CONTENTS

Preface
John C. McLucas.................................................................7

Singularity and Spectrality: Desire and Death in Girart de Roussillon
Sarah Kay, University of Cambridge.................................11

Violence, Perspective, and Postmodern Historiography in Raoul de Cambrai
Peter Haidu, University of California-Los Angeles..............39

Patterns in the Presentation of Discourse in the Charroi de Nîmes
Edward A. Heinemann, University of Toronto......................73

From Latin Chronicle to Hollywood Extravaganza: the Young Cid Stirs Hearts
Matthew Bailey, University of Texas at Austin....................89

Ludovico Ariosto’s Olimpia: Faithful or Foolhardy?
Ita Mac Carthy, University College, Cork, Ireland..............103
A Typology of Beast Combats in *Guerrino Meschino* by Andrea da Barberino

Gloria Allaire, University of Kentucky..............................119

Les campagnes d’Alexandre: de l’histoire à l’épopée

Pierre Kunstmann, Université d’Ottawa ...............................131

If There Wasn’t “a” *Song of Roland*, Was There a “Trial” of Ganelon?

Mary Jane Schenck, University of Tampa ..............................143
PREFACE

The American-Canadian Branch of the Société Rencesvals held its conference, “Romance Epic in the Americas,” on the campus of Towson University in Baltimore on October 5-6, 2001, under the joint sponsorship of Towson University, Loyola College in Maryland, and The Johns Hopkins University. The conference had been scheduled and planned for a year and a half beforehand, principally by Leslie Zarker Morgan of Loyola, Stephen G. Nichols of Hopkins, and myself. When American jetliners were hijacked and crashed less than four weeks before the planned opening of the conference, there was some discussion as to whether or not to proceed. Obviously, travel had become infinitely more complicated than before the disastrous and traumatic attacks, and indeed several conference participants were forced by either logistical or psychological exigencies to cancel their trips. More importantly, the mood of those first few weeks after the highjackings was one which seemed to make academic ruminations pointless or even frivolous. There was a peculiar historical lull as there appeared to be a chance for a moderate response to the crisis based on statecraft, international aid, and diplomacy. The sense of national mourning within the United States was not yet shadowed with violent reprisal.

We decided to proceed with the conference as planned. Let me be the first to admit that this decision was based at least in large part on the natural tendency to continue robotically with routine in times of upheaval and on the reluctance to see plans laid so far in advance go for nothing. Yet there emerged as well a sense that the theme of the conference held meaning for the present crisis. Indeed, much against the will of most of the mild academic community, we found ourselves living in epic times, when cultures clashed and warriors inspired themselves to acts of mass destruction through fervent belief and undivided conviction.

The conference as it occurred during those last stunned days of uneasy peace was both curtailed and enriched by the peculiar historical moment. The conference was marked by both an enhanced sense of urgency and an improvisational informality. Everyone present sensed the
uniqueness of the event. Yet, lest I fall into the jingoist bathos of too many “September 11” reminiscences, I should also say that the conference would have been unusually pleasant and productive under any circumstances. The easy congeniality which typifies the Société Rencesvals at its best was thrown into even higher relief by the particular circumstances of the season, and the papers themselves were consistently thoughtful, scholarly, and pertinent. The two keynote speakers, Sarah Kay and Peter Haidu, not only presented very thought-provoking addresses (which appear in the following pages) but also then provided a model of collegiality in their attendance and participation at the papers of others. The scope of the conference was especially free-ranging, spanning epic, chanson de geste, and romance, with citations of sources and analogues from non-European cultures and non-canonical media. Further, many of the panelists and their listeners seemed emboldened to make unusually speculative connections between the academic content of the conference and such contemporary polemics as terrorism, nationalism, violence in the media, and gender. For all these reasons, I have encouraged the authors of the papers that follow to preserve as much as possible of their spoken text.

Although the papers in this volume all speak for themselves, I will take the editor’s privilege of highlighting certain connections which I believe recall the special dynamics of this conference. Sarah Kay’s opening address not only specifically compared varying genres but also limned terms for examining the darker aspects of medieval literature; at the same time, Kay displayed an unusual tact, canniness, and clarity in the use of Freudian, Derridian, and other contemporary literary and psychological theory to illuminate historically remote texts. Likewise, Peter Haidu’s frighteningly relevant study of violence, relying in part on textual and critical work by Sarah Kay, is informed by theoretical meditations on language (Derrida, Peirce, Saussure) and by a contemporary alertness to problematics of gender and paternity. The dialogue on spectrality between these two extended essays resonated throughout the conference.

