a hiatus of an entire generation between the challenge of the court and the acceptance of the challenge by the newly dubbed knight Torec, the basics remain the same.

Following his departure, Torec finds himself quickly in a hostile environment where he is challenged by giants, lions and several knights. Here we are reminded of the avantures which take place in the anti-world and which provide the protagonist with plenty of opportunities to demonstrate his chivalry, battle prowess and virtues. Amongst the knights that Torec defeats there is one named Melions. After the fight, Torec befriends Melions and from this point on the reader is presented with an interlaced narrative:

> From a narratological point of view the combination of narrative threads is well done: whenever Torec enters a durative phase (the first time he is incarcerated, the second time he is convalescing) a switch is made to Melions. This is exactly the way switches of narrative threads are achieved in *Lancelot*. In this way *Torec* is given a simple interlace structure in keeping with the other romances of the *Lancelot* Compilation. (Besamusca 2007, 133)

Based on Brandsma's treatment of *entrelacement* (as discussed on page 7) it is clear that *entrelacement* is not exclusive to literary fiction. But when it is used in fiction it usually has a thematic function (as we discussed with *Le Conte du Graal*). According to Besamusca, this is also the case in the *Torec* and the *entrelacement* is mainly used to demonstrate the 'objectionable love lacking self-control with a destructive effect (as demonstrated by the damsel of Montesclare and Raguel) on the one hand, courtly love with an ennobling and inspiring effect (as practiced by Melions and Torec) on the other.' (Besamusca 2007, 134) In this way, there is most definitely an artificial structuring of events and the *entrelacement* could thus be used as a good example of the fictional nature of *Torec*. But unfortunately we have to discard this example. After all, the goal of this thesis is to consider Maerlant's attitude towards the matter of Britain, but it is very likely that he never wrote the Melions thread:

> The narrative thread about Melions is taken up awkwardly. A few days after Torec has met Melions, the latter's lover appears to have died quite suddenly, conveniently leaving Melions free to set out in search of adventure. This clumsy twist of events is a strong indication that the compiler interpolated Melion's adventure into Maerlant's *Torec*. (Besamusca 2007, 133)

Because this thesis is about Maerlant's attitude towards the matter of Britain, and the interlaced narrative is probably a creation of the *Lancelot* compiler, I will now leave the interlace structure for what it is and return to the overall structuring of events in the *Torec*.

After Torec defeats Bruant in single combat, it appears that he has become wounded by Bruant's poisoned blade. Bruant's courtiers tell Torec that the only one who can cure him of the poison is Bruant's sister-in-law who is also in possession of the diadem. When Torec hears them describing the girl he immediately falls in love with her, but they tell Torec that she has sworn only to marry the man who is able to defeat all the knights of the Round Table. This passage is the turning event in the *Torec* which divides the romance into two parts. Like the turning event in *Erec et Enide*, Torec is now faced with an inner crisis: He has proven himself a capable warrior by avenging his forebears and defeating their enemy, Bruant vanden Montangen. But the quest is not complete as long as the diadem is still in possession of Bruant's sister-in-law. Torec has now proven his competence in chivalric action and that he is a valorous knight, but now that he is about to regain the lands of his forefathers, the question arises whether he can also be a good ruler and king. The quest for the diadem can thus be seen as a metaphor: the crown has to be

earned. After leaving Druant, Torec arrives at the court of king Arthur where he defends the rights of a lady who was dispossessed of her estates (v. 1951-1961):

Torec beette ende ginc int sale	Torec dismounted and went into the hall
Daer hi den coninc Arture vant.	where he found King Artur.
Hi groette den coninc daer te hant	He greeted the king without delay
Ende seide: "Here, bi mire trouwen,	and said, "My lord, by my faith,
Dat men ontwies tere joncfrouwen	that a damsel should be stripped of her lands,
Al ne quam si tharen dage niet,	though she did not appear on her day in court,
Dat es selden igeren dage gesciet.	this has seldom happened anywhere.
Ende die dit wiesde en seide niet wale."	And whoever spoke this verdict did not speak well."
Doe seiden si alle in die sale	Then everyone in the hall said
Dat si tfonesse wiesden alsoe	that they had spoken the verdict
Ende dat oec bliven sal daer toe.	And, what is more, that it would remain in effect.
(Johnson 2003, 644)	(Ibid, 645)

Torec takes up the cause of a damsel who, even though she never neglected her feudal duties to her liege, lost her lands and is unable to defend herself. In this way, Torec is presented as one who is not only capable of independent jurisprudence, but also as someone with a well-developed sense of justice: Characteristics which are both desirable of a good king.

Another avanture, which seems to be designed to portray Torec as a competent ruler, is when he sails on the ship-of-adventure to the chamber-of-wisdom. Once there, he participates in a number of discussions on a variety of topics, such as temperance, honour, poverty, love, but most of all, on how to be a just ruler. Consider, for example, this monologue (v. 2416-2429):

Een oude man sprac ende wilse leren:	One of the elders spoke, wishing to teach them,
"Het scade vanden lansheren:	"It is a disgrace among the princes:
Als een here ter quaetheit keert,	if one of them turns to evil,
Al een lantvolc es onteert	You may be sure of this:
Seker sijt von dese sake:	if the head is ailing,
Alse dat hoeft es tongemake,	then all the limbs will suffer.
So sijn alle di lede swaer.	And I know as well for the truth
Ende oec wetic over waer,	that the greater always teach the lesser,
Dattie grote di clene leren,	whether for ill or good.
Gaet te scanden, gaet te eren.	If the rulers behave cruelly
Als lansheren sijn van fellen doene,	their barons show less shame still,
Scamens hen te min di barone,	otherwise they would not get away with it.
Dat irst tquaet comt vanden meesten.	Evil originates with the most powerful.
(Johnson 2003, 664)	(Ibid, 665)

According to Frits van Oostrom, the *Torec*, as a work of fiction is exceptional within Maerlant's oeuvre in that it almost exclusively consists of historical works. In this respect, the *Torec* might seem a little out of place with its playful and surreal adventures. But Van Oostrom 'argued that

the work was part of a literary, didactic programme aimed at preparing a group of young noblemen on the island of Voorne, among whom the future count Florence V, for their later duties.' (Besamusca 2007, 132) The passage I have quoted above illustrates this and explains why Van Oostrom called the *Torec* a 'romance for princes':

> Met name waar Torec getuige is van een uitvoerig leergesprek dat aan de monoloog van Aristoteles in *Alexanders Geesten* herinnert, herkent men Maerlants toon. Maar ook die driehonderd verzen kunnen niet verhinderen dat men zich afvraagt waarom de intellectuele dichter, met zijn afkeer van historische fictie, uitgerekend op dit Franse verhaal het oog heeft laten vallen. Men kan wat dat betreft wel meevoelen met sommige vroegere geleerden die hem het auteurschap van dit vreemde werk vlakaf ontzegden, dan wel – ultieme rationalisering bij gebrek aan beter – het enkel wensten te aanvaarden indien het dan Jacob van Maerlants vroegste werk zou zijn, en dus een jeugdzonde.[7] (Van Oostrom, 1996, 130)

Because of this didactic programme, it has been suggested that the passage in the chamber-of-wisdom might have been an addition by Maerlant and was initially not part of the French *Torrez*. (Besamusca 2007, 132) However, both the narrative structuring (*conjointure*) of the Arthurian romances, which demands a thematic divide of the story into two parts, as well as the subtitle '*le chevalier au cercle d'or'* (which emphasises the second theme of the romance) seem to imply that Torec's portrayal as a competent ruler was an integral part of the original romance. Also, the fact that Maerlant translated the *Grail-Merlin* as well as the *Torec* from the French around the same period might suggest that they were acquired from the same source and with the same purpose (i.e. presenting the young noblemen at Voorne with a didactic programme).

Be that as it may, after the chamber-of-wisdom Torec is cast in the role of a ruler twice more. Firstly, when he acquires the diadem from Bruant's sister-in-law (Miraude). In order to marry the girl, he takes up her challenge to defeat all the knights of the Round Table and with a little help from Gawain he succeeds. But in the end Torec is defeated by one man: King Arthur. In other words, it takes a king to defeat a king.

The last example I would like to discuss takes place at the very end of the story and reminds us of the artificial and improbable structure of events that is characteristic of the Arthurian romances. After having proven himself a capable warrior and a competent ruler, the familiar Arthurian festivities commence and the entire court joins in to celebrate the Arthurian ideal which is embodied by its champion: Torec. But right after the festivities, Torec's parents suddenly die, leaving their now tested and capable son with his own kingdom to rule.

---

[7] Especially where Torec witnesses a lengthy disputation which reminds us of Aristotle's monologue in *Alexander's Deeds*, we recognize Maerlant's tone. But even these three hundred verses cannot prevent that one wonders why this intellectual poet, with his disapproval of historical fiction, would choose this particular French story. In this respect it is hardly surprising that some older scholars denied blatantly his authorship of this strange work, or – rationalizing it because there was no alternative explanation – only wished to accept it if it were placed at the very start of his literary career, and thus being able to explain it as a 'sin of youth'. (my translation)

3.3 The narrative techniques of the Torec

Now that we have discussed the narrative structure of the *Torec*, I will consider some of the narrative techniques that were used. To start off, I will take a look at how the narrative agent is presented in the text. Let's consider a few examples: The romance of *Torec* is divided into 15 parts, at the end of each part the narrator refers to himself as 'ic' or 'I' (129-132):

Nu latic bliven hieraf di tale.	Now I shall leave off this story.
Ic salre hier na af spreken wale,	I shall certainly return to it,
Maer ic moet u segcen ere	but first I must tell you
Van hare di bleef in groten sere.	about the lady who was left in great sorrow.
(Johnson 2007, 566)	(Ibid, 567)

Similar examples as the one I have given above, can be found at the end of each part: 2:271, 3:375, 4:753, 5:1000, 6:1220, 7:1614, 8:1902, 9:2105, 10:2243, 11:2810, 12:3007, 13:3458, 14:3581, 15:3855. From these examples it is evident that we are dealing with a hetero- and extradiegetic narrator, i.e. a narrator who remains anonymous and outside of the events and time of the story. When the narrator refers to itself as 'ic' or 'I', it only does so in the capacity of a narrative agent. In other words, it is not presented as a character in the story nor does it refer to a person of flesh and blood[8], it is merely a guide, designed to lead its readers/audience through the story. Moreover, the fact that we are not dealing with a person is emphasised in the way that every part of the romance starts (1.1-4):

Die aventure doet ons cont,	The story tells us now
Dat in deser selver stont	that at this very time
Een coninc was, ende hiet Briant,	there was a king named Briant,
Ende was coninc int Rode Eylant	who was king of the Red Island.
(Johnson 2007, 562)	(Ibid, 563)

As we can see, it is 'die aventure'[9] who tells the reader the story, not a breathing, living person. Every part of the Torec starts in this fashion and in every first line a reference is made to 'die aventure/daventure'. In his article on the degrees of perceptibility in Arthurian romances Brandsma discussed the same phenomenon:

> Narratologically, 'li contes' can be defined as an extradiegetic, heterodiegetic, and impersonal narrator. Extradiegetic, because it presents the diegesis (the tale) to the listeners/readers; heterodiegetic, because 'li contes' itself does not play a role as a character in the diegesis; impersonal, because as narrative agent 'li contes' does not take the form of an 'I' or 'we'. (Brandsma 2007, 122)

---

[8] Rimmon-Kenan makes a very clear distinction between the author and the narrator.
[9] Literally 'the adventure' and not 'the story' as it is presented in Johnson's translation.

As Brandsma points out, 'li contes' (the tale) is an impersonal narrator, much like the Middle Dutch 'daventure'. But we have also seen how the narrator in the *Torec* refers to itself as the personal 'ic' or 'I'. According to Brandsma the impersonal narrator was developed later, mostly in vernacular prose romances. He explains the combination of these two forms which is used in the *Torec* as a by-product of translation:

> Since they [the ic's and I's, red.] almost exclusively are found in rhyming position, the versivication may be the explanation of this phenomenon. The translator used the basic toolkit of the verse maker to come up with rhymes to fill out the lines. Some of these standard phrases contain the first-person narrator common to most verse romances and thus the 'I' slipped in. (Brandsma 2007, 132)

The narrator can be of great importance to this investigation and we have now seen how it functions in one of Maerlant's fictional texts. The question is whether we will we find a similar type of narrator in his historical works. And if not, will this tell us something about the differences in the presentation between his fictional and historical narratives? And, if so, what does that tell us about Maerlant's attitude towards the matter of Britain?

Another aspect of the text that should be considered is speech representation. In the *Torec*, speech representation seems to take place mainly in three different forms. One of the most common types is direct discourse[10], which is a literal textual representation of what is said by characters. Furthermore, there are a lot of pure diegetic summaries and less 'purely' diegetic summaries, which give a short account of a speech event, without representing it literally. Again this can pose some interesting questions. As history tends to focus more on events than on dialogue, it will be interesting to see if Maerlant uses less direct discourse in his historic works.

The last narratalogical aspect that will be considered here is the characterization of different personae in the *Torec.* Generally, this is done through direct definition. In other words, the narrator explicitly reveals to us the nature of a given character, mainly through the use of adjectives. Aside from direct definition we can also find examples of characterization through analogous names: Tristoise as the name of Torec's sad mother[11], Morele (moral or morality) as the name of Torec's loyal steed. Another example (though strictly not a character) is Fellon as the name of the castle which harbours the twelve malicious knights, which is etymologically derived from the French *félonie* and denoted the confiscation of a convicted persons land. The use of analogous names is only used in fiction because they imply that a character has a single, fixed role within the story and has been created precisely for that purpose.

Furthermore, characters in the *Torec* do not go through any major changes, nor are there any serious examples of personal growth or *Bildung* (as is the case with Chretien's Perceval, for

---

[10] In Johnson's version (which I have used above) quotation marks are inserted, which makes it easy to recognize direct discourse.
[11] Tristoise only laughs three times in her life and in each case it is in anticipation of the vengeance her son will bring upon her enemies. The first time she laughs is when Torec is born. The second time is when he is dubbed knight and the third time she smiles when she arrives at Arthur's court and sees Miraude wearing the diadem.

example). Torec already seems to possess all the qualities needed to be a good knight and king and he never seems to make a mistake. In this sense, we are dealing with flat characters or types, mainly constructed around one single idea. This type of characterization is also typical of fictional works.

