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Stylistic Aspects of Proper Names in some Late French Arthurian Verse Romances

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In the thirteenth-century verse romance *Durmart le Galois*, the hero has met a beautiful woman in the course of his travels. It will eventually be revealed that this maiden is Fenise, the Irish queen, the lady who, so he has been told, should be the object of his marital aspirations. Temporarily, Durmart loses contact with his companion, tries to rejoin her, but he becomes so lost in thought that he misses his way and rides for twenty leagues without noticing where he is going:

> Mesire Durmars chevacha,
> Qu'ains en vint liues n'aresta;
> N'onques ne fina de penser:
> Ce li fist sa voie oblïer.[1]

The motif is well known, so well known that the author does not insult our intelligence by inviting us to seek a source, but immediately refers us to the story of Perceval:

> Onques Percevaus li Galois
> Ne fu de penser si destrois
> Quant le vermel sanc remira,
> Com mesire Durmars fu la (ll. 3741-44)

Clearly this is an allusion to the famous incident in Chrétien de Troyes's *Conte du Graal*, where Perceval, seeing drops of blood on the snow, begins to think of Blanchefleur and remains lost in thought:

> Percevax sor les gotes muse
> Tote la matinee et use.[2]

Here, as on so many occasions in the later verse romances, the influence of Chrétien is sharply felt. The author of *Durmart* does show a little independence: whereas Perceval wastes a morning deep in thought, Durmart seems to spend the whole day until close on sunset unaware of his immediate surroundings. The author of *Durmart* does seem to have taken the Chrétien motif and, by a trivial twist, made it his own.

Identifying direct borrowings is no easy task. It is often far from clear whether a writer is lifting a passage or merely dealing with established, traditional motifs. In the case of *Durmart le Galois*, it does seem possible to identify other borrowings, notably from the first two continuations of the *Perceval*, but the author shows himself to be eclectic, discriminating and independently minded in his choice of material. Similarly, whole sections of *Durmart*, where the hero has to prove his worth by undertaking a series of tasks, are undoubtedly reminiscent of a considerable part of *Erec et Enide*. But the author of *Durmart* offers a corrective to *Erec*, suggesting that the knight who seeks to fulfil his true potential should aim high and find a bride in the appropriate social class. This is in obvious contrast to the morganatic marriage contracted by Erec. Likewise, as far as the religious dimension of the work is concerned, the author of *Durmart le Galois* avoids the vague mysticism which pervades the *Perceval* and sets his heroís endeavours firmly within the framework of the established Church.[3] Thus, the *Durmart*-poet, even as he draws upon the work of the Champenois master, simultaneously distances himself from it.

'Distances' is perhaps the appropriate word here, because this article will deal with proper names, specifically with place-names, as they occur in the writers of the post-Chrétien generations, of whom the *Durmart*-poet is an obvious representative. More precisely, what the article will concentrate on is the use of certain types of phrase, formulae is perhaps the appropriate term, which contain geographical names, and there will be an attempt to assess the poetic charge of the stylistic patterns we can identify.

Let us remind ourselves of the geographical parameters of the world as established by Chrétien in his major romances and which define the area of operation of King Arthur and his knights. We are concerned above all with mainland Britain and with a number of the islands that surround it. To be more exact, we are generally concerned with the west and the north of the country, with areas that historically were Celtic areas. Brittany is mentioned by Chrétien, but is by no means

central to his concerns, while Cornwall is similarly of little interest to him, since it was, in all probability, already closely associated above all with the Tristan story. Wales, however, is a favoured centre of operations; we find King Arthur at Cardigan, for example, at the beginning of *Erec et Enide*. Further, the Scottish borders are a favourite stamping ground: it is at Cardueil, probably suggesting Carlisle in this case, that we find Arthur at the beginning of Yvain. The relationship between the world presented by Chrétien and the world of reality is by no means an unchanging one. From the place-name point of view, as in so many other respects, *Cligés* is something of an oddity. Certain of the names employed by Geoffrey of Monmouth and Wace return, but what is striking is the number of place-names in the text which relate to known or real places in the south of England which are generally accurately located. Dover, Southampton, Windsor and Winchester appear, as do Oxford, Canterbury, Shoreham, London and Wallingford. Dover, Windsor, Shoreham and Wallingford are not found in the Arthurian section of Wace's *Brut*, and, indeed, it would seem that Dover/Dovre, Shoreham/Sorham and Wallingford/Galinguefort do not figure in any other recognised French Arthurian verse romance. But generally, the Arthurian world of Chrétien in no way reproduces exact geographical reality, but is also occupied by places which are literary inventions and which do not correspond to any existing small towns or strongholds. Embarking on his first adventure, Erec leaves Arthur's residence at Cardigan and comes to a town where Enide and her parents live and which is later named Laluth (ll. 6245, 6247). Try as one might, it is impossible to identify Laluth with any real place. Even Roger Sherman Loomis, that most enthusiastic and incorrigible identifier of romance names with real places, could find no possible equivalent in the real world for Laluth.[4]

But place-names can have other resonances; their function is not merely to locate a place in a real or in an imaginary world. Other forms of information, apart from the purely geographical can be conveyed. Again, let us consider the example of Chrétien in these areas, as an influence in establishing the patterns. Consider, to take a case in point, the references to Thessaly which we find in his romances.