Most of the other papers also managed to bring the medieval and/or Renaissance past into sharp colloquy with our own troubled centuries.
Ed Heinemann’s wry presentation of his computer-assisted investigations into French epic and Matthew Bailey’s deft linkage between Spanish sources and Hollywood analogues were in some sense typical of the conference’s breadth of pondering. In a paper congenial to my own research interests, Ita Mac Carthy looked at ambiguities in the gendering of a controversial sixteenth-century heroine, Ariosto’s Olimpia, a remote but recognizable descendent of the medieval epic damsels and stateswomen. Gloria Allaire’s paper on beasts and combat in Guerrino meschino was not only thorough and incisive, but laced with references to real-life experience with real-life animals in the here and now. Pierre Kunstmann evoked Antiquity in his exploration of the complications in the process by which medieval French epic authors adapted Classical historical sources. Mary Jane Schenck’s paper, which closes this volume, made the most explicit and poignant reference to contemporary events while maintaining full critical clarity and acumen in reading the Chanson de Roland.

One of the great pleasures of this conference was the harmonious collaboration of the three sponsoring institutions, which have not always managed the two-mile journey up and down Charles Street with the grace shown during these days. Deans and department chairs at all three schools (among whom I must personally thank Salvatore M. Zumbo, chair of my own department) dug deep into institutional pockets to make the conference possible. The opening ceremonies for the conference were enlivened by the participation of key administrators from all three schools: Stephen Nichols of Hopkins, one of the conference planners; Beverly Leetch, Dean of the College of Liberal Arts at Towson; and David Haddad, Academic Vice President of Loyola. Florence Newman and George McCool of Towson, Diane Chaffee-Sorace and André P. Colombat of Loyola, and Walter Stephens of Hopkins contributed by ably chairing sessions. I would normally not think it necessary to name all of these contributors, but in a conference devoted to discussion of literary and historical conflict, the friendly participation of three neighboring schools provided an edifying and consoling note. It would be quite wrong of me not to mention here what was said often at the conference: that, while each of us worked hard to make the conference a success, Leslie Morgan of Loyola was the moving force and sine qua non
from first to last, managing a daunting array of details with consistent efficiency, tact, professionalism, and good humor. A private pleasure fell to me as editor in working with three conscientious, prompt, attentive, and scholarly readers in reviewing the many excellent manuscripts submitted by the conference speakers for publication in this volume: Françoise Denis of Macalester College, Philip E. Bennett of the University of Edinburgh, and Catherine M. Jones of the University of Georgia were all model collaborators for a project of this kind, and I thank each of them for their superb work. Finally, I would like to thank Philip E. Bennett (again) and Hillary Doerr Engelhart, editors of *Olifant*, and William Kibler as president of the North American Branch of the Société Rencesval for their work in the preparation of this issue.

I hope that this issue of *Olifant* may stand as a document of an extraordinary moment in the history of the Société and of the academy.

**John C. McLucas**
Towson University
Singularity and Spectrality: Desire and Death in *Girart de Roussillon*

Sarah Kay
University of Cambridge

It is difficult to read the *chansons de geste* otherwise than in comparison with romance, though that comparison can be undertaken in many different ways. In an earlier book, *The Chanson de Geste in the Age of Romance*, I experimented with envisaging it as a dialectical engagement over a third, occluded term: that of an inadmissible political reality, the point where, as Fredric Jameson puts it, History is what hurts. More recently, I have approached the relationship between the two genres from a different angle in “L’éthique dans *Raoul de Cambrai*.” It is striking to what extent the *chansons de geste* are impervious to the dominant intellectual interest of courtly literature from the mid-twelfth century onwards: namely dialectic, with its formal negotiation of coherence and contradiction, and its philosophical engagement with universality (Kay, *Courtly Contradictions*). The world of the *chansons de geste* seems, by contrast, to be committed to individuality, a commitment which confirms, although from a different point of view, what Boutet and Strubel identify as the Augustinianism of the genre (*Littérature, politique et société*, pp. 39-67). I shall expand on this point later. Romances may disport themselves with dialectical display, typify or contest universal values in their characters, and embark on allegorical inventions that gauge the relative merits of nominalism and realism. The *chansons de geste*, however, insist on the moral uniqueness of each and every agent, and are left wrestling with the difficulty of finding unity and coherence in the troubled world which results from their acts.