- o Summary

In this chapter we have discussed the narrative structures and techniques that were used in the Arthurian romance of *Torec*. In relation to Haug's description of the fictional nature of the Arthurian romances we have found multiple similarities. First of all, the romance begins with a challenge of the court, a challenge which is consequently taken up by a knight. Secondly, we see how this knight, Torec, goes out into the anti-world to proof his worth. Thirdly, there is a thematical division of the story into two parts, the first was posed by a challenger from outside of courtly society, in which Torec had to proof his prowess as a warrior and a knight, the second was posed by an inner crisis where Torec had to prove whether he was fit to rule. At the end of the romance there are the Arthurian festivities and the celebration of the Arthurian ideal by the entire court. Through the *conjointure* (the artificial and improbable structuring of events as I have described above) we have seen how the *Torec* is a typical example of a fictional Arthurian romance:

> The fictional status of Arthurian romances as a genre can hardly be doubted when viewed from a literary-historical perspective, since its world is manifestly a freely invented literary construct. Such sources as there are serve primarily as a repository of motives. (Haug 1997, 92)

We have also found a good example of *entrelacement* with the interlaced narrative of Melions. Through the thematic contrast that was used in order to create meaning, it demonstrated its conventional application in Arthurian romances. However, because the interlaced narrative was probably written by the compiler, and not by Maerlant himself, we have to discard this example when we consider his attitude towards the matter of Britain.

Other narrative properties of the text were the use of a combined personal ('ic') and impersonal ('daventure') narrator, a frequent use of direct discourse, characterization through direct definition, flat character types and the use of analogous names.

Based on what we have seen in this chapter, I think that it is safe to say that Maerlant, at least once in his life, had fully embraced the fictional nature of the Arthurian material. The next two chapters will consider this attitude based on his treatment of the subject in the *Historie van den Grale* and *Merlijns Boeck*.

Above: *Compianto sul Cristo morto* (1495) by Pietro Perugino. The man in the down right corner, holding the death shroud, is Joseph of Arimathea. (Source: Wikipedia.org)

4. Tinkering with the *Joseph*[12]

In the introduction to this thesis I quoted a passage from the prologue of Maerlant's *Grail-Merlin* in which he dedicates his work to Albrecht van Voorne (c. 1247-1287), his patron. Maerlant finished the *Grail-Merlin* in 1261, approximately one year before he wrote the *Torec*. This work was basically intended as a translation of the *Joseph d'Arimathie* (abbreviated hereafter as the *Joseph*) and the *Merlin*, written by the French poet Robert de Boron. This Robert lived during the late 12th and early 13th century and was thus a contemporary of Chrétien de Troyes.[13] Robert's work has become the target of a lot of criticism; not only for its clumsy treatment of history (as we will see later on), but also for its supposed mediocre style. (Bryant 2001, 10) However, not only does Robert present us with the first Arthurian cycle in literary history, according to Norris J. Lacy he is also one of the most influential authors within the French romance tradition. (Lacy 2000, 169) Robert's version of the story of Joseph of Arimathea was in part inspired by the apocryphal *Gospel of Nicodemus* and survived in seventeen manuscripts. It is generally accepted that the original version was written in octosyllabic verse.[14] Maerlant's translation of the *Joseph* was called the *Historie van den Grale* (abbreviated hereafter as the *Historie*). Based on passages such as I have quoted below, we know that Maerlant used a prose version of the French text for his translation (and versification!) into Middle Dutch (v. 1560-1567[15]):

Mijn her robrecht van barioen	Sir Robert de Boron,
De in dat walsch screyff al dit doen	who wrote all this in French,
Vnde sonder rime al gader dichte	and composed it without rhyme,
He seget dat men nicht mach lichte	says that one cannot
Al verstaen desse aŭenture	easily understand this,
He mote dat weten wal ter cure	unless one knows well
Waer hen genck aleyn de grotze	where Alain the Great went.
(Sodmann 1980, 159)	(My translation)

Up until now, I have only discussed the narrative properties of Maerlant's texts, however, in the case of the *Grail-Merlin* we also have to consider the formal aspect of the original French work. The importance of the fact that Maerlant's main source was a prose ('sonder rime') version of Robert's original, can hardly be overstated. Conventionally, vernacular prose had been used in the Middle Ages for texts of a religious nature. We can see how these aspects of the *Joseph* are radically different from that of the *Torec*. For his work, Robert combined both the religious themes of a saint's life (Saint Joseph) with the history of a relic (the Holy Grail) and a literary

---

[12] For the reader's convenience I have written a short summary of Robert's *Joseph* and *Merlin*. See appendix C and D.
[13] It is unknown whether Robert was familiar with Chretien's work, however, Bryant argues that "given the degree of excitement generated by Chrétien's tantalising, unresolved theme, (...) it does not seem likely that any writer interested in Arthurian matters in the 1180s and 1190s would have been unaware of Perceval." (Bryant 2001, 3)
[14] In response to the negative criticism of Robert's style, Bryant points out that the original was written in verse and that "in the hands of a talented performer this material has tremendous potential." (Bryant 2001, 11)
[15] All the verse numbers in chapter 4 and 5 refer to Sodmann's edition of the Steinfurter Manuscript.

form (prose) that was conventionally used to relate the highest of all truths, namely religious truth:

> Vernacular prose had formerly been used for religious purposes – in sermons, psalters, translations of Latin religious texts, and indeed the Bible itself (first translated into old French at the beginning of the thirteenth century). Prose thus carried for many medieval authors a truth-telling value absent from the rhetorical artifice of purely literary verse accounts that by the thirteenth century were sometimes condemned as "vain pleasures". (Chase 1992, xiv)

The reason Maerlant versified Robert's prose into rhymed couplets is probably because the *Grail-Merlin* (like the *Torec*) was part of the didactic programme. In that capacity the *Grail-Merlin* was probably meant to be read aloud for the young nobles at Voorne and verse was generally considered to be far more suitable for this. However, it should be mentioned here that Middle Dutch verse showed a remarkable resilience to change. It has been argued that medieval Dutch literature had, in this respect, more in common with the developments in medieval German literature. Unlike their French counterparts, who held that verse was false and prose was true, German authors were 'more interested in experimenting with the new structural concepts of romance introduced by Chrétien de Troyes, than in trying out a new medium'. (Lie 1994, 37) Lie also posed that 'In the eyes of Maerlant, the underlying truth of a written work was clearly not a matter of stylistic form (verse or prose) but of using the right source.' (Lie 1994, 43) We can find plenty of examples of this in the *Grail-Merlin*. I will return to this matter in the next section of this chapter, but for now I will return to the didactic purpose of the *Grail-Merlin*. By the time that Maerlant finished the this work, the young count Floris V would have been seven years of age. A child. And in this regard, Besamusca and Brandsma have observed that Maerlant refers to his audience in the *Joseph* as 'kinder' (children) in verse 543 (Besamusca 1996, 117):

Kinder dit was omber waer	Children this is utterly true:
Dat de joden hadden vaer	the Jews were concerned
Wo ze em ontsculdigen mochten	to excuse themselves.
(Sodmann 1980, 533)	(My translation)

Now that we have discussed the purpose of the work and its formal presentation, I want to make a few remarks on its linguistic properties and the manuscript before we proceed to the contents of the work itself. The *Joseph* is different from the *Torec* as the only version of Maerlant's *Grail-Merlin* that survived is not written in the original Middle Dutch, but is a translation into Middle Low German. Maerlant's *Grail-Merlin* only survived in what is now called the 'Steinfurter Manuscript'. This manuscript also includes the continuation by Lodewijk van Velthem, which is a translation of the *Suite-Vulgate du Merlin*, written around 1326. However, because this thesis is specifically concerned with Maerlant's attitude towards the matter of Britian, I will discard

Lodewijk's continuation for this investigation.

The Steinforter Manuscript itself belonged to the extensive library of Everwijn II (1461-1530), count of Bentheim-Steinfurt. By some miracle Maerlant's *Grail-Merlin* is the only work that survived the test of time – all other works from Everwijn's library have either disappeared or been destroyed. (Van Vloten 1880, VIII) In this chapter, the first part of the *Grail-Merlin*, the *Historie*, will be considered.

3.2 The narrative structure

At the very start of the *Historie*, Maerlant immediately apologizes to his audience for the many erroneous historical accounts in the original text (v. 20-24). After a lengthy speech on 'waer ombe Onse Here wart gebore' (why Our Lord was born), he continues with the events surrounding the Last Supper. In this passage, Maerlant immediately sets the tone as he corrects the French text when it claims that the Last Supper took place at the home of Simon the Leper. (v. 229-254) In this passage, Maerlant bluntly calls Robert's account foolish ('gedwas', v. 242) and explains that Simon the Leper lived in Bethania, whilst Jesus and his disciples had, of course, already arrived in Jerusalem by the time the Last Supper took take place. Maerlant does not hide the fact that he is bothered, irritated even, by this obvious error in the original text and declares that he will give the correct account of events as they are related in the Gospels (v. 252-254):

Mer ick late de historie staen	But I will leave this history now,
Van den romanse vnde telle iv voert	as it was written in French and tell you from now on
Der waeren ewangelien woert	the true words of the Gospel.
(Sodmann 1980, 259)	(My Translation)

From here on, Maerlant continues to tell the audience about Maundy Thursday ('witten donredages') and Judas' betrayal – exactly as it is related in the Bible. This is a clear example of what Lie described: To Maerlant, finding truth was a matter of using the right source and formal aspects of a text were of secondary (or no) concern. The authority of the Bible as a source that concerning Biblical events was of course unquestioned. And regardless of whether Maerlant thought that he was writing a historical or fictional work, erroneous accounts of Biblical events would have simply been unacceptable, especially when a work has a didactic or educational purpose! From this we can already learn a great deal about the nature of the *Historie*. First of all, that for his translation Maerlant did not limit himself to his primary source, Robert's *Joseph,* and it is clear that he preferred to follow the Gospels whenever contradictions between the two arose. In other words, the narrative structuring of events, i.e. the order in which the events are presented, is not subject to artistic composition, but they had to be an accurate chronological representation of real events. In this respect, the text deviates from the conventions of the Arthurian romances and reveals a different attitude on Maerlant's part. For example, when, in

the *Torec*, the audience is presented with the 'Red Island' or 'lord Ydor vander Baser Rivire' (without any information as to where or who they are) it is implied that they're existence should be taken for granted, in other words: the audience is expected to suspend their disbelief for the sake of the story. There is no such 'contract' between narrator and narratee in the *Historie*. In this work, a critical attitude is expected of the audience. Maerlant's indignant tone stresses the serious nature of the subject matter and openly expresses his disappointment with regard to his source's failure to give an accurate representation of history. This last aspect is important, because it stresses that the author is not free to do as he pleases, and that he can't simply make something up as he goes. This aspect of the *Historie* is completely in contradiction with Haug's definition of the Arthurian romance as a 'freely invented literary construct'. (Haug 1997, 92)

Now that we know how Maerlant's *Historie* begins, it can also be concluded that it deviates from the Chrétien's Arthurian romances in a number of other ways. First of all, there is no court, no challenge from an outsider, nor a knight to take up the challenge. Or is there? According to the French original, Joseph of Arimathea was a knight in Pilate's retinue. But again, Maerlant doesn't hesitate to express his doubts about the matter:

Vnde ist alzet inden walsche state	If it is as the French text says
So hadde he in ziner massenien	he [Pilate] had in his retinue
Enen ridder dar wij aff lien	a knight of whom we shall tell
Jǔ zolen harde vele hijr na	you much more after this,
Vnde heet iossep van aromathia	and who was called Joseph of Arimathea.
Mer dat he zijn ridder iet was	But that he was his [Pilates's] knight
En zegge ick nicht dat ik ny las	I will tell you that I have never read it
Jn ander historien dan in dese	in any other history but this one.
De waerste historie die ik dar aff lese	The most trustworthy account [the Bible] I read thereof
Seget dat pilatus was heiden	tells us that Pilate was a heathen
Vnde alle de ridder zijn	and all the knights
De do waren van ziner massenieden	who were part of his retinue
Weren vnbesnedene lude	were uncircumcised men.
Josep was iode vnde harde rike	Joseph was a Jew and very rich.
(Sodmann 1980, 119)	(My translation)

Concerning Joseph's social status, only the Gospel of Mark (15:43) tells that he was a 'nobilis decurio' (prominent council member). Maerlant is clearly surprised by Robert's claim that Joseph was a knight but, interestingly, he limits his comments to the remark that he had never heard that Joseph was a knight in other sources. In fact, after Maerlant voiced his doubts about the matter, he concedes to the claim of his French source and in verse 223-229 Joseph is again referred to as a knight. This could mean either two things: firstly, that Maerlant thought it was at least plausible that Joseph was a knight and that he accepted it because of the didactic purpose of the work. Secondly, that he merely conceded to this idea for the sake of the story. But based

on how we have seen Maerlant treat the issue concerning the location of the Last Supper, I think that the first option is more likely. Especially because most of his decisions seem to be guided by these didactic considerations and a Joseph as a knight would make him a good example for the boys at Voorne. But whether Joseph was a knight or not, he was certainly a saint and this aspect of the Joseph is of much greater importance. Robert was determined to present the Grail as the holy cup that was used by Christ during the Last Supper and he chose Joseph, who is only mentioned a few times in the Gospels, to be its guardian. Joseph's status as a saint have led scholars to refer to the *Joseph* as a 'hagiographical romance', 'historical romance' and an 'ecclesiastical romance'. (Lagorio 1975, 91) and now that we have identified Joseph as a knight we could argue for a chivalric romance. But these qualifications are of little explicative value as they only provide us with abstract genres. The definitions of these genres often vary considerably among different scholars who use the same term or overlap each other in so many ways that they lose their distinction. In an article with the polemical title 'There are no genres' Paul Wackers argued that:

> Moreover, it is remarkable that genres are often presented as entities with an existence free from human touch. It is said for instance, that genres develop and change over time. This is in fact nothing more than an image or a metaphor. In reality people produce texts. Those texts may change with the passing of time. In addition texts are classified or grouped and, as already said, the standards used to classify them may also change. One or both of these changes is referred to when one speaks about the changing of a genre. (Wackers 2000, 239)

In his article, Wacker argues that most genre definitions are concepts developed in modern poetics and that medieval genre definitions are largely based on the functional aspects of the text. In the case of *Historie*, the fact that Maerlant wrote this work for the young nobles at Voorne is of much greater importance than the status of Joseph as both a knight and a saint. Maerlant's willingness to accept Joseph as a knight seems to be largely the result of pragmatic and educational considerations. But there is another aspect to this knighthood that I want to discuss here. According to Gerritsen, the presentation of Joseph as a knight is also 'in accordance with De Boron's conception of Joseph as the first of a noble *lignée* of Grail guardians'. (Gerritsen 1981, 370) But of the seventeen French manuscripts that have survived only two[16] include the story of Perceval, who is of course the most famous of these Grail guardians. In relation to this, Maerlant's text presents us with another riddle in verse 1564-1577:

Al verstaen desse aŭenture[17]	All who hear this adventure
He en mote dat weten wal ter cure	should take note of

---

[16] Manuscript E39 of the Biblioteca Estense in Modena and nouv.acqu.no.4166 of the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, named after its former owner Didot, hence the name by which the work is commonly known: the 'Didot-Perceval'.
[17] The meaning of this sentence is rather elusive.