In *Cligès*, Thessaly is the native land of Fénice's servant and governess, Thessala, an obviously eponymous figure, who owes her name to the fact that it was in Thessaly that she was born:

Sa mestre avoit non Thessala,
Qui l'avoit norrie en anfance,
Si savoit molt de nigromance.
Por ce fu Thessala clamee
Qu'ele fu de Tessalle nee,
Ou sont feites les deablies.
Anseigniees et establies.[5]

Here, *Tessalle* does have a real geographical presence; it is the place of birth of Thessala and an area renowned for sorcery, almost the home of sorcery and all magic spells. Elsewhere, the resonances may be more complex. In *Erec*, we read:

An une chambre fut assise
Desor une coute de paile
Qui venue estoit de Tessaile.[6]

Geographical provenance is obviously suggested here, but the use of the exotic proper name also suggests, as does the surrounding context, the quality of the silken cloth on which Enide is seated. A third reference to Thessaly in Chrétien again shows a usage which is not purely geographical. In the *Lancelot*, the hero is offered hospitality for the night by a maiden, so long as he is prepared to sleep with her. Somewhat reluctantly, Lancelot acquiesces and is led to a fortified place:

Puis qu'il li ot acreanté
Son voloir et sa volenté,
Si l'en mainne jusqu'an un baile,
N'avoit plus bel jusqu'an Thessaile,
Qu'il estoit clos a la reonde
De hauz murs, et d'eve parfonde.[7]

The use of *Thessaile* in this comparative formula, 'N'avoit plus bel jusqu'an Thessaile', does not necessarily lead us to think of some distant Greek land but rather persuades us to wonder at the unsurpassed beauty of the *baile*. Just as in the previous example, the place-name in the comparison serves to suggest the quality of the object being described.[8] In neither case is it the authorís primary intention to send us on some kind of imaginative journey to foreign climes: he simply

wishes to emphasise, via the associations introduced, the beauty of what is being described.[9] I am obviously not suggesting that these formulations are unique to Chrétien, nor indeed to the romance genre as a whole, but merely that he provides examples of the patterns which later romance writers will exploit.

In his study of the characters and the setting of Chrétien de Troyes's Arthurian world, Keith Busby is concerned with audience expectation and suggests in his conclusion that a complicity between audience and author develops, dependent upon a close knowledge of Chrétien's romances.[10] There is no doubt that the writers of the post-Chrétien verse romances seek in part to satisfy this audience expectation by situating them in familiar territory. At the beginning of a number of romances, we find conventional figures associated with conventional places. This is an attempt to reassure, to indicate to the audience what kind of literature this is, and to suggest also what their legitimate expectations might be. The beginning of *Fergus* is almost a classic of its kind:

> Ce fu a feste Saint Jahan
> Que li rois a Karadingan
> Ot cort tenue comme rois.
> Molt i ot chevaliers cortois,
> De tels que bien nonmer saroie
> Se entremetre mïen voloie;
> Car si com j'a[i] oï conter
> Et l'aventure raconter.
> Mesire Gavains i estoit
> Et ses compans que molt amoit,
> Car c'estoit mesire[s] Yvains
> Qui ai[n]c en nul tans ne fu vains,
> Et Lancelos et Perceval,
> Qui tant pena por le Garal.
> Erec i fu et Saigremors
> Et Kex qui ot les cevels sors
> Et maint autre que je ne sai
> Nonmer, que pas apris ne l'ai,
> Mais es sales se sejornoient
> Aprés mangier et devisoient
> De lor fais, de lor aventures,
> Qui avenues erent dures,

As pluissors d'aus par maintes fois.[11]

Here we have the king holding court, and note that the author does not even need to name him, for the audience knows full well from all the surrounding information that this is Arthur. We are at a familiar moment in the year, at one of the main religious festivals, and the author gives us almost a roll-call of the heroes of Chrétien's Arthurian romances, Erec, Lancelot, Yvain, Perceval, Gauvain; he also names Kay and Sagremor, figures also familiar from Chrétien. The writing here is not of the tightest. Line 10, 'Et ses compans que molt amoit', is decidedly weak, as in line 12, where Yvain is merely given an attribute suggested by his name.[12] But the intention is not to shock or to surprise, but to reassure. We know the world being described here, and this includes the place where the court is being held, Cardigan, where the beginning of *Erec* is similarly set. *Le Bel Inconnu*, after a few brief introductory lines, has the same kind of conventional beginning:

A Charlion, qui siet sor mer,
Se faissoit li rois coroner
A une cort qu'il ot mandee.
A un aost fu l'asanllee.
Molt fu la cors qu'Artus tint grans,
Et la cités bonne et vaillans. (ll. 11-16)

Once again, it is Arthur who is holding court, and once again, on first mention at least, it is considered superfluous to indicate that 'li rois', the king involved, is Arthur. The time of the year is indicated ('A un *aost* fu l'asanblee'), as is the precise place where the court meets, *Charlion*, Caerleon-on-Usk. Caerleon may never have been strictly 'sor mer', but fortresses, strongholds, fortified towns are typically by the sea, so that is the literary convention that wins the day, rather than the geographical reality. Caerleon is the site of Arthur's second coronation in the *Roman de Brut*,[13] and is the main place of residence of Arthur (in this, Wace is following Geoffrey of Monmouth); it also figures in the *Perceval*, where Caerleon is again a main residence, seemingly the customary home, of Arthur and his court.[14] We find a similar mode of conventional description, even when the figure concerned is not Arthur but another king. In *Durmart le Galois*, Jozefent, the father of the hero

and a cousin of Arthur, holds court at a conventional time of the year and in what has the ring of a conventional setting:

> Ce fu el pristens en paschor
> Que li rois estoit a sejor
> A la Blanche Cité en Gales;
> Todis avoit plaines ses sales
> De chevaliers et de desduit. (ll. 571-75)

Presumably Jozefent cannot appropriate to himself one of the recognised strongholds of Arthur, but he can be presented as operating in a familiar setting, 'en Gales'. So powerful is the convention that it is automatically applied to any ruler of stature.