---

1 Esp. p. 62. James R. Simpson presents an interesting qualification of this view (*Fantasy, Identity and Misrecognition*, ch. 1). For Simpson, the politics of the *chansons de geste*, grounded in the renunciation of any fleshly community, are more Pauline than Augustinian.
When my title evokes “singularity,” this, then, is what I mean by it: the perception that the *chanson de geste* character possesses, or aspires to possess, an irreducible uniqueness. One form in which this singularity manifests itself in the feudal epic is in the desire for exclusive possession of particular goods: a particular estate or woman, for example. As the stakes of exclusivity are ratcheted up, it also expresses itself as the desire to be the only person living and thus as the desire to kill as many other people as possible. One effect of killing, however, is to precipitate awareness that one’s own death is the ultimate expression of one’s singularity. It is in dying that one achieves—at the very moment that one loses it—the uniqueness one aspired to. The awareness that death deprives us of a unique being gives rise to a thematics of revenge in which attempts are made nevertheless to repair the loss that death has made irreparable. That, in essence, is how I shall be developing the concept of singularity in relation to the *chansons de geste* themes of desire and death.

What, then, of the term “spectrality”? The concept of spectrality was established in theoretical discourse by Derrida in his *Spectres de Marx* of 1993; he himself takes it from the opening words of Marx’s *Communist Manifesto*: “A spectre is haunting Europe—the spectre of Communism.” Derrida uses it to explore (among other things) the complexity of our ethical obligations to the past and the future, given that these are not wholly co-present with us, and yet we are connected to them. The term is then elaborated in more overtly political ways by Slavoj Žižek and Judith Butler. Both are interested in the way political systems rely on policing exclusions which nonetheless return to haunt them. Such a “return of the repressed” forms part of the spectral support of power. Crucial to the

---

2 On death as the ultimate mark of singularity, which thereby brands singularity as impossible since one attains it only as one loses it, see Jacques Derrida’s “Donner la Mort,” (esp. ch. 2): “[. . .] ma propre mort est cette irremplaçabilité que je dois assumer si je veux accéder à ce qui m’est absolument propre” (p. 47).

3 See for example Slavoj Žižek’s Introduction in *Mapping Ideology* as well as his *Metastases of Enjoyment* (esp. ch. 3 “Superego by Default”). See also Judith Butler’s *Antigone Claim*. 

*Olifant*
notion of spectrality in all of these thinkers is that it stalks the limits of ontology, revealing the extent to which what we take to be the world of being is troubled by the not-yet or the not-now, by something “out of joint” that unsettles it.\(^4\) By appealing to this concept, I shall be arguing that among the effects of the *chansons de gestes*’ concentration on singularity is the generation of spectrality, whether in the form of an uncanny double, the spectralized self, or a *revenant* from beyond the grave, a spectrality that disrupts the ontological assurance of the universe these poems portray.

This essay is in three parts. The first centres on desire, the second on death, and the third on narrative. I shall concentrate on *Girart de Roussillon* as one of the finest examples of the genre—a poem in which singularity and its attendant spectres are in maximum tension with the aspiration for a coherent, orderly world—but my remarks could be extended to other *chansons de geste* such as *Raoul de Cambrai*, *Renaut de Montauban*, *Daurel et Beton*, *Girart de Vienne*, or the Loheren poems.

I

The poem of *Girart de Roussillon* as we now have it begins with an episode that may be a later addition to a more ancient core. Europe is being ravaged by Saracens, and the emperor of Constantinople proposes to be-