Waer hen genck aleyn de grotze	where Alain the Great went,
Broens zone vnde zine genotze	Bron's son and companion,
Vnde wat geslechte van em quam	and what lineage came from him,
Vnde wat leuene he an nam	and what kind of life he chose,
Vnde wat daer oeck aff komen zal	and also what would become
Van peter vnde zijn leŭen al	of Peter and his whole life,
Vnde in wat stede men ene vant	and where he would end up,
Vnde waer moyses was bewant	and what became of Moyses.
Want he de den grael ontfenck	Because he who would receive the Grail
Van broene dat is ware dinck	from Bron, it is true,
He vant moyses onverscheden	his fate and that of Moyses would be intertwined.
Hijr to sal ons robrecht leden	Robert will tell us what happened.
(Sodmann 1980, 159-60)	(My translation)

It seems evident that with 'wat geslechte van em quam' (v. 1568) and 'he de den grael ontfenck' (v. 1574) the narrator refers to Perceval who, in Robert's third instalment, would be received in the Grail castle by Bron (Perceval's grandfather, who is the Rich Fisher or Fisher King) and receive from him the Grail. So what is going on here? Why does Maerlant refer in this passage to the *Perceval*, which is missing in his translation and was probably never even translated by him?[18] Again, there seem to be two possibilities: firstly, that the prose version which Maerlant used was incomplete and though the original text referred to a third part, it was in fact not included in the original French manuscript. Secondly, that the *Perceval* was included in the manuscript but that it was discarded for some reason.[19]

The last example that I would like to discuss in regard to Maerlant's translation is the matter of the Roman emperors. In Robert's original, Joseph asks Pilate for the body of Christ after his crucifixion in order to bury him in his own tomb. Pilate allows it, but after the burial Christ rises from the grave and the Jews, who have taken responsibility for his murder, become scared. When they learn that Joseph had taken Christ's body, they capture and imprison him. In the following passages the Roman emperors are assigned an important role by Robert.

When an anonymous Roman emperor hears of the miracles of a healing prophet in Jerusalem (i.e. Jesus Christ), he thinks he has found the solution to cure his sick son, Vespasian, who is suffering from leprosy. Vespasian is then healed by looking at the cloth of Saint Veronica which had the image of the Lord imprinted on it. After being healed, Vespasian decides to take revenge on the Jews who have martyred and murdered his benefactor. He goes to the Holy Land and frees Joseph of Arimathea from his prison after which the latter converts Vespasian to Christianity.

---

[18] Instead of the Perceval, the Steinfurter manuscript presents us with a translation of the *Suite-Vulgate du Merlin.* This combination is unique in medieval Arthurian cycles and no other manuscript offers the same combination of stories. This begs the question if Maerlant's French original had this combination or if it was created by the copyist who translated it into Middle Low German.
[19] Maybe because the Perceval already had the reputation of being a work of fiction? Though this will largely remain conjecture, I will briefly return to the matter in chapter 6.

Anyone with a basic knowledge of Roman imperial history can see the enormous implications that these mistakes would have on a chronological and historical sequence of events. Maerlant, seeing these mistakes, is confronted with a huge problem: he can either keep on translating what Robert wrote or he can correct that which he knows to be obviously wrong (v. 407-412):

Dat zeget dat romans dat he dar ynne lach	The French tale tells that he [Joseph] lay there
Tot an den zeluen dach	until the day
Dat ene vaspasianus wt dede	that a certain Vespasian freed him.
Mer dat is alto male logene mede	But that is altogether a lie,
So zolde he dar ynne xlij iaer	as it would make 42 years
Hebben gelegen dat is waer	that he was imprisoned there.
(Sodmann 1980, 126)	(My translation)

Maerlant thus decides to act. Firstly, by revealing that it was actually emperor Tiberius, and not Vespasian, who suffered from leprosy and was healed by looking at Saint Veronica's image (v. 471-476):

Jn den tiden dat dit geschiede aldus	In the time that this happened,
Was ein keiser de heet tiberiǔs	there was an emperor named Tiberius.
Js dat als ick dat bescreuen kenne	As I know that it was written down,
De dar de keyser vnde qǔal[20]	that this emperor suffered the affliction,
Vnde de fisiciene deden al	and that the doctors did everything
Dar to dat em gehelpen mochte	they could to help him.
(Sodmann 1980, 128)	(My translation)

Secondly, Maerlant explains on the basis of the accounts of the Romano-Jewish historian Josephus (c. 37-100) that Vespasian is wrongly presented in the French text as the 'Scourge of God', and that it was in fact his son, Titus, who would besiege Jerusalem and destroy the Second Temple in the year 70. Maerlant thus observes that between Tiberius and Titus there is a difference of nearly 42 years (vs. 411), 37 being the year of Tiberius' death and the year 79 being the start of Titus' reign. In the meantime Caligula, Claudius and Nero (not counting Galba, Otho, Vitellius) and Titus' own father Vespasian would have been emperor of Rome. In other words, if Joseph was imprisoned after Christ's resurrection and would have been freed during the siege of Jerusalem, that would mean that he would have been locked up without food or water for more than 42 years. Though this sounds unlikely, I would argue that Maerlant did not have to consider this particular aspect of the story to be problematic in regard to its historicity, after all, stranger things have happened in the lives of saints. Instead, it is the miscalculation in the French text that is Maerlant's main cause for doubt. Especially when we consider the following verses in which he notes that in the French original, Jesus returns the Grail to Joseph, which he had lost

---

[20] Again, the meaning of this sentence is rather elusive.

some time before his imprisonment, and in verse 523 states that this 'might be true'.

But the biggest problem is that Maerlant's changes would have enormous repercussions on the causality of the story. Because he had corrected Robert's previous error and presented Tiberius as the leper-emperor instead of Vespasian, there was no motivation for Titus, who also replaces Vespasian during the siege of Jerusalem, to take revenge on the Jews, free Joseph and allow the conversion of the captured Jews to Christianity, since he had never been ill.[21] Especially this conversion of the Jews was an essential part of the story, as it was from this group that Bron (the later Fisher King) would come forth. Unfortunately we have no idea how Maerlant solved this problem, because, at this critical moment, several pages of the manuscript are missing[22] and these lost pages create a lacuna of approximately 312 verses (Gerritsen 1981, 373). Though we cannot say for certain what Maerlant wrote in these verses, it seems highly unlikely (in my opinion) that Maerlant would have been able to solve all these problems with the chronology and causality of the narrative in a mere 312 verses. It is much more likely that he simply abandoned the entire storyline, as we know for sure that when the story resumes, Maerlant is back on track with the original text. From here on out the story continues pretty much along the lines that Robert set out. He tells the story of the invisible feast, the dramatic fate of Moyses and the twelve sons of Bron and in each case the events are virtually identical to the events in the French original.

Above: A relief from the Arch of Titus (constructed in 82 A.D.) displaying the spoils from the Second Temple which are carried away by Roman soldiers. (Source: Wikipedia)

---

[21] Maerlant also notes that it was not Vespasian, but 'Philippus' a.k.a. Philip the Arab (c. 204-249 A.D.) who was the first Roman emperor to convert to Christianity in verse 579-582.

[22] In the introduction to his edition of *Merlijns Boeck*, Van Vloten explains that the owner of the Steinfurter manuscript had become hesitant to allow people access to the work after the children of a Guelder minister (to whom he had borrowed the manuscript) had torn out several pages! (Van Vloten 1881, VII) I do not know if these comprised the lacuna in the *Historie van den Grale*, nor whether these rascals have been disciplined appropriately.

3.3 The narrative techniques

From Maerlant's corrective attitude toward his French source, it is obvious that he considered an accurate historical representation of events to be of greater importance than presenting his audience with an amusing story. In this regard, Gerritsen also notes that:

> Whenever Maerlant had the opportunity to check the *Joseph* against some more authoritative account of the same events, he took care to correct the errors of the French text and to bring his rendering of it in accordance with what he regarded as the historical truth. (Gerritsen 1981, 370)

The 'ic' that is presented in these corrective passages no longer refer solely to a narrative agent, but indeed to a person of flesh and blood. Someone who was alive at some point in time and who is not merely confined to the fictional space, but exits in real space in which he is surrounded by other sources, such as the Bible and Josephus' *The Jewish War*. In this capacity Maerlant does not merely take on the role of a poet or translator, but also of a historian. A historian who adopts a critical attitude towards his subject material and his sources. The appearance of an impersonal narrator as 'daventure' (or, in this case, 'aůenture') is rare but can, for example, be found in verse 619 and 1417.

The speech representation in the *Torec* and the *Joseph* is actually quite similar, and both combine direct discourse, diegetic summaries and less purely diegetic summaries, although it should be noted that the ratio of direct discourse in the *Joseph* is noticeably lower. What is remarkable in this regard, is that when Maerlant corrects the original text in regard to Tiberius' leprosy, his interpolation gives not only a very different representation of events, but also different dialogues. Maerlant's use of direct discourse in these passages (consider for example verse 505) is interesting, as he knew that he was making these conversations up himself. However, the use of this narrative technique does not undermine his efforts to give an accurate representation of historical events, as these speech events do not proclaim any untruths, but merely flavour the story and (to use a metaphor) are meant to sweeten the 'historical pill'. Exactly what might be expected from a didactic work with an educational purpose.

In relation to the characterization of different personae in the *Historie*, it is obvious that there is no use of analogous names. One exception to this might be the deceptive Jew who sits in Judas' seat and has the typical Jewish name Moyses.[23] Here, a number of ideological preconceptions come into play and it should be mentioned that Robert makes a great effort to prove that the jews were guilty and that the Romans were innocent of Christ's death. The Jews who were sincere in their conversion, however, do not have typical Jewish names, like Bron. Maerlant seems to follow Robert closely in this respect.

---

[23] Of course, Moses is also a holy figure to Christians, but I felt I could not ignore the Jewish connotation of this name in relation to the characterization of personae.

3.4 Maerlant and the Eucharistic Grail

Up until now I have mainly discussed Maerlant's *Historie* in relation to its protagonist, Joseph of Arimathea, and its presentation of historical events. But one of the most interesting aspects of the *Historie* is probably its treatment of the Grail. According to Gerritsen, Maerlant "accepted the Grail as a historical reality".[24] (Gerritsen 1981, 373) But how could Maerlant have mistaken this legend for actual history?

Melanie Hackney argues that medieval authors often adapted or continued stories of their predecessors through a process of *translatio* (Hackney 2009, 77). Because of this, Hackney speaks of a collaborative effort, as she poses that interpretations of a story could be 'pushed' into a certain direction by one author which is then followed by subsequent authors who deal with the same material. Through this process a 'collaborative lens' is created:

> Perhaps the most prominent and influential "linguistic betrayal" of the *Conte du graal* is Robert de Boron's famous *Estoire du graal*, an adaptation that dates from the thirteenth century. A contemporary of Chrétien, Robert de Boron wrote three works that remain available to modern readers, compiled into a trilogy: *Joseph of Arimathea*, *Merlin*, and *Perceval*. This work comprised of several parts intertwines the grail story with biblical history. Robert is the first to refer to the grail as the Holy Grail and, consequently, to place it at the Last Supper, as the cup that would collect the blood from Christ upon the cross. In doing so, he actively modifies the nature of the grail. (Hackney 2009, 79-80)

Hackney continues by suggesting that through Robert's work a collaborative lens was created that presented all subsequent authors with a Eucharistic Grail, instead of the more mysterious and ambiguous object it was in Chrétien's work.[25] Though Robert would indeed be the first to refer to the Grail as 'holy', there was definitely good reason for such an interpretation in Chrétien's work:

Ne va pas t'imaginer qu'il ait	And don't imagine that he's given
brochet, lamproie ou saumon!	pike or lamprey or salmon;
Le saint homme, d'une simple hostie	he's served with a single host
qu'on lui apporte dans ce graal	which is brought to him in that Grail.
sou tient et fortifie sa vie	It comforts and sustains his life
Le Graal est chose si sainte	the grail is such a holy thing.
(Zink 1990, v. 6421-6429)	(Bryant 1982, 75)[26]

---

[24] Strangely enough, Gerritsen also argues that Maerlant had "difficulty in believing the Grail to have been the relic of the Last Supper and of Christ's blood which the French text (…) purported it to be." (Gerritsen 1981, 373) Personally, I have <u>not</u> found any textual evidence of Maerlant's supposed difficulty with the Eucharistic portrayal of the Grail. His disagreement with Robert is limited to the location of the Last Supper, not with the nature of the object itself.
[25] I will return to this subject in the next chapter.
[26] This translation is based on the prose English translation of *Le Conte du Graal* by Nigel Bryant.

As we can see in the passage above, Chrétien's Grail definitely has a Christian connotation which is directly linked to the Eucharist through the host it serves and in that capacity to the Last Supper. But still, Hackney claims that:

> It is undeniable that Robert's version of the grail narrative altered the way that readers and scholars look at Chrétien's tale. Scholars wrote for decades on the Christian aspects of *Le Conte du Graal*, often ignoring those elements less appealing to the Church. Why would they have falsely attributed a Christian character to the work? Such an oversight was surely not intentional, but may be explained by the success of Robert's collaboration. (Hackney 2009, 83)

Even with medieval authors, who tend to borrow a lot of material from their predecessors, it is hard to 'prove' that one author was actually influenced by another. Though Bryant argues that it is very likely that Robert had read *Le Conte du Graal*, there is no hard evidence to prove that he did. Nor is there any evidence (for example) that Wolfram von Eschenbach, who also presented the Grail as explicitly Christian, read Robert's work and was influenced by him. Be that as it may, the religious connotation of the Grail did not only come from the passage I quoted from Chrétien's own work and I would like to point out that it is, in fact, very hard to imagine that its symbolism would not have been interpreted in a religious way, as medieval European culture was deeply embedded with Christian imagery. In this sense I agree with Hackney that there is a collaborative effort behind the Eucharistic portrayal of the Grail, but these portrayals seem to be more of a paradigmatic nature, and should not (in my opinion) be solely attributed to Robert's works or its supposed influence on other authors. This argument is even more convincing when we consider the fact that, during the centuries when these texts were written, a great number of relics were brought back from the Holy Land by crusaders. Not least of which was the so-called 'Spear of Destiny', which was used by the Roman soldier Longinus to pierce the side of Christ. It might be no coincidence then that a similar item, the bleeding lance, also features in Chrétien's *Le Conte du Graal*. But the very ambiguity of such objects in Chrétien's presentation is part of its genius and we should consider the idea that his medieval audience would have picked up on the symbolic meaning of these relics (especially in their combined use) much quicker than the naïve Perceval who, at the time when he visits the Fisher King in his castle, has 'forgotten God'.