But, once having established certain norms, including geographical norms, the author can then give an individual flavour to the text, partly by the locations which he chooses to insert. We have noted already that *Cligès* is unusual, in that Chrétien introduces a number of real, identifiable places situated in the south of England. Similarly in *Fergus*, the action is set in identifiable Scottish locations. As the text says of our hero:

> *Par Escoche* va cevauçant
> La u fortune le demainne. (ll. 4056-57)

Glasgow and its forest are named (ll. 184-85), l. 845), as is Jedburgh and its forest (ll 139, 6298, 6319, 6401, 6744). There are also references to Liddel Castle (ll. 1552, 2554, 5509, 5886), to Queensferry (ll. 3937, 4393) and to Roxburgh (4421, 4790, 5160, 5489, 5616, 6051, 6283, 6941, 6999).[15] Our hero Fergus visits Dunottar Castle (ll. 3755, 3827, 4345) and also Dunfermline:

> De l'autre part est arivés
> Desous un castiel sarrasin
> Si ert clamés *[D]unfremelin*.[16]

The *castiel sarrasin* temporarily disconcerts, but one assumes that the author, Guillaume le Clerc, had in mind a somewhat primitive structure, something less sophisticated than the Scottish norm for this kind of edifice.

Fergus is obviously an extreme case, but other authors similarly succeed in imposing, through their choice of place-names, their own stamp upon largely conventional material. *The Romance of Yder*,[17] like *Fergus* in fact, has its own stock of conventional Arthurian names. We find, for example, Carlion (or, more frequently, Karlion) (ll. 5117, 5134, 6046, 6059, 6258) and Cardoil, which in this text has a different resonance, being the birthplace of Yder and thus situated apparently outside Arthur's kingdom (ll. 324, 4792, 6653, 6666). But we also find a knot of names relating to known places in the West of England, Gloucester, Worcester, the Malvern area, together with an allusion to the Severn:

> 'C'est pres,' dist ele, '*Wircercestre*
> Dedens la forest de *Malverne*
> Qui siet sor la val de *Saverne*.'
> 'Sire Gagains,' dist li reis, 'sire,
> Ço est en *Gloccestresire*.' (ll. 5360-64)

> Gagan, Yder, Keis e Ywain
> Maine li reis, n'est que sei quint;
> Tant erra que a *Malverne* vint. (ll. 5410-12)

Of the places mentioned here, Worcester is found in the Arthurian section of the *Roman de Brut* (*Guircestre*, l. 1714), as is the River Severn (l. 1017). Gloucester (*Gloecestre*, l. 1713, l. 3763) is also found there, if not Gloucestershire. The author does not seem too confident as to where Malvern might be, but his intentions are clear: while remaining within the normal bounds dictated by the genre, he has expressly chosen to set one section of his tale in an easily identifiable part of the country. *Yder* also contains a reference to Pontefract,[18] which figures as a residence of Arthur. Once again, one may ascribe a degree of originality to an author in selecting a new home for the king.

But not all writers are overwhelmed by such concerns. Elsewhere -as was the case with Chrétien's *Laluth*- we find names which appear to be invented and which have no roots in any geographical reality. In *La Vengeance Raguidel*, we read:

> Ne cuidoie pas que je vos les
> M'onnor et m'amie desfendre!

.....
Ains m'en iroie outre la mer
Conbatre moi vers le plus fort
Qui soit jusques en *Galesport*.[19]

Here, Gauvain is refusing to allow others to respond to a challenge on his behalf and employs a formula to convey his insistence which contains the proper name *Galesport*. The identity of the place is of little import: *Galesport* suggests Welshport, it obviously implies a place by the sea. But speculation is probably fruitless, and we must ultimately accept West's observation that *Galesport* is 'an unidentified town'.[20] The editor of *La Vengeance Raguidel* muses that we may have a deformation, a reversal of the elements of the term *Portugale*, but any attempt to identify Galesport with a real place is probably a fruitless exercise. The form seems unique to *La Vengeance Raguidel* and has every air of being an invented name, one which provides a convenient rhyme for *fort*, one which adequately suggests the sense of remoteness already conveyed by *outre la mer* and suggested by the formulaic construction. One can only have sympathy with the editor when in his list of proper names he simply glosses *Galesport* as 'ferne Stadt'.[21] *Le Bel Inconnu* may furnish another example of the made-up name:

Molt fu li castials bons et fors;
Se cil qui sont dusqu'a *Limors*
I fuissent asiegé trente ans,
N'enterroient il pas dedans. (ll. 3921-24)