\(^4\) The quality of being “out of joint” is discussed by Derrida (*Spectres*, p. 42) and taken up by Ernesto Laclau (“‘The Time is Out of Joint’”). My presentation in this paper of ontology unsettled by a spectral “out-of-joint-ness” is heavily influenced by Žižek’s *The Ticklish Subject*. For the definition of ontology used here, see Žižek’s *Enjoy Your Symptom!*: “ontology pertains to the ‘discourse of the Master’ [. . .].” The discourse of ontology is thus sustained by an ‘indirect speech act’: its assertive surface, its stating that the world ‘is like that,’ conceals a performative dimension, i.e., ontology is constituted by the misrecognition of how its enunciation brings about its propositional content” (p. 98). The use made of death, ontology, and “out-of-joint-ness” by all the thinkers cited here is ultimately indebted to Heidegger.
trowth his two daughters and heirs to the king of France Charles Martel and his powerful baron Girart so as to enlist their help to defend Rome. Together, Charles and Girart help drive back the invaders. Girart then attends the emperor’s court and the negotiations are concluded: Charles is pledged to take the older sister, Berte, and Girart will take the younger one, Elissant. Upon inquiry, however, Charles is dissatisfied with this apportioning and insists on taking the daughter he judges to be the most beautiful, Elissant, even at the cost of breaking his oath. He offers Girart the inheritance of both by way of compensation. Girart is furious at being dishonoured and perjured by the king. He eventually accedes but only on condition that he should hold his land freehold, quit of any obligation to Charles.

The king’s behaviour throughout this scene is motivated by the determination to mark the extent of his power. He is determined that he shall be the one to choose, that he should be able to override whatever Girart undertook in Constantinople: “‘Per mon cap, co dis Carles, tot en devis. / Se Girarz lai partit, eu cai causis’” ‘“By my head, I make the decision, says Charles. / If Girart apportioned there, I choose here”’ (ll. 369-70). He suspects Girart of having made the deal so as to secure the more desirable sister for himself and is resolved to undo it even before the two princesses have arrived. His satisfaction is thereby double: he acquires the bride of his choice and, just as gratifyingly, prevents Girart from having her.

It is the nature of the marital bond that it forms a unique tie. Each of the two princesses from Constantinople is represented as having been exclusively bound to each of the men. That the sexual bond with a woman marks a unique individuality is familiar from Ami et Amile, where two otherwise identical friends are differentiated by carnal union with their respective partners. In Girart, just the promise of such a bond is enough to mark exclusive possession in the eyes of the Church, represented in these quotations by the Abbot of Saint Denis, the Bishop of Soissons, and the Pope:

«Don», co respon l’abaz de Saint Denis,
«Ceste autre est ta muilliers que tu plevis [ . . . ]» (366-67)

Olifant
«Seiner, Carles nos quert folle auchaison,  
Qui la muiller Girart quert c’on li don.» (382-83)

«Mais vai, pren la muillier que as plevie,  
E leisse Girart conte aver s’amie.» (394-95)

“Sir,” responded the Abbot of Saint-Denis, “this other woman is the wife you pledged [. . .].”

Lords, Charles is starting a crazy cause against us when he asks us to give him Girart’s wife.”

“Go and take the woman to whom you have pledged and let Count Girart keep his beloved.”

The resolve to have one woman rather than another is thus an index not only of superior power but also of one’s singularity. Unique to Charles is to be the fact of his marriage to Elissant. A medieval example of the trophy bride, she is to be the emblem of her husband’s position. By depriving Girart of her and consigning him to union with the sister he has discarded, Charles likewise brands Girart with a particular identity: that of subordinate.

Girart’s countermove is calculated likewise to reinforce his own status. He rejects Charles’s offer of wealth that concerns neither of them personally: the cities of Rome and Constantinople that are the legacies of the two sisters. Instead, his demand that he should hold Roussillon freehold, when previously he had held it in fief from Charles, is a tit for tat move designed to ensure that the king does not assert himself at his expense: “‘Non vuel quel reis meillort dont eu sordei’ ’ ‘I don’t want my loss to be the king’s gain’ ’ (l. 456). The anchoring of his identity to this particular territory is, of course, enshrined in the title, *Girart de Roussillon*, by which the song is known. Girart’s claim to exclusive rights over this land is tantamount to depriving Charles of such rights. As with Charles’s demand to marry Elissant, possession is directly equated with position. Possession ensures the position of the one who possesses and (just as emphatically) of the one dispossessed. That Charles subse-
quentely feels galled and mortified by this dispossession will be one of the major motors of the plot. His first act of war against Girart will be to claim the castle back and, when unsuccessful, to take it by treachery.