This passage on the Grail might seem a little beside the point, but I think that the concept of translatio is of pivotal importance to what I sparingly called the 'medieval process of myth-making' and how Maerlant got caught in its web. In the Fourth Council of the Lateran in 1215 the Church would develop the concept of *transsubstantiatio,* which taught that the bread and wine, through the sacramental Eucharist, changed (or 'transubstantiated') into the body and blood of Christ. These later developments in liturgical theology would only add to the importance and legendary status of a Eucharistic Grail which, through the stories of Chretien, Robert and

Wolfram had already spread throughout western Christendom. And it is mainly in this capacity that Maerlant and his contemporaries would have known about the Grail.

   o   Summary

In the second chapter of this thesis, I posed that it was much harder for medieval poets and historians to discern fact from fiction (see page 4). Because of this, medieval scholars developed methods to determine the reliability of a text. We have discussed some of these considerations, including the status of truth-telling prose versus the untrustworthy verse. In the Dutch tradition however, the reliability of a source was more important than its formal aspects and this attitude is reflected in the way Maerlant treated the Robert's *Joseph* in his *Historie*, especially in relation to the unquestionable authority of the Scriptures.

   We have seen how Maerlant's treatment of the subject matter in the *Joseph* is radically different from that of the explicitly fictional Arthurian romances, such as the *Torec*. There is a constant fact-checking going on in which the vernacular source is in every way subordinate to the Bible and the narrative structure to an accurate representation of (what was considered to be) historical events. These considerations seem largely guided by the educational purpose of the work and its place within the didactic programme for the young nobles at Voorne.

   The 'ic' in the *Historie* is no longer a mere narrative agent, but a person of flesh and blood with a critical attitude towards his source. The interpolated events in the corrected passages, tell us that the use of direct discourse in Maerlant's historiographic methodology was allowed, as long as these did not contradict any historical truths. Other characteristic elements of fiction, like analogous names, are completely absent, though typical names, such as Moyses, can be used to stereotype certain personae.

   We have also seen that we cannot simply dump the entire Christian interpretation and presentation of the Grail on Robert de Boron and his works. However, in relation to the *Historie,* Robert's influence concerning the Christian portrayal of the Grail is evident. However, Robert's uncanny mix of religious, historical and legendary elements in French prose make for a story that must have been hard to categorize for Maerlant.

Above: A miniature from *L'Estoire de Merlin*, c. 1316, Add. MS 10292, f. 163v. Here Merlin is depicted as a handsome young man. The hooded and bearded scribe, to whom Merlin is dictating, is Blaise. (Source: bl.uk)

5. *Merlijns Boeck* and the *Processus Satanae*

In this chapter I will discuss the second part of Maerlant's *Grail-Merlin*, which is called *Merlijns Boeck* (or *The Book of Merlin*). Like the *Joseph*, Maerlant versified the prose *Merlin* into rhymed couplets. It is remarkable, however, that in almost every other way this translation follows Robert's original closely. There are some tiny variations and I will discuss a few examples to illustrate the nature of these changes. One such example is the fifteen days between the trial of Merlin's mother and the arrival of the judge's mother in the French text, which becomes five days in Maerlant's translation. Another example is Blaise's departure to Northumberland which, in verse 4758 of Maerlant's translation, is replaced with 'Merlant'. But these are of little consequence to the narrative at large. Because of this fact it is safe to say that the *Merlin*, unlike the *Joseph*, did not have to compete with other, more authoritative, sources. Still, there are some passages where Maerlant felt he could change something of the original text. These exceptions are of particular interest to this investigation, as they can shed some more light on Maerlant's attitude towards the matter of Britain.

5.1 The *Processus Satanae*

Maerlant's most important deviation in relation to the French *Merlin* starts at the very beginning of the story, right after Christ's Harrowing of Hell. The demons have lost many souls and realize that they will lose even more in the future because of Christ's teachings and sacrifice. In the *Merlin*, the demons thus decide that they need their own representative among mankind. To create such a demonic representative, one of the demons is tasked to conceive a child with a human female, a child that will later be called Merlin.

   In *Merlijns Boeck*, Maerlant interpolates a lawsuit before Merlin is conceived. In this interpolation, the demonic solicitor Maskeroen takes on the role of public prosecutor in a case against mankind. God acts as the judge and the holy virgin Mary takes it upon herself to defend the human race. In Gerritsen's article from 1981, he claimed that this *Processus Satanae* (as it is generally called) was an original creation by Maerlant himself. If this would have been the case one might argue that Maerlant did not take the story of Merlin as a serious historical account and that the narrative events could thus be reorganized by using his own imagination. However, in 1996 Van Oostrom published a 'biography' of Jacob van Maerlant in which he demonstrated that his interpolation was probably borrowed from an older Latin source:

> De ware mode van het literaire Satansproces – met de *Mariken van Nieumeghen* als een volgend Nederlandstalig hoogtepunt, en *Mascheroen* van Hugo Claus als derde – zou immers pas vanaf de veertiende eeuw op gang komen. Met een heel vroege Catalaanse tekst, die evenwel ná *Historie van den Grale* dateert, heeft Maerlant de primeur van alle volkstalen. Zelfs in het Latijn is er maar

één tekst bekend die, en dan nog met enige goede wil, vóór die van Maerlant kan worden gedateerd: de zogenaamde *Litigacio Mascaron contra genus humanum*, enkel bewaard in late drukken maar mogelijk een nazaat van een dertiende-eeuws origineel.[27] (Van Oostrom 1996, 44)

As this interpolation is not a product of Maerlant's own imagination, we cannot simply brand it as fiction, as we do not know whether Maerlant thought that these events really happened. However, the fact that Maerlant interpolated this passage into the story of Merlin should nonetheless be considered here, as it can give us some insight into Maerlant's attitude towards the matter of Britain. If Maerlant was under the impression that he was relating real historical events, shouldn't he object to interpolating events which he knew were not part of the original account as they are related in his source? This consideration is more of a historiographical than literary nature, but again the didactic purpose of the passage seems to be decisive.

In the *Torec* we have seen that there was a lot of emphasis on the competences of a ruler, especially in relation to his ability of independent jurisprudence. In *Maerlants Wereld* Van Oostrom argued that it is very likely that Maerlant received an education at the prestigious school of Sint Donaas. (Van Oostrom 1996, 31) A school which, among other things, was famous for its educational programme in law. (idem, 38) As Maerlant was fluent in Dutch, French and Latin, Van Oostrom poses that it would be possible that it was at this school that Maerlant first took note of a work which was similar to the *Litigacio.* (idem, 46) The moral of the *Litigacio* seems to be that compassion is at least as important as justice as God eventually concedes to Mary's pleas for mercy. When we take all of this into consideration, it becomes clear that the interpolation probably had an educational purpose. In this respect, the didactic programme seems to be of decisive importance for this part of the structure of the narrative, and what is more, Maerlant's interpolation does not, in any way, interfere with either the chronology or causality of the events in the French source.

5.2 Narrative techniques

In chapter 3 and 4, we have seen an important difference between the narrator in the *Torec*, who only functions as a guide through the events, and the narrator in the *Historie*, who is Maerlant himself, commenting on his French source. Both the *Historie van den Grale* and *Merlijns Boeck* belong to Maerlant's *Grail-Merlin*, but there is a striking difference between these two parts.

In Robert's original, when the mother of Merlin is impregnated by one of the demons, she seeks out the help of her confessor, Blaise. By the demons devices, Merlin is born with knowledge of the past in order to defend their cause. However, because the demons have chosen

---

[27] The popularity of the literary Satan's Trial – with *Mariken van Nieumeghen* as the next Dutch highlight, and thirdly *Mascheroen* by Hugo Claus – would largely emerge in the fourteenth century. With a very early Catalonian text, which is dated after the *Historie van den Grale*, Maerlant has the first of all vernacular languages. Even in Latin there is only one text that, not without effort, can be dated before Maerlant: the so-called *Litigacio Mascaron contra genus humanum*, which has only been preserved in printed copies, but was probably a successor of an original thirteenth century text. (My translation)

such a virtuous woman to be the mother of this 'anti-Christ', that God decides to intervene and He gives the child Merlin knowledge of the future, as some sort of antidote. Blaise decides to protect the mother and after baby Merlin has successfully defended her in court they remain friends. When Blaise retires to Northumberland, Merlin regularly visits him to tell him of his adventures, and it is Blaise who writes down the story of Merlin and is thus presented as the author.

In *Narrative Fiction*, Rimmon-Kenan discusses several concepts that might seem relevant to a fictional author such as Blaise. The 'implied author' is a phenomenon which is 'the governing consciousness of the work as a whole, the source of the norms embodied in the work' (Rimmon-Kenan 1983, 87). However, the implied author is not equal to the narrator as it is 'voiceless and silent'. (idem, 88) Another concept that might seem relevant is that of the intradiegetic narrator. This is a narrator who features as a character within the story itself. But neither of these seem to fit the function of Blaise in Robert's *Merlin*. Though Blaise is presented as the author he is neither the 'governing consciousness' of the work, nor is he presented as the narrator as he is referred to in third person. It could of course be argued that Blaise, as a narrator, chooses to refer to himself in third person, but such an elaborate system of narrative layering seems a bit beyond the abilities of a 12th century author.[28] Moreover, it is important that we keep in mind the distinction between author and narrator. If an author uses an extradiegetic narrative agent to refer to himself in third person, than that narrator is, by definition, not an intradiegetic narrator, as the narrator is not presented as a character within the story, regardless of whether he is the author (real *or* fictional).

The most useful concept in relation to Blaise's role seems to be what Brandsma called 'source fiction' in his translation of the work into modern Dutch. (Brandsma 2004, 200) Source fiction is a common phenomenon in medieval literature (as we will also see in the next chapter with Geoffrey of Monmouth) and it presents the audience with a non-historic, i.e. fictional source. In the epilogue of his translation of *Merlijns Boeck*, Brandsma notes that Maerlant, with his impressive eye for detail, wove his interpolation of the *Processus Satanae* into Merlin's account when he relates the events to Blaise (v. 4097-4117):

Merlijn zegede gewinne ons enket	Merlin said: get some ink
Vnde zet ons nv in dat perkement	and write on the parchment
De zake de nyman en bekent	that which no-one knows
Scire zo was dat gedaen	this was done at once
Vnde merlijn hete em sciůen zaen	and Merlin urged him to write
De mynne van der schoenre marien	about the love of fair Mary

---

[28] It should be noted, however, that this kind of narrator was not totally unheard of during and prior to the Middle Ages. Consider, for example, Xenophon's *Anabis* and Julius Ceasar's *Commentarii de Bello Gallico*. In both of these works the authors are part of the events in the story, but they refer to themselves in third person. The same can be said about Matthew the apostle who, in Matthew 9:9 and 10:3 also refers to himself in third person.

Vnde van josepe van aramathien	and Joseph of Arimathea
Alze men hijr vor hoerde tellen	as was previously told here
Vnde van Aleyne vnde sinen gesellen	and about Alain and his companions
Wo dat ze de vader lieet	how their father left them
Vnde wo peter dannen schiet	and where Peter went then
Vnde wo joseph bezitte den grael	and how Joseph had the Grail
Vnde dat bloet mede in dat vromde vael	and the blood too in that strange valley
Vnde wo de duuele weren bedacht	and how the devils realised
Dat ze verloren hadden er cracht	the loss of their power
De ze hadden oůer den man	they had over humanity
Vnde van den gedinge ock voert an	and of the lawsuit
Dat ze hadden myt groten rouwen	which they made in great grief
Tegen marien onser zoeter vrouwen	[made a case against] Mary the sweet lady
Ombe de ziel de em weren behieten	because of the loss of souls which they were promised
Vnde wo ze clageden oůer de propheten	and how they complained about the prophets.
(Sodmann 1980, 248-9)	(My translation)

As we can see, Merlin clearly refers to Maerlant's own interpolation of the *Processus Satanae*. This passage is very problematic, because here Maerlant plays along with Robert's source fiction. The fact that Maerlant adds his interpolation to what Blaise supposedly wrote, implies that Maerlant was aware of the fictional nature of this source. Hence, his treatment of the subject matter in *Merlijns Boeck* is very different from that of the *Historie,* where he strived in every way to give an accurate historical account of events. The fact that he presents his interpolation as part of Merlin's original account tells us much about his attitude towards the matter of Britain. Essentially, this could mean two things: firstly, that Maerlant did not take Robert's history of Merlin seriously and that he was aware of its fictional nature.[29] Or, secondly, that the conventions of 13th century historiography permitted him to make such adaptations to the text. This different treatment between the *Historie van den Grale* and *Merlijns Boeck* might also have something to do with the subject matter. Where events from the Bible are concerned, no mistakes are obviously allowed. But based on what we have seen above, it could be argued that with the matter of Britain a little levity might have been permitted. But this is where it gets tricky. After all, if Maerlant allowed himself to make such adaptations to the text, what is to stop others from doing the same? And if one is not informed about the nature of such adaptations how then is one to discern fact from fiction? This makes the idea of source fiction as historiographically acceptable very unlikely. In this regard, the concept of translatio once again comes into play. As medieval authors were used to borrow heavily from their predecessor's material, alterations of this nature could easily be taken as historically accurate. In other words,

---

[29] I should point out that Van Oostrom does not seem to share Brandsma's views. According to Van Oostrom, Maerlant presents Blaise, not as source fiction, but as a reliable and authoritative source. See *Maerlant's Wereld*, page 418.

no matter what Maerlant's reasons were to present his interpolation as part of the original source, it is easy to see how such methods could become the cause of much confusion for authors who would have used Maerlant's work as the main source for their history.