Limors foxes the editor: he glosses it, with good reason, simply as 'château' (p. 208). West suggests Limours in Seine-et-Oise, but with a minimum of confidence and points out the similarity between this passage and a passage in a manuscript of the *First Continuation of the Perceval*:[22]

Primes parole cil d'Illande:
'La citez est et belle et forz.
Se cil qui sont jusqu'a *Limorz*
A ce siege venu estoient,
Certes par force na prandroient,
Ainçois seront set anz passé

Que par nos soient afamé,
Si conme je pans et espoir.[23]

One text may have influenced the other, but there seems no need to postulate any reference to a real place. Indeed, the fact that the term *Limors/Limorz* is employed twice in near-identical expressions and also that it rhymes on both occasions with *fors/forz* suggests that it is part of a formula and does not have any independent existence outside it. West is right to remind us at the same point that the name of the castle of the count in *Erec et Enide* is also given as *Limors*,[24] and Loomis speculated that *Limors* should be seen as *Li-mors*, 'the dead man'.[25] There seems no such resonance here, but it is certainly not impossible that Renaut de Beaujeu and the author of the *First Continuation* drew upon a name introduced by Chrétien. The name they use in the formula is a literary one, and, as with *Galesport*, it is very doubtful whether we are dealing here with a real geographical location. It must again be emphasised that both these examples, *Galesport* and *Limors*, occur in formulaic expressions, with a familiar pattern, *jusques en/dusqu'a*, introducing the invented proper name. Also, it might be noted that both names are made to rhyme with *fort/fors*. In neither case is geographical information of paramount importance: in the first, Gauvain is refusing to allow others to respond to a challenge on his behalf and employs a proper-name formula to convey his insistence, in the second, by the use of a near-identical proper-name formula, the author of *Le Bel Inconnu* emphasises the impregnable nature of the fortress.

Here, we certainly seem to have been dealing with two invented names which, by their very nature, cannot refer to any reality in the outside world. But it is not only made-up names which operate like this: authentic place-names have the power to suggest notions other than the purely geographical. Recall the second Thessaly example culled from *Erec et Enide*: 'Desor une coute de paile / Qu'apportee fu de Thesaile'. Here, not simply provenance but also quality is suggested by the use of the proper name. Normally, in truth, the formula is tighter than in this Thessaly example. Soon after this in Erec, the hero prepares to leave. The quality of his equipment is emphasised: he puts on a hauberk 'tant chier / Qu'an n'an puet maille detranchier' (ll. 2651-52); he dons a helmet 'Qui plus cler reluisoit que glace' (l. 2671), before asking for his horse, 'le bai de *Gascoigne*' (2675). In the

context, we understand that Erecís horse will be a valuable beast, and the impression is reinforced by the use of a proper name, in this kind of formula. We may ourselves have no personal knowledge of the quality of Gascony horses, but the context and the formula conspire together to suggest their worth.

If we stay with horses, we find that writers of the post-Chrétien generations employ place-names for much the same purpose. In the *Romance of Hunbaut*, a knight is described:

> Il sist sor un *ceval d'Espaingne*
> Qui n'iert pas anuiels ne lens;
> De droite voie sans asens
> Eut pris par force deus grans cers.[26]

The qualities of the horse, suggested already by the 'ceval d'Espaingne' formula, are brought out fully in the following lines. And once the sense of 'ceval d'Espaingne' has been established, there is no need to be so expansive on other occasions. Later in the text we find the same terminology, without any precise supporting epithets, because the formula virtually tells it all:

> Devant sor un *ceval d'Espaingne*
> Vient cil ki fu batus dou haste,
> Devant les autres vint en haste,
> Si ne tient ne cemin ne voie. (ll. 1108-11)

Spanish horses come in for praise elsewhere. In *Li Chevaliers as deus espees*, we read:

> A itant se sont eslongie
> Et orent le cemin laissie
> Et sont entre en la champaigne,
> S'ot chascuns grant *cheval d'Espaigne*
> Fort et bien alant et isniel.[27]

Once again, the author chooses to bring out the qualities of the horse, *grand, fort, bien alant, isniel*, but the term *cheval d'Espaigne* almost suggests this on its own. And it is not simply the reference to Spain which conveys this, but the formula itself: the use of a proper name, allied to an object, suggests the object's qualities.

As we might anticipate, references to horses from Castille are far from rare. In *La Vengeance Raguidel* we read of an impressive knight, riding '.i. sors bauçans de Castiele':

> Li chevals sor coi il seoit
> Ert .i. *sors bauçans de Castiele.*
> Li chevaliers ot droite et bele
> La janbe et les piés bien tornés,
> Et sist ausi com'il fu[st] nes
> El ceval dedens les arçons. (ll. 4210-15)

The whole context suggests the quality of the horse, but the simple formula, *bauçans* plus proper name, could have conveyed something of this on its own. In the same text, we read of another horse: 'Il est montés, l'elme en son cief, / Sor .i. *bauçant de Cornouaille*. (ll. 5716-17). Whereas the quality of Castilian horses is well known, that of Cornish horses is perhaps less so. But the formula alone carries the sense.