Both Charles’s move to strip Girart of his bride and Girart’s to deprive Charles of seigneurial rights show how, for both men, a greater value attaches to a possession achieved in defiance of regulation or constraint. Members of the clergy object to Charles’s overturning of his sworn word, but Charles insists on marrying the woman of his choice, not of his bond. His singular power expresses itself in showing his will is supreme, ranking even above his word. Indeed, we could argue that it is the pleasure of flouting a sworn agreement which enhances Elissant’s attractions to him and strengthens his resolve to have her. When the Pope urges him to stand by his oath, Charles rises to the challenge with a retort: “ ‘Per mon cap, co dis Carles, abanz es mie; / E cele c’an donet, a Girart sie’ ” “By my head, said Charles, she is mine and let the one they gave me be Girart’s” (ll. 396-97). The position to which he lays claim in taking Elissant is defined by his capacity to flout the authority of the Church that would deny her him.

A similar point can be made about Girart’s countering move. By demanding to hold his lands freehold, he releases himself from the multiple obligations that previously (albeit confusedly) bound him to the king. Thus while, from one point of view, one could say that he exacts alodial status as the price for marrying Berte, it would be just as true to say that marrying Berte is the price he pays in order to achieve greater autonomy. Like Charles, he positions himself as the man who owes service to no one, and it gives him especial satisfaction that Charles should be the person to whom he no longer owes it. For example, when Charles asks him to cede him entry to the castle of Roussillon, Girart exults that he is no longer bound to provide hospitality nor attend court:

«Bernart, tu t’en iras au Carlon trat,

5 For reflections on the complexity of land tenure in Girart, see ch. 2 of Linda M. Paterson’s The World of the Troubadours, esp. pp. 20-21, 24-25, 27-28.
“Bernart, go to Charles’s tent and tell the king from me why I refuse: because I hold my whole duchy as freehold. I’ll not go to his court all summer. I’m not so mad, I am sure, as to yield up my castle for such folly.”

The jewel in the crown of singularity to which both characters aspire is to rise above obligations to others into absolute autonomy.

In these opening scenes of the *chanson*, however, each man’s bid to secure position through undisputed possession achieves only limited success. Charles has miscalculated in staking his uniqueness on Elissant. When Girart agrees to the match, he stipulates that he should have the right to come to her defence should Charles fail to treat her as he should.

«Pois Carles est tan lieus c’on le mescret, 
Se midonne fai tort ne enneleit, 
Qu’eu li poisse ajudar de tot son dreit.» (527-29)

“Since Charles is so fickle as to be untrustworthy, if he does any harm or injury to my lady, then I must be allowed to come to her aid when justified.”

This condition on Charles’s exclusive possession of his wife rapidly opens into an emotional chasm. It seems he may have been right all along in his suspicion that there was a love match between Elissant and Girart. Although she becomes empress, she acknowledges her preference for Girart. She even interprets his marriage to Berte as evidence of his love for herself: “‘Vos m’avez fait reïne, e ma seror / Avez pres a muillier per meie amor’ ” “You have made me queen, and have taken my sister as your wife for love of me” ” (ll. 578-79). Her dissociation of love from
marriage serves her own purpose as she assures Girart that she loves him more than father or husband (l. 586). Thus although Girart seems on the face of things to have given up Elissant for Berte, in fact, he has gained the affection of both women and Charles that of neither. The anchoring of singularity in the uniqueness of the marriage bond is thus an aspiration which Charles has failed to realise.

A similar reservation affects the vesting of identity in the uncontested control of territory. Just as Girart imposes conditions at the very moment of Charles’s taking possession of Elissant, so the king stipulates a limitation on his exclusive claim to Roussillon, namely that he should continue to exercise his ancestral right to hunt in the surrounding woodland (ll. 500-02). This stipulation, minimal as it may appear, provides the leverage for subsequent lengthy reconsideration of the legality of Girart’s self-styled independence (an issue on which the text itself is confused). More pragmatically, it also provides the opportunity for Charles to approach and attack Roussillon castle. It is as he stands in the valley looking up at the fortress that his resolve to seize it for his own takes shape (ll. 680-89). Before long, this desire has mushroomed into the determination to strip Girart of everything he has. Too long, Charles thinks, he has served merely as the means of Girart’s elevation (l. 1781):

«Ne cuidaz de sa terre ne le despuel!
Ne laiserai estar vilan dinz suel,
Ne arbre doumescer que ne veruel,
Qu’en secerunt les brances e pois li fuel.» (1791-95)

“Don’t let him imagine I won’t despoil him of his lands!
I’ll not leave a single peasant standing in his own house,

---

6 See Gaunt’s “Le pouvoir d’achat.”
7 A reason for the confusion may be that the text hesitates between seeing Girart as bound to Charles by vassalic law (based on homage and service in return for a fief) or merely by the looser oath of fidelity. See Hackett’s “La féodalité.”
nor a single fruit tree that I don’t lock away so that its branches and leaves wither.”