5.3 The Merlin you know

Another important aspect that should be discussed here, concerns the main protagonist himself. It is widely accepted that Merlin is what is called a 'composite character', which basically means that he is a patchwork, made up out of several characters from different legends, histories and folklore. According to Carol Harding, the Merlin we know is composed out of a combination of vernacular secular Celtic tales and early British and Irish saint's lives. (Harding 1988, 14)

This is also the case with the work of Robert and Maerlant. Some of the characters used to create the character Merlin, include the child Ambrosius (or Emrys in Welsh) who, in Nennius' *Historia Brittonum*, is brought before Vortigern and prophesizes his downfall. Secondly, the madman Lailoken or Myrddin, a warrior and prophet from (respectively) Scottish and Welsh legend. Both characters are linked to the hagiography of Saint Mungo or Kentigern/Cantigernus:

> The Celtic saint's lives which are closely contemporary to the mabinogi (as well as Geoffrey of Monmouth) contain many familiar Celtic fantastic elements. Although some of the elements discussed are not unique to Celtic saint's lives, it is crucial to note these elements were not foreign to the Celtic Christian culture and peoples, or their literary products, but similar to – or occasionally the same as – the stories circulating in the secular indigenous culture. (Harding 1988, 23-24)

The characters Ambrosius, Lailoken and Myrddin initially had nothing to do with the Welsh legends about the mythical chieftain Arthur. It was Geoffrey of Monmouth who would first feature Merlin among the rest of the cast of the Arthurian legend. He combined the story of the boy Ambrosius with the wizard who, in his work, would become the architect of Arthur's birth. Moreover, it is not Robert, but Geoffrey himself who first presents Merlin as having some kind of diabolical heritage in the *Historia Regum Britanniae* (c. 1136, abbreviated hereafter as *HRB*). In the following passage, Merlin's mother relates to Vortigern the tale of Merlin's mysterious conception:

> Cui illa ait: "Vivit anima tua, rex, et vivit anima mea, quia neminem agnovi qui illum in me generaverit. Unum autem scio quia cum essem in thalamo parentum puella apparuit mihi quidam in specie formosi iuvenis, ut videbatur, et amplectens me strictis brachiis saepissime osculabatur et statim evanescebat, ita ut indicium hominis non appareret loquebatarque aliquando non comparens. Cumque in hunc modum me diu frequentasset, tandem in specie humana miscuit se

mihi et gravidam dereliquit. Sciat ergo prudential tua, me aliter non cognovisse virum."[30]

(Hammer 1951, 121)

The description of the mysterious man, given above by Merlin's mother, has been identified by many scholars as an incubus. These incubi are described as demons who prey upon sleeping women and have intercourse with them, much like Merlin's mother describes. It was thought that such sexual activity could lead to pregnancy, failing health and in some cases death. In the *HRB*, Merlin remains an ambiguous figure and his demonic nature is not (in any way!) toned down, as is the case with Robert's version. In the *HRB*, when Merlin helps Uther deceive Igerne[31] (by letting him take on the appearance of her husband, Gorlois), he does not show any kind of remorse. This is a striking difference when compared to Robert's portrayal. In his French version, Merlin is quick to tell Uther that they have wronged Igerne and that they will have to go through a lot of effort to absolve themselves of that sin. (Bryant 2001, 103) Examples such as these led Nancy Brown to say that:

> (…) Robert de Boron had no qualms when it came to shuffling the elements of history, omitting and reordering events to bring out his Christian moral. His Merlin, more a lesson in how good men should live in an evil world than a history of Britain's kings, is a simple, three-part narrative, each section revolving around one of his three major characters: Merlin, King Uther Pendragon, and King Arthur. (Goodrich 1990, 101)

In the previous chapter we have seen how Robert presented the Grail as the vessel which Christ used at the Last Supper and how he linked the story of that holy relic to the hagiography of Joseph of Arimathea. In this chapter we have seen how Robert used the vague description of the incubus to present Merlin as an anti-Christ who, through God's intervention, became a force for good in an evil world. Where Geoffrey's Merlin was an ambiguous character with a rather questionable nature, Robert's Merlin is a Christian, saved from his demonic fate by God himself. In this way, the relation between the *Joseph* and the *Merlin* becomes clear, as they are both expressions of an effort to further Christianize the Arthurian legend. Not only that, but in the Didot-*Perceval* the most important characters in the cycle are linked together through this same religious re-interpretation: Joseph is the first guardian of the Grail and Merlin is the founder of the third table to hold the Grail. The first being the table at Christ's Last Supper, the second being Joseph's table at which the converted Jews are seated, including Bron and thirdly, the Round Table itself (which was introduced by Robert's mains source, Wace's *Roman de Brut*), to which

---

[30] 'By my living soul, Lord King,' she said, 'and by your living soul, too, I did not have relations with any man to make me bear this child. I know only this: that, when I was in our private apartments with my sister nuns, some one used to come to me in the form of a most handsome young man. He would often hold my tightly in his arms and kiss me. When he had been some little time with me he would disappear, so I could no longer see him. Many times, too, when I was sitting alone, he would talk with me, without becoming visible; and when he came to see me in this way he would often make love with me, as a man would do, and in that way he made me pregnant. You must decide in your wisdom, my lord, who was the father of this lad, for apart from what I have told, I have never had relations with a man.' (Thorpe 1966, 167-8)

[31] In the *HRB* Igerne is actually called Ygerna, but to avoid confusion I will use the same spelling here.

the last Grail-guardian, Perceval, the son of Alain and grandson of Bron, would return the Grail. In this way, Robert's treatment of the matter of Britain testifies to an incredible ingenuity and we can be sure that he was a very attentive reader of his predecessors' material with an incredible high sensitivity for potential religious symbolism. Not only does Robert quickly pick up on Chrétien's subtle link between the Grail and the Last Supper (through the host it serves to the mysterious guest), he also used the story of Merlin's conception to further present him as a Christian hero. But the most important aspect here, is that these religious reinterpretations are not solely attributable to Robert, as elements of it were already present in the works of his predecessors. In other words, the Christian reinterpretation and representation of these elements is a collaborative effort in which each of the subsequent authors of the legend adds a little something of their own, often with a symbolic and/or religious meaning, which is then passed down to the next author and the next. In the case of Maerlant, this addition was the *Processus Satanae*, an interpolation which again adds a Christian element to the legend, in this case specifically to Merlin's birth. Though this process is very interesting in relation to the creative and artistic development of the Arthurian legend, it prompts the question how such treatment of material influenced medieval historiography. I will consider this issue more closely in the last chapter of this thesis.

- o Summary

In this chapter we have seen how *Merlijns Boeck* had a number of distinct features which are different from that of the *Historie van den Grale*. It does not present us with a different approach of Maerlant to the matter of Britain per se, but it does confront us with a number of problems which seem to contradict a strictly historical treatment of the source material. The use of source fiction in particular is extremely problematic and it is reminiscent of the kind of playfulness that we have found in the *Torec*, but of which we have not found a trace in the *Historie van den Grale*. The interpolation of the *Processus Satanae* seems to have been admissible on the grounds that the work had an educational purpose and the moral of the story (that compassion is just as important as justice) seems to fit well into a didactic programme designed for young princes.

The narrative techniques that Maerlant used, like the narrator, the speech presentation and the characterization of different personae are largely similar to those of the *Historie*. The narrative structure of *Merlijns Boeck* is, in almost every way, similar to that the Robert's original. As Van Oostrom and Gerritsen argued, this was probably due to the fact that there were no other authoritative sources available to Maerlant at the time. In regard to the narrative structure this meant that the story was not be interrupted for a more accurate historical account of events. But I think we should also entertain the possibility that Maerlant simply did not consider the matter of Britain to be of equal importance as that of Biblical and Classical history. In my opinion,

Maerlant's treatment of the *Merlin* is distinctly different from that of the *Joseph*, not only because of his playful use of source fiction, but more generally through a far less critical attitude towards his source.

Above: The construction of Vortigern's tower. From Jean de Wavrin, *Recueil des croniques d'Engleterre*, vol. 1, 1471-1483, Royal MS 15 E. IV, f. 93r (Source: bl.uk)

6. A fabricated history

The last work I will discuss here is the *Spiegel Historiael* (abbreviated hereafter as the *Spiegel*). This work is over 90.000 verses long and is generally considered to be Maerlant's magnum opus. The *Spiegel* is a translation and adaptation of the Latin *Speculum Historiale* (abbreviated hereafter as the *Speculum*), which was written by the French Dominican friar Vincent de Beauvais around 1229. By this time Maerlant was working for his new patron, Floris V (1256-1296), for whom he had written the *Torec* and the *Grail-Merlin* when he was still a boy. In doing so Maerlant returned to the matter of Britain after more than twenty years. Like most of his other works, the *Spiegel* is written in Middle Dutch rhymed couplets. However, unlike the other works we have discussed here, it is not exclusively concerned with the matter of Britain. It is, first and foremost, a *heilshistorie*, which is a chronicle or history of the world from a Christian perspective. Thus, the *Spiegel* starts with Adam and Eve's expulsion from paradise and continues via the salvation of man by Jesus Christ to Maerlant's own time, up until the year 1250. Because of the gigantic size of this work, I am forced to limit myself strictly to Maerlant's treatment of the history of Britain and, even more specifically, to the period of Arthur's reign.

Many Dutch scholars have noted how Maerlant's treatment of the matter of Britain had changed dramatically in the *Spiegel*. According to Gerritsen, the *Spiegel* and the *Grail-Merlin* are 'strikingly different' due to Maerlant's 'changing attitude' (Gerritsen, 1981, 368). Van Oostrom makes a similar analysis and argues that Maerlant, around this period, obtained a copy of Geoffrey's *Historia Regum Britanniae* (*HRB*), which greatly influenced him. (Van Oostrom, 1996, 316-17) Maerlant's main source, the *Speculum,* was also indirectly affiliated with the *HRB*, as it was based on the *Auctarium Ursicampinum,* which was written in the second half of the 12th century by an anonymous author who integrated several passages of the *Chronographia* (c. 1105) which was written by Sigebertus of Glemboux, who also used the Geoffrey's *HRB* as his main source on Arthur's reign. Interestingly though, Sigebertus had some reservations concerning Geoffrey's work. But according to Richard Barber, such reservations were actually quite rare and the *HRB* was generally accepted as a true history among medieval historians, :

> By medieval standards, Geoffrey's work was a bestseller; not only that, but most chroniclers accepted his work as true. Between 1150 and 1420, some fifty chroniclers had used it as the basis for their account of the history of Britain, while only a handful questioned it. The most sceptical was William of Newburgh, writing at the end of the twelfth century, but his attack went largely unheeded. With the writers of the romances, his success was even greater. Two romance histories were based on it within the next twenty years; Gaimar's version is lost, but Wace's *Roman de Brut*, completed in 1155, has survived. (Barber 1979, 10)

Amongst the fifty chroniclers that Barber mentioned, we can also count Maerlant. The passage above presented us with one of the most important aspects in the development of medieval Arthurian literature, namely: the birth of the chronicle tradition. In chapter 2, we basically discussed the birth of what is now called the 'romance tradition' and which started with Chrétien's Arthurian romances. But the 'chronicle tradition' started with Geoffrey of Monmouth's (c. 1100-1155) *HRB*. Though Geoffrey used a number of older British histories, such as Nennius' *Historia Brittonum*, the chronicle tradition (from a modern point of view) is just as fictional as the romance tradition. However, where the romance tradition presents itself as fictional, the chronicle tradition tries to keep up a certain historical pretention. Before Maerlant starts his history of Arthur's reign, in the *Spiegel*, he takes a moment to explain that much of what is known about the subject is pure fabrication (P. III, Book V, Chap. XLVIII, vs. 67-74):

Ende al es van hem achterbleven	Although there exist
Boerden vele, die sijn bescreven	still many lies about him [Arthur]
Van menestrelen, van goliarden,	by minstrels and vagabonds
Die favelen visieren begaerden,	who wanted to make up stories
Dies en salmen niet ommare	these I will not relate
Van hem make dat ware,	and I will tell you the truth
Dat ic cortelike tesen tide	as briefly as I can
Van hem wille overliden.	to pass them on.
(Maerlant 1982, 332-6)	(My translation)

It is hard to interpret these lines without attempting to psychologize what is going on in Maerlant's mind. Is he venting his frustration at finding out that many things he wrote about in his *Grail-Merlin* never actually happened? Or is he simply warning his audience that much of the material on Arthur's reign was never bona fide because it came from the minstrels' oral tradition? In this regard, it is interesting to note that both Chrétien (an author in the romance tradition) and Maerlant (an author in the chronicle tradition, at least with the *Spiegel*) both blame the minstrels for their mishandling of the matter of Britain.[32]

  Originally, Vincent's *Speculum* did not offer a very elaborate history of King Arthur (especially when compared to its elaborate portrayal of Charlemagne). But Maerlant, who apparently was still interested in the subject, used his newly acquired *HRB* to expand on these passages. What is interesting here, is that Maerlant's treatment testifies to a clear hierarchy of sources. As mentioned in the previous chapter (see page 34), Maerlant had probably enjoyed a prestigious education at the chapter school of Sint Donaas, where he became proficient in Latin. Like many other scholars of his age, Maerlant preferred the more trustworthy Latin accounts over that of

---

[32] However, Chrétien criticizes the minstrels for the low artistic quality of their oral tradition while Maerlant blames them for the many lies they have spread on the subject.

the French vernacular. In regard to the use of Latin in medieval culture, the American scholar Ziolkowsky notes that:

> Latin was what could be styled a "prestige language". Picked up by no one from the cradle in household conversation, facility in Latin was a skill that was prized and admired because the language had to be mastered in schools – which is to say, in grammar schools. As a result, exposure to Latin grammar and all that it entailed, such as the authority of its texts and the technology of its books, was held in such reverence that the word grammatical took on almost magical allure to lay people. (Ziolkowsky 1996, 507)

Because Latin could only be learned in grammar schools, its use was generally taken as a testament to the quality of the author's education. As a result, Latin texts were considered to be more trustworthy than those written in vernacular languages, which generally stemmed from an oral tradition. In the *Spiegel* we find evidence of this through Maerlant's treatment of various sources. To Maerlant, Robert's work is in every way inferior to that of Geoffrey and Vincenti and we can read how, according to Maerlant, fictional characters such as Perceval and Lancelot have no place in his historical *Spiegel* (P. III, Book V, Chap. XLIX, vs. 16-24):

Favele, die ic van hem vant,	Of the many lies that I found of him
Die latic al achterbliven.	I shall tell you nothing.
Van Lancelote canic niet scriven,	I cannot write about Lancelot,
Van Perchevale, van Eggreveine;	nor Perceval, nor Agravain.
Maer den goeden Waleweine	On the other hand good Gawain
Vindie in sine jeesten geset,	is present in these stories
Ende sinen broeder Mordret,	and his brother Mordred
Ende van Eniau den hertoge Keyen,	and Kay the duke of Eniau,
Daer hem die Walen mede meyen.	whom the French hold up to derision.
(Maerlant 1982, 333)	(My translation)

As we can see, there is not the slightest doubt in Maerlant's mind that the Latin sources are superior to those in the vernacular. And given the obvious errors Robert had made in his *Joseph*, this seems to be a fair assessment. Without a second thought Lancelot, Perceval and Agravain are denounced by Maerlant as products of the overactive imagination of minstrels. But what is especially remarkable in this passage, is that there is no mention of the Grail whatsoever. The holy relic which, in Maerlant's *Grail-Merlin*, was at the very centre of attention, seems simply forgotten. Does this imply that he assumes readers know that the Holy Grail is a myth? Or is it too painful for him to admit here that there never was a Grail in the time of Arthur's reign?