Sometimes things are not so easy. In *Le Bel Inconnu*, Guinglan is sensibly mounted on a 'ceval d'Espaigne' and unhorses Galoain who is riding a 'bon ceval de Frisse':

> A son ceval lasque le frain.
> Si le fiert si de grant ravine
> En l'escu, deseur la poitrine,
> Que tot l'escu le perce et brisse,
> Si que del bon *ceval de Frisse*
> Le trebucha ans el sablon. (ll. 5878-83)

Whereas Spanish horses crop up everywhere, horses from *Frisse* seem to be relatively thin on the ground. The formula characteristically suggests quality, as does self-evidently the adjective *bon*. And the formula, *ceval* plus proper name, conveys this sense of quality, even though we may be a trifle uncertain as to what is meant geographically by *Frisse*. The editor of *Le Bel Inconnu* suggests Frise (p. 207), Friesland, the area on the North Sea now split between Holland and Germany. But *Frise* or *Frisse* is found elsewhere with apparently different geographical references. In Béroul's *Tristran*, *Frise* has has been identified tentatively by a succession of editors with Dumfries, and *la mer de Frise* with the Firth of Forth, with the

Solway Firth and with the North Sea. But, for other texts, *Frise* has been identified with Phrygia in Asia Minor.[28] In *Fergus*, that aggressively Scottish romance, a knight is awoken by the hero and leaps into action:

> Ainc ne li vint de lui armer;
> Ains chaucha braies et chemisse,
> Et un blïaut de *drap de Frise*
> Jete en son dos isnelement. (ll. 2872-75)

The editor suggests Friesland here (p. 278), and this, in truth, seems a perfectly reasonable conclusion. Certainly in the field of more exotic fabrics, authors tend to create phrases which suggest the mysterious East; we find references to silken cloths from Constantinople and from Tyre in Syria. Indeed, there is a reference in *Fergus* itself which gives us to understand that Syria, *Sire*, is the home of refined, delicate fabrics:

> A bras qu'il ot gros et quaré
> A le blanc auberc recouvré,
> Si le ront, peçoie et deschire
> Ausi com fust uns *dras de Sire*. (ll. 4585-88)

As for the reference to the 'bon ceval de Frisse' in *Le Bel Inconnu*, the choice of identification is ours, if we choose to play this game. But, whatever we decide, the connotations of the formulaic expression remain essentially the same: it is above all the quality of the thing which is being emphasized, whatever its geographical provenance might be.

Let us turn now to another formulaic pattern, or rather set of formulaic patterns, found in Chrétien and exploited by later writers. Recall the last quotation referring to Thessaly which was taken from the *Lancelot*: 'Si l'en mainne jusqu'an un baile, / N'avoit plus bel jusqu'an *Thessaile'*, a form of comparative formula. There are many such expressions in Chrétien, and we find on more than one occasion the use of more than one place name in the same construction, as in this related type of expression in *Cligès:*

> 'Or tost, fet il, jusqu'à *Pavie*,
> Et de ça jusqu'an *Alemaigne*,

Chastel, ne vile n'i remaigne,
Ne cité ou il ne soit quis. (ll.6628-31)

In examples like this a degree of hyperbole is involved, and the literal truth of the statement is less important than the underlying idea, namely that what is claimed is *universally* recognised as valid. In such circumstances, virtually any place-name will serve the purpose, but certain authors do seem to have a particular predilection for certain locations. Rome is very popular everywhere in romance, but the author of *L'Atre périlleux* uses Rome as a convenient point of reference on no less than seven occasions:

Ains me vant bien k'une pucele,
La plus cortoise et la plus bele
Qui soit desqu'au porce de Rome, (ll. 3025-2)

We find Rome figuring later:

Se j'ere renclus u ermite,
Le plus saint et le plus prodome
Ki soit de ci desi qu'a Rome
Dont je fusce reté de rien. (ll. 4436-39)

We also find Rome associated with another place-name which we have already encountered, in a form of double comparison, as in the *Cligès* construction noted above:

N'a damoisele duqu'a Rome
Ne de la duques en Espaigne,
Ki esgaree n'en remagne. (ll. 4214-16)[29]

The very familiarity of the place-names employed, *Rome* and *Espaigne*, clearly signals to us that the true significance of the statement resides not with the place-name itself but with the formula utilised. Indeed, if we were to take statements of this kind at their face value, clear contradictions might emerge. In *L'Atre périlleux*, we find a number of references to *Bretaigne*, in a simplified form of the comparative formula:

En Bretaigne n'a chevalier

Plus outrecuidié ne plus fier,
ne plus douté en son païs: (ll. 1531-33)

Qu'il n'avoit si fel chevalier
Plus outrequidié ne si fier
Ne plus fort en toute Bretaigne: (ll. 1595-97)

Here, the same knight, Escanor, is being described, so, perhaps, the same comparative term predictably returns. But Bretaigne serves as a point of reference also for Gauvain, though admittedly he has slightly different attributes: 'Que onques son per ne mellor / Ne fu nés en toute Bretaigne' (ll. 1716-17). On must assume that no kind of chivalric knock-out contest has occurred to decide whether Escanor or Gauvain is top-dog in Brittany. The reference to *Bretaigne* in these cases has no literal truth at all.