What was initially a minor reservation on Girart’s ownership has opened out into a full-scale assault upon it.

The egoistic assertion of uniqueness and mastery by each of the two principal characters has thus met with only limited success. And this conclusion is indicated, on different grounds, by the way their very desire for singularity leads to their experiences converging. For each man conceives his fortunes and status only in relation to the other. The parallelism whereby bride is offset against castle and stipulation against stipulation sexualises the theme of land tenure just as it represents women as objects of ownership and control, so that each of the two men seems driven by identical urges, even though their motives may originally have been distinct. Each man’s attachment to his wife seems, at this stage, to have little content beyond the territorial, and conversely, in the early parts of the war at least, sexual cupidity and the desire for land go hand in hand. Charles’s attacks on Roussillon appear as an expression of sexual jealousy and failure—he is referred to, for example, as a cuckold (l. 1465)—while Girart’s disdain for him is exultant. Fouque explicitly assimilates Charles’s treachery over Roussillon to his perjury over his engagement (ll. 2002-05).

Thus the selfsame moves which conduce to singularity generate similarity, an outcome Charles acknowledges with horror: “‘Eu non(c) ai plus de lui fors la corone’” ‘I have nothing more than him except the crown,”’ he says bitterly when the marriage negotiations are concluded (l. 566). Charles’s comment is odd since, on the face of it, this seems a rather major difference. Is he threatened by the notion that Girart is fully his “peer” (see next quotation) or does he see the crown as merely an empty symbol compared with the more substantial possession of land?
levelling the differences between them. Henceforth the two are bonded together like unholy twins. It is in this fact of doubling that we see the first signs of spectrality in the text.\textsuperscript{9}

It may seem paradoxical that promotion of uniqueness should generate an uncanny duality. Yet if we retrace the steps we have taken thus far, we see how it comes about. I have argued that \textit{Girart de Roussillon} seeks to anchor the singularity of identity in unique possession. Insofar as the desire to possess is at the same time, and just as emphatically, the desire to deprive someone else, then it requires there to be a partner whose function it is to be dispossessed.\textsuperscript{10} If such a person did not exist, he would need to be invented; his very being is tainted, or diminished, by the way it is fantasmatically determined. Each of the two male protagonists, Charles and Girart, is forced into this role by the fierceness of the other’s desire. Each is condemned to assume the envious gaze of one who has not directed at the other who has. Each is, as it were, de-realised by this animus which requires that he be nothing but a defeated threat to the other’s enjoyment and thus, at the same time, the condition of it. He ceases to be represented as the source of his own emotions and desires, becoming instead the locus of the frustrated will projected onto him.

The constantly conjured threat that the other is poised to deprive one of enjoyment does not just diminish the other, making him in some degree less than himself; it also spectralises the self. Probably the securing of identity in exclusivity is an impossible goal since, as we have seen, it makes the self dependent upon the gaze of a desiring other. Each man, having pinned his sense of mastery to unique possession, at once, as we have seen, finds that possession slip from his grasp. Charles finds he cannot have exclusive control over Elissant; Girart cannot prevent his castle being betrayed. Each of them is effectively deprived of unlimited enjoyment of his good by the other’s limiting stipulation and even more

\textsuperscript{9} In his study of \textit{Anseïs de Cartage}, Simpson presents another example of the obscene, spectral double (\textit{Fantasy, Identity and Misrecognition}, p. 94).

\textsuperscript{10} This analysis of spectralisation closely follows Lacan’s “\textit{La fonction du bien},” although Lacan himself does not use this term.
so by the need to expend himself in defence of his good against the other. All are sufferers in the spectral confrontation whereby the condition of one’s enjoyment is, at the same time, a brake on it. Each man pays for this deadlock with a diminution of his being.

The legal makeup of the world in this poem is complex and confusing, but perhaps it could also be argued that the person who seeks to extricate himself from the bonds of law condemns himself to a degree of spectrality. The clergy in this poem, at least, maintain that identity results not from exception but from subjection, the theme of the Pope’s sermon in laisse 5 (l. 63): ontology is constituted within a signifying order. But even if each of the male protagonists does not acknowledge the law as transcendent and reckons instead to anchor his being in possession, he fails.¹¹ That failure taints not just his power to possess but his status and the very nature of his being.