6.1 Narrative structure and techniques

Now that we have become familiar with the nature of the *Spiegel* and the sources that Maerlant used to construct the historical narrative, we should consider some of the narratological properties of the text. To start off I will consider the narrative techniques that he used.

In the previously quoted passages from the *Spiegel*, it is clear that when Maerlant uses the 'ic', he is clearly referring to himself as the author and as a historian. For example, in the first passage I quoted in this chapter, Maerlant demonstrated some of his misgivings when dealing with the matter of Britain and in the second passage he condemns the oral and romance tradition for the many 'lies' that they have spread. In this way, the 'ic' is much more than just a narrative agent, which merely intends to guide the reader through the story. Instead, we are presented with the author himself, a scholar with a critical attitude towards the reliability of his sources.

The speech representation in the *Spiegel* seems to be similar to that of the *Grail-Merlin*, however, the ratio of direct discourse is much lower in this work. Contrary to modern historiography, the use of direct discourse in historical works was still widely accepted in Maerlant's time and we can find several examples of this in the *Spiegel*. The characterization of different personae does not present us with any surprising results either. Analogous names seem to be non-existent and though Maerlant sometimes uses direct definition to characterize a historical figure, this is done mostly to demonstrate some general consensus that seems to echo public opinion. However, one adjective or epithet used by Maerlant in relation to Merlin can provide us with some interesting insights. I will return to this issue in the next section.

The narrative structure of the *Spiegel* is more challenging for this investigation. As I have mentioned before, the *Spiegel* is not exclusively a history of Arthur's reign, it is a world history from a Christian perspective. Therefore, the work presents us with several narrative threads which relate historical events that take place more or less simultaneously. For example, the passage where the boy Merlin is presented to Vortigern at his tower is preceded by the story of Saint John Chrysostom and followed by the conquest of Carthage by the Vandals. As we can see, this technique is similar to that of *La conquête de Constantinople* and also functions through the interlacement of several narratives*. In her extremely thorough analysis of Maerlant's *Spiegel*, Wilma Feringa[33] described this method as follows*:

> Door telkens aan het einde van een periode waarover de geschiedenis van een land of een volk
> was verhaald, te verwijzen naar gelijktijdige gebeurtenissen bij andere volkeren volgde

---

[33] I would like to take the opportunity here to thank Wilma Feringa personally, as she was kind enough to lend me a copy of her thesis and much of her research material for my investigation.

> Vincentius – en ook Maerlant – het principe van de synchrone geschiedschrijving, zoals dit in Middeleeuwse historiografie gebruikelijk was.[34] (Feringa 1979, 4)

To construct his history of Arthur's reign, Maerlant primarily used Vincenti' *Speculum* and Geoffrey's *HRB*. Thus the organizing principle of the narrative structure is a chronological representation of historical events, and not artistic composition. Though both Gerritsen and Van Oostrom observed a different attitude in Maerlant's *Spiegel* in relation to his treatment of the matter of Britian, Wilma Feringa observed that he actually re-used quite a number of elements from his *Merlijns Boeck*:

> In 1976 my pupil Wilma Feringa observed that in writing the British chapters of the *Spiegel* Maerlant on several occasions derived words, phrases, and even elements pertaining to the narrative structure from his *Boek van Merline*. (...) It looks as if Maerlant rejected his earlier work by no means in its entirety, but only insofar as it was contradicted by the more trustworthy account of the *Historia Regum Britanniae*. (Gerritsen, 1981, 381)

Based on these similarities between the *Grail-Merlin* and the *Spiegel*, Feringa argues that Maerlant did not completely reject his earlier work. Though Feringa's observation concerning the use of words, phrases and elements of the narrative structure is correct, I do not agree with the subsequent conclusion that is drawn from that analysis, i.e. that Maerlant only retracted those passages from the *Grail-Merlin* that were in some way contradicted by his Latin sources. First of all, the absence of the Grail in the *Speculum* and *HRB* undermines Robert's work on the most fundamental level: its theme. In this respect, Maerlant, who was already aware of Robert's poor treatment of Biblical and Classical history, can hardly be blamed for considering Robert's work to be inferior to his Latin sources. Secondly, as we have seen in chapter 5 (page 38), there are a number of important differences between Robert's and Geoffrey's portrayal of the wizard Merlin. Therefore, in the next part of this chapter I will examine Merlin's portrayal in the *Spiegel* more closely as any such alterations can give us insight into Maerlant's treatment of the subject and thus his attitude towards it.

6.2 A sanctified heathen

Up until now we have seen how a number of subsequent authors of the Arthurian legend adapted the work of their predecessors in order to give it a (more) Christian significance. The nature of these alterations have provided us with interesting insights and they seem to be the focal point of many changes. We have also seen that the reinterpretation through translatio is mostly paradigmatic in nature and reflects the ideological orientation and values of a society. In

---

[34] By constantly referring to events that are happening simultaneously with other peoples or nations, Vincent – and also Maerlant – are using the principle of synchronous history, as was common in medieval historiography. (My translation)

this respect, the portrayal of Merlin provides us with an interesting opportunity to put this theory to the test. Concerning Merlin's portrayal in the *Spiegel*, Feringa notes:

> Dat de figuur van Merlijn en zijn voorspellingen problematisch zijn zowel voor Vincentius als voor Maerlant blijkt uit het slot van hun hoofdstuk. Het is een oorspronkelijke opmerking die Vincentius als christelijk leermeester zijn lezers meende te moeten meegeven, en die door Maerlant wordt overgenomen: nl. dat God soms zijn raadsbesluit door een heiden, zoals in de dagen van Mozes en Balaäm, laat voorspellen; zo ook nu door middel van Merlijn – de 'wilde' noemt Maerlant hem in de titel van dit hoofdstuk. Over zijn raadselachtige en ten dele duivelse afkomst zijn beiden ook zeer kort, in tegenstelling tot het uitvoerige relaas van Merlijns moeder aan koning Vortiger in de *Historia Regum Britanniae*.[35] (Feringa 1976, 26)

In chapter 5 we have seen how Robert made an effort to reinterpret Merlin as a Christian hero, almost saint-like in his presentation, and that Maerlant followed Robert closely in this regard. But the Spiegel is different in this respect, and Feringa argues that Merlin's prophecies are problematic to both Vincent and Maerlant. However, the problem here does not seem to be the prophecies themselves, but the fact that these revelations are made by a heathen, namely: Merlin. The presentation of Merlin as a heathen is completely new and almost as provocative as the absence of the Grail. Let's take a closer look at one of these passages in the *Spiegel* (P. III, Book V, Chap. XIIII, vs. 105-114):

Ende dit en es te wonderne niet,	This should not surprise you,
Dat God een deel van sinen rade	that God reveals part of his council
Openbaert onder die quade,	among the wicked
Ende ontecket vele plaghen.	and made known many plagues.
Dat dedi in Moyses daghen	He did this in the days of Moses
Biden propheten Balaam:	by the prophet Balaam:
Al was dat hi Gods raet vernam,	Even though he received God's council
Hi was selve een quaet man,	he was a wicked man
Een heidijn, een onwerdich tyran.	a heathen, an unworthy tyrant.
Desghelike ende naer desen	much like this
So maget van Merline wesen.	it could be in Merlin's case.
(Maerlant 1982, 289-90)	(My translation)

Both Vincenti and Maerlant, who take on the role of Christian teachers, make great effort to explain that a heathen *can* have the gift of foresight and prophecy. They emphasise that it is possible that God would bestow such an honour on an ungodly man and call the story of Balaäm into memory as an example (see *Numeri* 22-24 & 31). If we compare this presentation too

---

[35] That the character of Merlin and his prophecies are problematic for Vincent, as well as for Maerlant, becomes apparent at the end of their chapters. It is originally a remark by Vincent, which is copied by Maerlant, as a Christian teacher he felt obliged to explain that God sometimes reveals his council to a heathen and like in the days of Moses and Balaam, now through Merlin – who is called 'the savage' in the title of the chapter – such prophecies are made. Both are very short about his mysterious and partly demonic heritage, contrary to the lengthy story of Merlin's mother to king Vortigern in the *Historia Regum Britanniae*. (My translation)

Robert's portrayal of Merlin, we will remember that he was presented as a Christian man in every way: He befriended his mother's confessor, urged Uther to try and absolve himself in the eyes of God after they deceived Igerne, he has ties with the higher clergy and arranges with the bishops the test of the Sword in the Stone by which God shows his favour for Arthur and through which the young king can rule by divine right. Maerlant even interpolated the *Processus Satanae* through which Merlin's Christian portrayal is again expanded upon.[36] In this regard, the events surrounding his birth are of special interest. Was Merlin not saved by God and so absolved of his demonic heritage? He was in Robert's work, but (as we have seen in chapter 5) not in Geoffrey's. In the *HRB*, Merlin remains an ambiguous character. Harding notes how 'up to Merlin's entrance, Geoffrey is a totally reliable narrator (if one accepts that he is writing a fabricated history).' (Harding 1988, 61) Because of this Merlin is an extremely difficult character to define in the *HRB*. Robert took the liberty of presenting him as a Christian spin-doctor who masterminded Arthur's reign. Geoffrey's Merlin, on the other hand, was a composite character, a patchwork made up out of several personae from Celtic secular legends and saint's lives. In the *Spiegel*, when Merlin is brought before Vortigern, Maerlant refers to him in the title as the 'wilde' (or 'savage'). It is remarkable that, in every way, Merlin is still presented as the miracle child Ambrosius from Nennius' *Historia Brittonnum* and aside from his new epithet in the *Spiegel,* Merlin does not seem to be presented in any way as a 'savage' (P. III, Book V, Chap. XIIII, vs. 1-18):

Hier omme was al ommetrent	Because of this
Verre ende wide ghesent,	[the messengers] were send far and wide
Om te vindene sulc een kint,	to find such a child
So lange datmen Merline vint;	so long that they found Merlin
Want dat volc seide algader,	Because the people said
Dat kint ware sonder vader.	that this child was without a father.
Vorden coninc was hi brocht	He [Merlin] was brought before the king [Vortigern]
Met siere moeder, ende besocht	with his mother, and he [Vortigern] asked
An hare wie sijn vader ware;	her who his [Merlin's] father was
Ende soe seide al openbare,	and she said publicly
Dat hare die vrucht quam ane	that her child came
Van enen geest in mans gedane,	from a ghost in the guise of a man
Ende soe en wiste wie hi was.	and she did not know who he was.
Menegen sere wonderde das.	Many marvelled at what she said.
Merlijn seide vor menechs ogen,	Then Merlin said for all to hear,
Dat die ghene hadden geloghen,	that those [the soothsayers] had lied
Die dat seiden dat sijn bloet,	who said that his blood

---

[36] This was also noted by Gerritsen: "The effect of the interpolation is to place the subsequent story of Merlin's birth and his role in early British history even more clearly than De Boron had done into the perspective of God's work of redemption." (Gerritsen 1980, 376)

| Toten mortre ware goet. | would make the mortar strong. |
| (Maerlant 1982, 288) | (My translation) |

As we can see, the story of Merlin's diabolical heritage is still part of the story, however, unlike Robert's Merlin, this Merlin is not saved by God's divine intervention. In the *HRB*, Geoffrey does not make any mention of God interfering with the demonic plan to send their own representative to mankind. Because of this, Merlin remains a questionable character in the *HRB*. But this still does not explain Maerlant's use of the epithet 'wilde'. So where does it come from?

To answer this question we should consider Geoffrey's sources for a moment. For his *HRB*, Geoffrey claimed that he got 'a certain very ancient book written in the British language' (Geoffrey of Monmouth 1966, 51) from Walter, the archdeacon of Oxford and this ancient book served as his main source for the *HRB*.[37] However, it is well-known that after finishing the *HRB* in c. 1136, Geoffrey continued his study of several legendary British personae, including Merlin. Later in his studies he must have stumbled upon the legend of Myrddin and Kentigern and so, 14 years after finishing the *HRB*, Geoffrey wrote the *Vita Merlini* (c. 1150). It is in this work that Merlin is presented as the 'savage' man who lost his sanity after having witnessed the complete desolation of his army by Rhydderch Hael in the battle of Arfderydd in 573 A.D. After this tragedy Myrddin flees into the Caledonian forest where he lives naked amongst the wild animals. If this story is the reason for Maerlant's use of the epithet 'wilde', then that would suggest that he did not only use the *HRB* as his source, but also the *Vita Merlini* or some version of it. On the other hand, it is precisely in the *Vita Merlini* that Geoffrey presented a more Christian Merlin who, during a harsh winter, laments to God in his prayers that he has nothing to eat. Not exactly the typical behaviour of a heathen.

This prompts the question if Geoffrey's later revision of Merlin as a Christian character inspired subsequent authors to do the same. However, this points again into the direction of Hackney's theory and I remain convinced that such adaptations are more of a paradigmatic nature and cannot be assigned to the influence of just one author. Nothing can be said about this with absolute certainty, as it is generally very hard to 'prove' that a certain author was influenced by another author. In the end, all we can do is compare different versions of the story and consider some of the possibilities based on their differences and similarities.

But the portrayal of characters is not completely contingent either and the romance and chronicle traditions do seem to provide authors with certain conventions that shape their treatment of the matter of Britain. For example, the chronicle tradition generally pays much attention to Merlin's prophecies, while the romance tradition usually limits it to the fight between the red and the white dragon. The latter is the case with Robert's *Merlin*, but even this work is not unequivocally part of the romance tradition, as Brandsma notes that the relationship

---

[37] Interestingly, it has also been suggested that this 'ancient book' is, in fact, nothing more than another example of source fiction.

between Mordred and Guinevere in the Didot-*Perceval* is usually only found in the chronicle tradition. (Brandsma 1993, 104) In this way, a work can combine several properties from different traditions which for medieval authors only adds to the already problematic historical treatment of Arthur's reign.