Here, we have been dealing with familiar names, *Rome*, *Espaigne*, *Bretaigne*, and, perhaps as with so many things, with place-names there is a craving for familiarity. And yet, on occasion, romance writers do branch out and show some originality, introducing their individual choice of proper-name into constructions of this kind. Even though the original choice of proper-name may disconcert, the familiar formula will console. In *Fergus*, we find the conventional structure, but an unusual term:

N'ot si hardi dusqu'a Namur,
Fust en son liu, si com je croi,
Qui n'eüst grant paor de soi. (ll. 2884-86)

According to West,[30] this seems to be the sole occasion on which Namur figures in French Arthurian verse romance. Interestingly enough, the author of *Fergus* may include a reference to another Belgian town in a variant form of comparative expression a little later in the text: 'Mar s'asist aveuc nos en renc; / Mius li venist estre a Dinant.' (ll. 3322-27). There has been hesitation over identifying *Dinant*.[31] Is this Dinan in Brittany or Dinant in Belgium? The latest editor of *Fergus* plumps unequivocally for Dinant in Belgium,[32] perhaps with some reason. *Namur* crops up nowhere else in Arthurian verse romance, nor does the form *Dinant*.[33] We may be in the presence of a writer with a rare appreciation of things Belgian.

This last example from *Fergus*, 'Mius li venist estre a Dinant', might lead us on to consider a further variant of the comparative formula, wherein a general preference to be elsewhere is expressed. *Fergus*, in fact, offers a further example, where the term *Pavie*, Pavia, is employed: 'Mius vausissent estre a Pavie / Que la estrÎ a icelle hore' (ll. 360-61).

Continuing our Italian journey, we find an example of this formula being used in association with the ever-popular city of Rome in the *Romance of Yder:*

> Freor le prist de grant maniere
> Quant il n'i vit entor sei home;
> Mels volsist estre dela Rome. (ll. 5434-36)

Italy also figures in *La Vengeance Raguidel*, where the formula uses Brindisi as a point of reference, seen as a desirable bolthole in this particular context:

> Cil respont: 'Sire, se vos plaist!'
> Ki vausist qu'il fust a Brandis,
> Mais tant dotent ses felons dis
> Que nus n'osse vers lui parler. (ll. 4158-61)

If we are wish for an example literally a little closer to home, we can find a reference to Lincoln in *Hunbaut*:

> Hunbaus qui l'ot mis a escole
> L'amast asés mius a Nicole
> Lui et la damoisele ensanble. (ll. 721-23)

In these cases, as in many of the previous expressions examined, it is the formula, 'Mius vausissent', 'Mels volsist', 'Ki vausist', 'L'amast asés mius', which carries the meaning of the phrase: the particular place-name employed is of little import.

Finally, let us return to *Durmart le Galois* and see what variety of resonances and functions place-names may have in one, representative text. To no one's surprise at all, *Carduel* figures as a residence of Arthur:

> Tant oirre et par terre et par mer

Qu'il vint a Carduel la cité.
Le roi Artu i a trové, (ll. 12712-14)

The editor of the text, Joseph Gildea, notes that no precise localisation of Carduel is possible from this reference,[34] but the author is hardly concerned here with external reality. He is simply seeking to associate the text via the place-name and its resonances with a characteristic mode of writing. We also find a number of characteristic place-name formulae. The ever-reliable Rome is drawn upon here:

Je sui filz a si tresprodome,
Et l'on ne poroit dusqu'a Rome
Trover si malvais com je sui,
Car je ne fai bien a nului. (ll. 599-602)

We also find the author exhibiting a degree of originality. Arthur resides now also at Glastonbury, possibly a new role for the place: 'Li bons rois Artus sejornoit /A Glatingebieres tot droit' (ll. 6003-04).[35]

The author also shows originality in setting his story in a precise, identifiable locality, for the hero has a series of adventures in Ireland from l. 1569 onwards: 'Entrés en est en la terre grande / Que maintes gens claimment Yrlande. (ll. 1569-70). Durmart is also active there from l. 10407 onwards. Ireland has long been a site for Arthurian operations, and the author has chosen here to give this locality particular prominence. Amongst the place-names the predictable Dublin, *Duveline*, figures, but associated with a 'cuens de Duveline' (see, for example, l. 7278)[36] and thus a title rather than a location in its own right. But a more authentic Irish flavour is provided by the siege of Limerick: 'Et si l'a li grans rois assise / En la cité de Limeri' (ll. 10672-73). There is a description of the town of Limerick in l. 10809 ff. The description is conventional, and what lends it any kind of distinctiveness is the use of the name alone, *Limeri* not being employed elsewhere, it would seem, in other texts of the genre. Perhaps it is strange that the author does not exploit further via place-names the Irish ambience. We have references to a place called *Landoc* (see, for example, l. 2005 and l. 11461), but no real place seems intended, any more than did *Landuc* when it appeared in Chrétien's *Yvain* as the title of Laudine.[37] Indeed, *Landoc* in *Durmart* forms part of a formulaic line, 'Devant Landoc enmi la pree', which appears four times in the text. As with so many other ostensible place-names, we

should seek out Landoc not in any form of geographical reality, but in literature.

Sylvie Lefèvre, in her remarks on the geography of Chrétien de Troyes, makes the point that the place-names in his romances come together to create 'une géographie prise entre la réalité et l'imaginaire'.[38] Certainly place-names in the later verse romances, so this study would seem to confirm, may situate themselves at any point in that broad spectrum which stretches between the decidedly real and the strictly imaginary. As with some names in *Cligès*, so, for example, a number of terms in *Fergus* and *Yder* strongly urge us to identify them with a recognised, external reality. But other names, *Galesport* in *La Vengeance Raguidel*, *Limors* in *Le Bel Inconnu*, are, like Chrétien's *Laluth*, products of the literary imagination. Furthermore, real or imaginary, a place-name in a formulaic expression will have a different resonance, for it is largely the formula itself which carries the meaning of the phrase. Though for the sake of convenience we may habitually consign names of this kind to one and the same category, they present in truth a diversity of function and connotation.