6.3 Dissolving the Epic

The observant reader undoubtedly noticed how this thesis struggled in its search to find an organizing principle in Maerlant's treatment of the matter of Britain. Though it is obvious that the *Torec* received a fictional treatment and the passages on Arthur's reign in the *Spiegel* received a historical treatment, the *Grail-Merlin* remains problematic. It is clear that, somewhere down the line, Maerlant got confused and in modern academic circles the general consensus is that, in the case of the *Grail-Merlin*, he gave a historical treatment to what was basically a work of fiction. Based on my analysis I think that it is safe to say that Maerlant's confusion was not as much an expression of his flawed methodology, as it was an expression of the problematic nature of the Arthurian legend. The matter of Britain combines elements of both history and fiction alike. But how did these two elements get so inextricably intertwined with each other? We have seen that some conventions in medieval historiography, such as the use of direct discourse, tends more to a literary presentation of historical narratives then we (modern people) are used too. Modern historiography does not allow historians to interpolate an imaginary dialogue on the grounds that it *might* have happened that way. If there is any use of direct discourse in modern works of history, then only on the condition that they are literal quotes from a representational and verifiable source. Which was not the case in the Middle Ages:

> But it is also worth remembering that the distinction between fiction and history is a modern one, and Geoffrey's book is indeed a mixture of the two. It is not a chronicle of contemporary events, using the scraps of evidence that were available. It is safe to say that there is very little in Geoffrey's book that his contemporaries could have firmly contradicted as untrue. But they gave it a very different aspect when they used it as a source for the early parts of their own purely factual histories. (Barber 1979, 10)

The problem that the *HRB* presented to authors like Maerlant, was not merely that it was a fictional history that was presented as an actual history, but primarily that it was treated as such by other historians. That the *HRB* is actually a work of fiction does not need further explanation here. However, I would argue that it would be wrong to simply brand the nature of this work as purely fictional. It is clear that Geoffrey knew much about British legends and Welsh oral traditions and in his time these stories might have had some credibility. The origin myth of Brutus of Troy was still taken very seriously by many medieval historians. And the heroic acts of the mythic warrior Arthur, told by many Welsh bards, were already still very popular among the

Welsh in his time. In other words, the *HRB* is not just the product of Geoffrey's own imagination, it is a bricolage of an imaginary history which partly existed long before Geoffrey was born. It is a fictional history of the Britain, which may or may not have some vague connection to actual historical events. However, those stories developed in such a way that legend is all that remained. Unlike Chrétien's romances, which are explicitly fictional through their improbability, the *HRB* had a certain credibility that would later remain recognizable in other incarnations of the chronicle tradition:

> Scholes and Kellogg in *The Nature of Narratives* delineate one version of the progress from epic: epic "dissolves" into two distinct forms, history on the one hand, and fiction or romance on the other, which were united under the epic qualification. N.E. Griffin, too, sees a direct development from the epic into romance, ancient and medieval. He picks out credibility as the key, in which we can see an implied bias toward epic typical of his generation: "By a romance we commonly mean a tale of an improbable or, better, of an incredible character" which differs from epic, "which was once … a credible tale". He further argues that the epic of one culture will, when translated and re-interpreted, become the romance of another. (Harding 1988, 4-5)

The epic can be understood as an expression of the 'mythologization' of history. Much like Homer's *Iliad*, the famous epic about the Trojan War, in which we can find remnants of what might have been an actual historical war, historical events have been mixed with tales of Gods and legendary heroes by the rhapsodes. Medieval examples of such epics include *Beowulf* and the *Edda*. It is undeniable that the epic, as a history that was 'once a credible tale', eventually disappeared in the Middle Ages and if we consider the *HRB* as a form of epic, it might very well be one of the last examples that the European literary culture ever produced. The idea that Geoffrey's epic 'dissolved' into romance on the on hand and history on the other is actually quite intriguing in relation to Maerlant's different attitudes towards the matter of Britain. From the differences between the *Torec* and the *Spiegel* it is clear Maerlant was aware that both a fictional and historical approach to the material was possible, however, a combination of the two was to be condemned and rejected. Unfortunately for Maerlant (and many other medieval historians) the most authoritative source on Arthur's reign, the *HRB*, was precisely such a problematic combination of fiction and history – because of its epic nature. We have seen clearly how Maerlant struggles to separate the wheat from the chaff, the fiction from history. But as Griffin notes, the epic of one culture can become the romance of another and this seems to be precisely what happened when Chrétien developed his Arthurian romances:

> In concrete terms, this is made possible by turning away from the historically based subject matter of classical antiquity and Frankish heroic poetry, and using instead the *matière de Bretagne*, i.e. by operating with primarily oral and popular subjects of Celtic origin which, having no firm historical basis, may be adapted at will. (Haug 1997, 92)

Some older version of the Welsh Mabinogi *Peredur Son of Evrawg* might have provided Chrétien with the blueprint of his *Le Conte du Graal*. To people such as Chrétien, Welsh legends of this kind would have been the product of a distant culture and its stories might seem to have no firm historical basis and could thus be 'adapted at will'. It is probably not surprising that there is no Grail in the Welsh *Peredur* and when the hero visits the castle of the Fisher King, he is instead presented with a severed head on a plate. If the theory that Peredur as Chrétien's inspiration for Perceval is correct, then it would be another good example of translatio, as Chrétien would then have translated and re-interpreted the Welsh legend. Consequently, Robert seems to have combined Wace's *Roman de Brut* for his *Merlin* (which was inspired by Geoffrey's *HRB*) with elements from *Le Conte du Graal* for his *Joseph* and possibly for the Didot-*Perceval*.[38] In the case of Chrétien is was clear that he was writing fiction. But in Robert's case, we find a combination of elements from the romance *and* the chronicle tradition. To make matters worse, Robert even used the apocryphal Gospel on Nicodemus, creating an incredibly complicated mix of fact and fiction.

   When we say that the epic 'dissolved' into the separate categories of history and romance we are speaking figuratively. However, because this implies that such a development took place during the Middle Ages we should be able to find some evidence of that development in the matter of Britain. In the works that we have subsequently discussed here, it seems clear that neither Geoffrey, Wace nor Robert were particularly concerned with giving a 'real' or 'historical' version of Arthur. In Maerlant's *Spiegel*, however, this issue is constantly at the forefront of his mind. Through his different use of narrative agents (the 'ic' strictly as narrator in the *Torec* and the 'ic' as critical historian in the *Spiegel*) we have seen that he was aware of both a fictional as well as a historical approach to the matter of Britain and the role he had to play in these different narratives. A combination of both, however, was simply out of the question. If we take Maerlant's attitude towards his sources as representative for the methodology of 13th century historians, then it is clear that the conditions under which an epic would normally be created were no longer present. Something either really happened (as is the case with history) or not (as is the case with fiction) and any fantastical or imaginary combination of those categories was no longer acceptable or desirable.

   The process of 'dissolving the epic', as Scholes and Kellogg described it, did not happen overnight and Maerlant was not the first nor the most important scholar in this process. But while I discussed a number of authors in this thesis (from Geoffrey of Monmouth to Chrétien de Troyes and Robert de Boron, all the way to Jacob van Maerlant), the centuries slipped by almost unnoticed, spanning almost 300 years in total. Based on what we have seen in this chapter, I think that there is a certain awareness in Maerlant's attitude towards the matter of Britain which

---

[38] This also explains why it is that the Didot-Perceval is one of the rare examples

I can only define as a historical awareness that guided his treatment of the subject matter and compelled him to use a meticulous methodological treatment of sources in a desire to find historical truth. This attitude towards literature and history, so completely absent in the work of Geoffrey and Robert, must have developed somewhere during that 300 year period. This new way of thinking demanded a clear distinction between history and fiction. But unfortunately for Maerlant, the history of King Arthur was stuck in fiction and there was simply no truth to be found.

Above: A depiction of Myrddin and Saint Kentigern (Mungo) at Stobo Kirk, Scotland. (Source: Wikipedia)

6. Conclusions

At the start of my thesis I had two premises that have guided my investigation. Firstly, that Maerlant was familiar with both a historical and fictional approach to the matter of Britain and that each of these approaches demanded a different treatment, each with its own conventions. Secondly, that these historical and fictional conventions can be distinguished by analysing the different treatments on the level of selection (in the use of source material) and on the level of presentation (the narrative structure and techniques). On the basis of my analysis I think that these premises were correct and in this thesis I have tried to provide enough evidence to prove that they are correct.

In Maerlant's oeuvre, we have seen two distinctly different treatments of the matter of Britain. The *Torec*, with its use of *conjointure*, presents the reader with an artificial narrative structure through an artificial and thematic organisation of events. The narrator is strictly a narrative agent in the *Torec* and it does not question nor criticise its source. In this work there are also purely fictional elements, such as analogous names. In the *Spiegel*, on the other hand, it is Maerlant personally who is presented as the narrator and he constantly questions his sources, warns his readers concerning the many lies told about Arthur and complains about the minstrels and their rude handling of the matter of Britain. The narrative structure in the *Spiegel* is meant to be an accurate representation of historical events. Typical fictional elements, such as analogous names, are not used.

As different as these treatments are, they do share one particular aspect which make Maerlant's historical accounts look more like literature than history: the use of direct discourse in speech representation. As I explained in chapter 2, the problem with fiction and history is that history, like fiction, links a number of events in a causal order by means of textual narration. The similarities that fiction and history have, through the medium that they share, is real and still presents modern historiography with problems:

> Histories gain their explanatory power by processing data into stories. Those stories take their shape from what White calls "emplotment," the process through which the facts contained in "chronicles" are encoded as components of plots. Plots are not immanent in events themselves but exist in the minds of historians, who rarely reflect on them. No historical event can itself constitute a story, tragic or ironic: it can only be presented as such from a particular historian's narrative point of view. The event emerges as a plotted story, which takes on meaning when it is combined with other elements in the limited number of generic plot structures by which a series of events can be constituted. (Leitch 2001, 1710)

This is precisely what we have seen in Maerlant's treatment of the matter of Britain: the linking of a number of events through which a narrative structure is created. But we have seen that

there are clear differences in the treatment of the material when a work concerns a fictional or historical approach (as with the *Torec* and the *Spiegel* respectively). The use of direct discourse in history only adds to the feeling that a story is being told and makes it harder to distinguish fiction from history. Though the use of direct discourse is no longer accepted in modern historiography, it was still widely accepted and used in Maerlant's time.

We have seen how Maerlant, with a limited amount of information due to the unavailability and/or unreliability of sources, applied a method in order to find historical truth. This method did not merely limit itself to the formal aspects of a text (in which verse is false and prose is truth), but which is mainly concerned with the authority and reliability of a source. Unfortunately this methodology was flawed and it thus resulted in two strikingly different versions of British history. One in which there is a Holy Grail and a Christian Merlin (the *Grail-Merlin*) and one in which the Grail is totally absent and Merlin is a heathen with a very questionable nature (the *Spiegel*). In my analysis I have tried to demonstrate how subsequent authors of the Arthurian legend translated and adapted the work of their predecessors (*translatio*). This was largely done out of religious and ideological motivations and considerations. However, this process cannot be attributed to one particular author. Instead, their efforts should be interpreted as a paradigmatic orientation that aims to unify the sacred and secular works.[39] Through Maerlant's critical historical treatment the fictional nature of these adaptations became clear to him.

Contrary to the early Middle Ages (c. 500-1000) in which the epic was still a common literary phenomenon, in Maerlant's time, we've considered how the epic dissolved and from it developed romance on the one hand and history on the other. These were not just new genres, but also new methods of dealing with texts and sources and each of these treatments made specific demands on an author. In fiction, Chrétien wanted to break away from the formulaic structure that the minstrels used. Through texutalization he was able to create meaning through an intricate structuring of events. In historiography these developments implied (and indeed demanded!) a critical treatment of any and all sources with historical pretentions, in order to give an accurate chronological representation of historical events. These developments insisted on a clear division between history and literature, a distinction that, unfortunately for Maerlant, neither Geoffrey, Robert or Wace seemed to have made.

These conclusions are rather straightforward and perhaps not very new or shocking. However, based on my analysis I think that the *Grail-Merlin* displays some considerable inconsistencies in relation to both the fictional and historical treatment as we have identified

---

[39] As E. Jane Burns adequately summarizes: "If the Christianization of Arthurian legend was encouraged by Church officials who, in the spirit of Thomas Aquinas's Summa Theologica later in the century (1274), sought to harmonize the sacred and secular worlds within a totalizing system of interpretations, that Christianization of a distant Arthurian past also served the political aspirations of the Norman dynasty." (Chase 1992, xiv)

them in the Torec and the Spiegel. In these cases it has been rewarding to return to the original purpose of the *Grail-Merlin*. If we forget about the dichotomy between literature and fiction for a while, and simply consider the *Grail-Merlin* to be a work that was written for children (the princes at Voorne) we might want to consider that we are dealing with an form of medieval children's literature.

Let's consider this possibility for a moment. We are again reminded of verse 543 of the *Historie,* in which Maerlant refers to his audience as 'kinder' (children). On page 14 I have already conjectured that the original *Torezz* and Robert's *Joseph* and *Merlin* might have been acquired from the same source and possibly with the same intention, i.e. providing the youth at Voorne with a didactical programme. Thematically these two works present the audience with a similar topic: young noblemen or kings (Torec and Arthur) who have to overcome considerable adversity before they can become a ruler. When we look at the *Grail-Merlin* as a form of medieval children's literature, we might also see how Maerlant made an effort to present the princes with a work which could have been intended to be both amusing and educational at the same time. If we accept this, for the sake of the argument, we might begin to understand where Maerlant's different attitude comes from. And we might also see that for this particular purpose, Maerlant might have used a different treatment of source material. After all, it would be completely unacceptable for an educational program in the European Middle Ages to present an erroneous account of Biblical events, and it is mostly in these passages that we see Maerlant the critic, or Maerlant the historian, especially (but not surprisingly!) in the *Historie van den Grale*. In *Merlijns Boeck* this critical attitude seems largely absent. It is indeed logical to consider the availability of alternative sources here (as Gerritsen and Van Oostrom already observed), but it does not explain the playful attitude in relation to Maerlant's interpolation and use of source fiction. What is particularly interesting about this assessment is that this treatment of source material in relation to its didactic purpose is actually very recognizable, even to modern readers. For example, if we were to think of a children's book, written in the modern age, about the wizard Merlin, which aims to be both amusing and educational at the same time, such a work would no doubt reflect much of the values of our culture and society, just as a medieval example would. Indeed, T.H. White's *The Sword in the Stone* can be a good example of such a book. By that same token, a children's book from the high Middle Ages would never accept a clearly erroneous account that contradict the Biblical truth, especially when such a book has an educational and didactic purpose.