NOTES

[1] *Durmart le Galois: roman arthurien du treizième siècle*, ed. by Joseph Gildea, 2 vols.,Villanova, Pennsylvania, The Villanova Press, 1965, ll. 3737-40.

[2] *Perceval ou le Conte du Graal*, in *Chrétien de Troyes: oeuvres complètes*, ed. by Daniel Poirion, Paris, Gallimard, 1994, ll. 4211-12.

[3] For a recent appraisal of the text, see Neil Thomas, 'The Old French *Durmart le Galois*: a demystified version of the Perceval story?', *Parergon* 13 (1995), 117-28.

[4] Roger Sherman Loomis, *Arthurian Tradition and Chrétien de Troyes*, New York and London, Columbia University Press, 1949 (repr. 1961), pp. 107-08, p. 486.

[5] *Cligès*, ll. 2984-905, in *Chrétien de Troyes: oeuvres complètes*.

[6] *Erec et Enide*, ll. 2418-20, in *Chrétien de Troyes: oeuvres complètes*. Note also this example taken from *Le Bel Inconnu*:

> La dame par la main l'en guie;
> Sor une kiute de brun pale,

Qu'apportee fu de Tesale,
Iluec se sont andoi asis.

(*Renaut de Beaujeu: Le Bel Inconnu: roman d'aventures*, ed. by G. Perrie Williams, Paris, Champion, repr. 1967 (Classiques français du moyen âge, 38), ll. 2278-81.) One suspects that, as in so many other cases, the exigences of the rhyme had a part to play here in determining the provenance of the pale.

[7] *Lancelot ou le Chevalier de la Charrette*, ll. 971-76, in *Chrétien de Troyes: oeuvres complètes*.

[8] See also ll. 1856-59 of the Lancelot in Chrétien de Troyes: oeuvres complètes:

El cemetire après le moinne
Antre, et voit les plus beles tonbes
Qu'an poüst trover jusqu'à Donbes,
Ne de la jusqu'a Panpelune.

Donbes, Dombes in Burgundy, département de l'Ain, is probably only evoked here because it offers an easy rhyme for *tonbes*, whereas *Panpelune* provides the kind of exoticism and hyperbole encountered in the third Thessaly example. The terms conspire together to emphasize the beauty of the tombs. See also the comments of P. Rickard on the use of place-names (*Britain in Medieval French Literature, 1100-1500*,Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1956, p. 67): 'Commonplace from an early date in epic and romance are references of a purely conventional kind; that is to say allusions which have no particular significance and which have in many cases obviously been introduced only to add a tuch of variety, or for the sake of rhythm, or as a piece of padding.'

[9] There are other patterns of words which can create this same impression without employing a proper name. See, for example, ll. 1531-2 of *Le Bel Inconnu*: 'Li sibelins molt bons estoit, | *En nul païs* millor n'avoit'. This may further suggest that, in many cases, the choice of proper name is a matter of some indifference.

[10] Busby writes: 'It is possible, therefore, to postulate an evolving audience expectation of three different types: before, during and after Chrétien. It could be argued that for audiences other than the very first ones, the *Erwartungshorizont* acquires a second dimension, one of the retrospective complicity between them and the author, where even when they know what is coming they realise that they are supposed to have certain expectations and are waiting for the author to play with them. This kind of complicity is also essential, for example, to the parodic effect of certain *fabliaux*, which depend on an intimate and detailed knowledge of

Chrétien's romances and other texts. This knowledge in turn means that later authors, whilst reacting to Chrétien, could rely on their audiences understanding what they were doing' (*The Legacy of Chrétien de Troyes*, ed. by Norris J. Lacy, Douglas Kelly and Keith Busby, 2 vols, Amsterdam, Rodopi, 1987-88; I, 88-89).

[11] *Guillaume le Clerc: The Romance of Fergus*, ed. by Wilson Frescoln, Philadelphia, William H. Allen, 1983, ll. 1-23.

[12] There is perhaps a reminiscence here of a line in *Erec et Enide*, 'Et Tristanz qui onques ne rist', (*Erec et Enide*, l. 1695, in *Chrétien de Troyes: oeuvres complètes*).

[13] See *La Partie arthurienne du Roman de Brut*, ed. by I.D.O. Arnold and M.M. Pelan, Paris, Klincksieck, 1962; l. 1691 (see also l. 647 and l. 4647).

[14] 'Aprés ont lor voie tenue / Andúi a Carlion tot droit, / Ou li rois Artus cort tenoit / A feste, bien priveemant, / Qu'il n'i avoit que seulemant / Trois mile chevaliers de pris' (*Perceval ou le Conte du Graal*, ll.4002-07, in *Chrétien de Troyes: oeuvres complètes*). See also l. 4155 and l. 4606.