In this respect, medievalists (by the very nature of their discipline) often tend to focus too much on the 'otherness' of the Middle Ages; on the fact that it was a different culture, from a different age, and that their literature is thus the product of a different way of thinking. But the problem that Maerlant had in discerning fact from fiction is still the same problem a lot of

modern medievalists are struggling with today. If, with the *Grail-Merlin*, we are indeed dealing with a form of medieval children's literature, then the entire discussion on the historical or fictional nature of the work, is irrelevant and is merely the result of an absence of paratext and guided reception.

With this being said, I would like to point out that by presenting Maerlant's *Grail-Merlin* as a form of medieval children's literature, I am not simply trying to chuck the work into a narrowly defined genre, just to be done with it. On the contrary, in this thesis I have tried to understand the *Grail-Merlin in its function*, that is, its function as a work which was written as part of a didactical program for children with its own treatment of the matter of Britain that is shaped by its purpose. In this sense, the analyses of the narrative structure and techniques have helped me to characterize the nature of the work, especially in relation to the inconsistencies in Maerlant's treatment of source material. Though many Dutch scholars have discussed the *Grail-Merlin* in relation to this supposed didactic function, none (as far as I am aware) have considered the possibility that Maerlant's treatment of source material was also dictated by that function.

This would radically change our views of Maerlant's attitude towards the matter of Britain. No longer is its treatment confined to either the realms of either history or fiction, but it can transcend these categories through its educational function and playful approach in the form of children's literature. In this capacity Maerlant could allow himself to treat the matter of Britain with some levity and, when an opportunity presented itself, use a playful approach to his source material. This is not a modern criteria, but a very practical solution to the problem of trying to keep the attention of a seven-year-old noble. But there was one provisio: that such an approach did not contradict its educational purpose or undermine its didactic value. When this is the case with Robert's original, Maerlant immediately jumps in and corrects the mistakes.

I would like to state for the record that this idea (i.e. that this early form of children's literature allowed for a different treatment of source material) has by no means been proven in this thesis. An important argument against this theory could be that there seems to be no distinguishable difference in Maerlant's tone or use of language in the *Grail-Merlin* when compared to the *Spiegel* and Feringa's observations in relation to the similarities between these texts cannot simply be ignored. One might imagine that a work written for young nobles between the age of seven and twelve would show more differences than a mere loose treatment of sources. Is the fact that the *Grail-Merlin* was written for a young audience enough to qualify the work as a form of children's literature? Unfortunately, I am not able to answer these questions without further study. I have merely observed a number of inconsistencies in Maerlant's treatment in the *Grail-Merlin* and have considered this as one possible explanation. To verify this hypothesis another study would be necessary in which the *Grail-Merlin* is compared to other works which were also written for young people and which have some

historical basis. Such a study could provide us with interesting new insights into the development of medieval literature.

Appendices

- **Appendix A** – *Abbreviated titles*

Title:	Abbrevation:
Historia Regum Britanniae	*HRB*
Historie van den Grale	*Historie*
Speculum Historiale	*Speculum*
Spiegel Historiael	*Spiegel*

- **Appendix B** – *Timetable*

o	Geoffrey of Monmouth	c. 1100-1155
	o *Historia Regum Britanniae*	c. 1136
	o *Vita Merlini*	c. 1150
o	Chrétien de Troyes	c. 1153-1183
	o *Erec et Enide*	c. 1170
	o *Le Conte du Graal*	c. 1180
o	Robert de Boron	Unknown (late 12th and early 13th century)
	o *Joseph d'Arimatie*	c. 1190
	o *Merlin*	c. 1190
o	Jacob van Maerlant	c. 1235-1300
	o *Historie van den Grale/Merlijns Boeck*	c. 1261
	o *Torec*	c. 1262
	o *Spiegel Historiael*	c. 1285
o	Vincent de Beauvais	c. 1190-1264
	o *Speculum Historiale*	c. 1256

- **Appendix C** – *A summary of the Joseph*

After Judas' betrayal, our Lord Jesus Christ is arrested and tortured. The angry Jews insist upon his crucifixion and he is condemned (though reluctantly) by the Roman prefect Pontius Pilate. After the death of Christ a Jew from Arimathea named Joseph, who is part of Pilate's retinue, asks his master for the body of the deceased. Pilate grants Joseph his wish, but the Jews fear the resurrection of Christ and refuse to relinquish His body. Joseph returns to Pilate and he sends Nicodemus along with him to claim the body. When they take the body of Christ down from the cross, Joseph uses the cup from the Last Supper to collect the blood from his wounds. When they have cleaned Christ's body and have buried Him the Jews post guards at the grave to make sure His body is not stolen by the disciples. Before His appearance to the apostles, Christ goes down into hell and rescues all the souls that have been imprisoned there, including Adam and Eve. When the Jews find out that the body of Christ has disappeared they suspect Joseph. They beat him, interrogate him and imprison him in a dark dungeon without food or water. In this prison Christ visits Joseph and hands him the cup from the Last Supper, which is henceforth called the Grail. Years later, when a pilgrim arrives in Rome, the emperor hears of a holy man (Jesus) who could heal the sick. Because the emperor is looking for a way to heal his sick son, Vespasian (who suffers from leprosy), he is interested in these rumours. When the pilgrim confirms the stories the emperor has heard an envoy is send to investigate. With Pilate's help they find Veronica and they bring her back to Rome with her prized possession: the piece of cloth with the image of Christ on it. When Vespasian looks upon the image he is instantaneously cured of his illness and vows to take revenge on those who killed his benefactor. When he arrives in Jerusalem he frees Joseph who then converts Vespasian to Christianity. After Joseph's plea Vespasian concedes to sparing the Jews who agree to convert to Christianity. Those Jews join Joseph and together with his sister's husband, Bron, they travel to a place where they built a community, growing crops and keeping sheep. When famine hits the community it becomes clear that one of them has committed the sin of lust and that they are being punished for the transgression. Joseph invites all the people to a feast but only twelve of them (who are virtuous) are able to take a seat because they can see the food on the table, the others cannot. Those who have not seen the food on the table are ashamed and leave the community, but one of them, Moyses, remains to convince the others that he is a good man. When he convinces Grail companions to allow him to sit at their table he takes a seat in the only chair left, which is the chair that represents Judas' seat. Because Moyses tried to trick Joseph and his companions he is instantaneously swallowed up by the earth and thrown into hell. The company is distressed but Jesus explains to Joseph that Moyses was misleading them and was planning to betray them. After this, Bron asks Joseph what is to become of his twelve sons now that they have reached

manhood. Joseph tells Bron that if any of his sons wish to marry, they should. But if one preferred celibacy, then that sons should be sent to him. All of the sons decide to get married, except for Alain li Gros. Joseph teaches Bron and Alain everything he knows. Then Bron is given the Grail which he takes to the West (Britain).

- **Appendix D** – *A summary of the Merlin*

After Christ's harrowing of hell, the demons decide that they need to take action to retain some of their combustible clientele. One of them is charged with impregnating a human female. This child will be born with the memories and knowledge of his demonic father and is meant to lure people away from the teachings of Christ. The girl that the devil has chosen for this purpose is the daughter of a merchant. But even after the demon has destroyed her entire family the girl still won't lose her faith. Her confessor, Blaise, advices her to make the sign of the cross every night before going to sleep, but after a fight with one of her sisters she forgets to make the sign and falls asleep. When she lies there helplessly the devil takes his chance and conceives a child with the girl. When she wakes up she know that she has been taken advantage off and she immediately goes to Blaise who gives her absolution. But her pregnancy does not go unnoticed and she has to appear in front of a court. The judge finds it hard to accept that the girl doesn't know who the father is, but at Blaise's request he delays his verdict until the child is born. The girl is taken to a tower where she is to remain under close watch until she has given birth. Because of the piety of the girl, God decides to intervene and he gives Merlin knowledge of the future so that the child is free to choose between Christ or the devil. When the child is born he is named Merlin (after the girl's grandfather) and he is covered in thick, black hair. After eighteen months he is able to speak. Merlin successfully takes up the defence of his mother at court and she is released. When it becomes clear to Blaise that Merlin acts to the will of God he devotes himself to writing down all his adventures and histories. Merlin tells Blaise the story of the Grail and about Joseph and Bron. Meanwhile Vortigern, the seneschal of king Constant, has been able to usurp the British throne. After Moine's death, Vortigern fears the return of his two younger brothers: Pendragon and Uther. He decides to build a huge tower to hide from his enemies, but every time the tower crumbles into dust. He is told by soothsayers and he has to mix the blood of a fatherless child with the mortar to make the tower stand. Vortigern sends out messengers to find such a child and they return with Merlin. When Merlin is brought before Vortigern he convinces the king to drain the water beneath the tower and two dragons appear. One red, the other one white. They fight and the white dragon, which resembles Moine's brothers, eventually wins. Vortigern releases Merlin and when Pendragon and Uther arrive they burn Vortigern alive in his tower. Next the Saxons attack and Pendragon dies in a battle near Salisbury. Uter succeeds his brother and manages to defeat the Saxons. Merlin is tasked with building a cemetery for Pendragon and he takes a ring of Stone (Stonehenge) from Ireland to Britain. After this Merlin dedicates himself to founding the Round Table, which is the third table to hold the Holy Grail. After this Merlin returns to Blaise to tell him all that has transpired. In the wizard's absence, Uther falls in love with Igerne, the wife of the duke of Cornwall. Civil war breaks out between the

king and the duke. Uther turns to Merlin who is able to change Uther's appearance to make him look like the duke. Thus disguised, Uther beds Igerne and they conceive a child. The following morning it becomes clear that the duke has died on the battlefield and Uther and Igerne marry. The child that was conceived that night, Arthur, is given to Merlin and he brings the boy to Entor. Years later Uther dies and there is much confusion as to who should succeed him. Merlin calls for all the nobles to leave that decision to God and to wait for a sign. Then, at Christmas, in front of the church a sword in the stone appears and on it is written that he who is able to pull the sword from the stone is the true king of Britain. When Arthur's foster brother, Kay, has lost his sword, Arthur is send to find him one. He returns with the sword in the stone. However, the nobles are unwilling to accept the boy as their king and Arthur has to prove that he is the only one who can pull the sword form the stone two more times (at Easter and Pentecost) after which he is crowned king.

Bibliography

- Barber, R. *The Arthurian Legends*. Book Club Associates, London, 1979.

- Besamusca, B. *The Book of Lancelot.* Boydell & Brewer, New York, 2003.

- Besamusca, B. & F. Brandsma. ''Kinder dit was omber waer' – De didactische functie van Jacob van Maerlants Graal-Merlijn', in: *Queeste.* Jaargang 3. Uitgeverij Verloren, Hilversum, 1996, pp. 115-124.

- Brandsma, F. 'Degrees of Perceptibility: The Narrator in the French Prose Lancelot, and its German and Dutch Translations', in: *Arthurian Literature XXIV.* D.S. Brewer, Cambridge, 2007, pp. 121-134.

- Brandsma, F. *Merlijn – De tovenaar van koning Artur*. Athenaeum – Polak & Van Gennep, Amsterdam, 2004.

- Brandsma, F. 'Werd Guinevere Arthurs ondergang?' in: *Millenium* 7, 1993, p. 99-115.

- Chase, C.J. *Lancelot-Grail – The Old French Arthurian Vulgate and Post-Vulgate in Translation. Part 1. The History of the Holy Grail*. D.S. Brewer, Cambridge, 1992.

- Chrétien de Troyes (ed. Michel Zink.) *Le Conte du Graal: ou le roman de Perceval. Edition du manuscrit 354 de Berne.* Paris, Librairie Générale Française, 1990.

- Clogan, P.M. (ed.) *Medieval Hagiography and Romance*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1975.

- Feringa, W. *Jacob van Maerlant en Artur – De Britse geschiedenis in de Spiegel Historiael*, doctoraalscriptie voor het hoofdvak letterkunde der Middeleeuwen o.l.v. Prof. Dr. W.P. Gerritsen, Instituut Vooys, 1976.

- Geoffrey of Monmouth. *Historia Regum Britaniae*. ed. Jacob Hammer, The Mediaeval Academy of America, Massachusetts, 1951.

- Geoffrey of Monmouth. *The History of the Kings of Britain.* Penguin Books, London, 1966.

- Gerritsen, W.P. 'Jacob van Maerlant and Geoffrey of Monmouth'. In: *An Arthurian Tapestry. Essays in Memory of Lewis Thorpe*. Glasgow, 1981, pp. 368-388.

- Goodrich, P. (ed.) *The Romance of Merlin – An Anthology.* Garland Publishing, New York & London, 1990.

- Harding, C.E. *Merlin and the Legendary Romance.* Garland Publishing, New York & London, 1988.

- Haug, W. *Vernacular Literary Theory of the Middle Ages – The German Tradition, 800-1300, in its European Context*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1997.

- Jacob van Maerlant (ed. Timothy Soddman). *Historie van den Grale und Boek van Merline – Nach der Steinfurter Handschrift herausgegeben von Timothy Sodmann.* Böhlau Verlag, Köln & Wien, 1980.

- Jacob van Maerlant (ed. Philip Utenbroeke & Lodewijc van Velthem). *Spiegel Historiael met de fragmenten der later toegevoegde gedeelten*. Tweede deel. HES Publishers, Utrecht, 1982.

- Johnson, D.F. & G.H.M. Claassens. *Arthurian Archives X – Dutch Romances III. Five Romances from the Lancelot Compilation.* D.S. Brewer, Cambridge, 2003.

- Lacy, N.J. 'The evolution of French Prose Romance', in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance*. ed. R.L. Krueger, Cambridge, 2000, p. 196.

- Leitch, V.B. (ed.) *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, W.W. Norton & Company, New York, 2001.

- Lie, O.S.H. 'What is Truth? The Verse-Prose Debate in Medieval Dutch Literature' in: *Queeste.* Nummer 1. Uitgeverij Verloren, Hilversum, 1994, p. 34-65.

- Rimmon-Kenan, S. *Narrative Fiction – Contemporary Poetics.* Routledge, London and New York, 1983.

- Robert de Boron. *Merlin and the Grail.* D.S. Brewer, Cambridge, 2001.

- Van Oostrom, F. *Maerlants Wereld*. Prometheus, Amsterdam, 1996.

- Wackers, P. 'There are no Genres – Remarks on the Classification of Literary Texts', in: *Reinardus*. John Benjamin's Publishing Company, Amsterdam, 2000, pp. 239-248.

- Ziolkowsky, J. 'Towards a history of medieval Latin literature' in: F. A. C. Mantello and A. G. Rigg (eds), *Medieval Latin. An introduction and bibliographical guide*, Catholic University of America Press, Washington, 1996, pp. 505-536.