[15] In his list of proper names, the editor omits two references to Roxburgh (l. 5489, l. 6283). At an earlier reference, l. 5160, the text needs re-punctuating , for a in l. 5161 must be equivalent to il y a (see also l. 5616.) Thus: 'De ci a Rocebouc ne fine. / A une entree vers galerne, / Et cil qui garde la posterne / Maintenant contreval descent.

[16] *Guillaume le Clerc: The Romance of Fergus*, ll. 4050-52. D.D.R. Owen translates sarrasin by 'outlandish' (*Guillaume le Clerc. Fergus of Galloway: Knight of King Arthur.* trans. by D.D.R. Owen, London, Dent, 1991, p. 65) and adds in a note (p. 124): 'The epithet, *sarrasin,* which I have translated as "outlandish", has been taken to refer to the primitive motte-and-bailey structures of the period..., though it may simply be a convenient rhyme for *Dunfremelin*.' One hesitates to believe that *sarrasin* is quite as bereft of meaning as Owen here suggests. For P. Rickard (*Britain in Medieval French Literature, 1100-1500*, p. 60 and p. 114), *sarrasin* suggests that the castle is of Pictish origin, a reference to pagans from the south, the contemporary enemies, having been substituted for one to pagans from the north, the historical foes.

[17] *The Romance of Yder*, ed. by Alison Adams, Cambridge, Brewer, 1983.

[18] *The Romance of Yder*, l. 57 (*Ponfret*, MS *pon ret*).

[19] *La Vengeance Raguidel: altfranzösischer Abenteuerroman*, ed. Mathias Friedwagner, Halle, Niemeyer, 1909; ll. 4358-59, ll. 4366-68.

[20] G.D. West, *An Index of Proper Names in French Arthurian Verse Romances, 1150-1300*,Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1969; p. 67.

[21] *La Vengeance Raguidel*, p. 280 and p. 359.

[22] *An Index of Proper Names in French Arthurian Verse Romances*, p. 103

[23] *The Continuations of the Old French 'Perceval' of Chrétien de Troyes*, ed. by William Roach and others, 6 vols, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania, 1949-83;, II, *The First Continuation, Redaction of MSS EMQU*, ed. by William Roach and Robert H. Ivy (1950) ll. 5706-13.

[24] *Erec et Enide*, l. 4719 etc in *Chrétien de Troyes: oeuvres complètes*.

[25] *Arthurian Tradition and Chrétien de Troyes*. pp. 162-64.

[26] *The Romance of Hunbaut: an Arthurian Poem of the Thirteenth Century*, ed. by Margaret Winters, Leiden, Brill, 1984; ll. 426-29.

[27] *Li Chevaliers as deus espees*, ed. Wendelin Foerster, Halle, Niemeyer, 1877; repr. Amsterdam, Rodopi, 1966; ll. 1757-61. See also *L'Atre périlleux: Roman de la Table Ronde*, ed. Brian Woledge, Classiques français du moyen âge 76, Paris, Champion, 1936: 'Armé sor dous destriers d'Espaingne' (l. 5789). The conventional nature of the adjectives used in the *Chevaliers as deus espees* example is brought out by l. 3629 of *L'Atre périlleux*, where a horse is described as 'fort et isnel et tost alant'.

[28] See, for example, *The Romance of Tristran by Beroul*, ed. A. Ewert, 2 vols, Oxford:,Blackwell, 1939-70 (II, 198-99); *Béroul: Tristan et Iseut, poème du XIIe siècle*,ed. by G. Raynaud de Lage and H. Braet, 2 vols, Paris and Louvain, Peeters, 1989 (II, 101-02): also J. Chocheyras, '*La Vie de Saint Gilles* et le trafic maritime à l'Époque du *Tristan* de Béroul', *Romania* 113 (1992-95), 383-400 (p. 399) and G.D. West, *An Index of Proper Names in French Arthurian Verse Romances, 1150-1300*, pp. 64-65.

[29] There are other references to Rome in *L'Atre périlleux* at l. 348, l. 3354, l. 5068 and l. 5970.

[30] *An Index of Proper Names in French Arthurian Verse Romances, 1150-1300*, p. 121.

[31] See West, *An Index of Proper Names in French Arthurian Verse Romances, 1150-1300,* p. 49.

[32] *Guillaume le Clerc: The Romance of Fergus*, p. 277.

[33] But both forms are found in Jean Renart's *Guillaume de Dole*. See *Jean Renart: Le Roman de la Rose ou de Guillaume de Dole* ed. Félix Lecoy,

Classiques français du moyen âge 91, Paris, Champion. 1966; l. 2100 and l. 2521.

[34] *Durmart le Galois: roman arthurien du treizième siécle*, II, p. 141.

[35] See also l. 5330, l. 5415, l. 9321, l. 9366, l. 9380, l. 9383. On the connection made between Avalon, Glastonbury and Arthur, see Rickard, *Britain in Medieval French Literature, 1100-1500,* pp. 102-04, and West, *An Index of Proper Names in French Arthurian Verse Romances, 1150-1300*, p. 75.

[36] *Duveline* is also found at l. 6669, l. 7253, l. 7291, l. 8047 (not l. 8074, as Gildea has it in his index of proper names), l. 8543 and l. 8566.

[37] See *Yvain ou le Chevalier au Lion*, l. 2151, in *Chrétien de Troyes: oeuvres complètes*.

[38] *Chrétien de Troyes: oeuvres complètes*, p. 1484.