The theme of the desire for possession does not leave the poem after these opening scenes. There are many later reminders of Charles’s sexual jealousy and extensive debates over Girart’s entitlement to his estates, but as the ratchet of animosity between the two heightens, desire to reduce the other to destitution and, preferably, to deprive him of life as well

¹¹ I owe to Mary Jane Schenck the observation that what the protagonists seem most vehemently opposed to is the claim of law to be transcendent. This would be the case with the attempts at regulation by the clergy in this text. Under customary or common law, by contrast, individuality is indexed to individual possession and not to universal subjection. Within such a framework, the characters’ claim to advance their position through possession would be an exercise in power which exploited the law but did not transgress it (for more on customary law, see her paper in this volume). However, the influence of customary law in the Midi was less than in Northern France or England as a result of the greater persistence there of (transcendent) Roman law. There is, then, some doubt as to how the characters are positioned relative to the law—a confusion echoed in the poem: do they flout it or merely exploit it? I am very grateful to Professor Schenck for her informative and collegial contributions to my argument.
rises to prominence. It is accompanied by a new plot line, only hinted at in the opening scenes, which tells of long-standing enmity between Thierry, close advisor and brother-in-law of Charles, and Girart’s family. Girart’s father Drogo had previously driven Thierry into banishment and poverty, during which he was forced to work as a carpenter. At the first pitched battle between Charles and Girart, at Vaubeton, Thierry kills Girart’s father and his uncle Odilon, who is the father of a whole series of cousins including the much admired Fouques and the sinister Boson. Peace is secured only by Thierry going into exile a second time, but when he returns after the due term, Boson and his friends murder his young sons and then Thierry himself at a quintain. The desire to avenge this murder results in the wave of vendetta so characteristic of chansons de geste of this type. In the next section of this essay, I will examine how this radical raising of the stakes to life or death inflects the treatment of singularity and spectrality in the poem.

II

From the time of the first capture of Roussillon, antagonism between the two principals grows ever harder and more deadlocked. Girart mistrusts the king for his treachery; he wants revenge for the death of his father and uncle; he wants restitution of his and Fouques’s lands; eventually he falls prey to the blind urge to destroy, burning down a church where Charles’s men had sought sanctuary and killing the monastic community there too (ll. 6190 ff.). Although he has moments of being more conciliating and listening to the wise counsel of Fouque, he ends up succumbing to Boson’s more belligerent advice. Boson’s words incite him to undertake the final battle against Charles, buoying him up against desperate odds with the hope of stripping the king of everything he has, although in fact it will be Girart himself whom the battles reduces to total destitution:

«Eisi poden Carlon getar de cant;
Non preizerai sa gerre puis mige un gant;
Toz n’er deseritaz e sui enfant.» (6864-66)
“In this way we can drive Charles from the field. I shan’t reckon his warring as much as a glove. He will be utterly disinherited by it, and his children too.”

Reciprocally, Charles’s antagonism to Girart hardens into the desire to deprive him first of Roussillon itself and then of all his other lands. Anger over Thierry’s death provokes him to confiscate Fouques’s fief, bribe Girart’s vassals into his own service, and rejoice in the war in which Girart will be utterly despoiled. Soon his only objective in life is Girart’s death: “‘Non amerai le conte seu non vei mor[t]’ ‘‘I shall never love the count until I see him dead’’ (l. 5521). Finally he wants to compound death with dishonour:

«S’eu tenie Girart de Rossillun
Eu lo ferie pendre con un lairon
A sordeiors garcons de ma maison.» (6720-22)

“If I held Girart de Roussillon I’d have him strung up like a thief by the worst wretches in my household.”

Whereas in the early stages of the war the balance of success fell more Girart’s way than Charles’s, now it is Charles who gets what he wants. Girart is not literally hanged but he is ruined, stripped of his social identity, and widely believed to be dead.

Earlier I argued that in the opening scenes of the poem the characters aspired to a singularity of position that was guaranteed by exclusive, undisputed possession. As the narrative develops, this notion of a position secured by possession persists and is still linked with territory, but its association has shifted from being with sex to one with death. The enjoyment of possession, formerly shot through with sexual desire, now thrills to surging violence. The singularity at stake is that of the unique life threatened—as it threatens others—with extinction. One man’s desire to occupy a singular position becomes the desire to dispossess another
man utterly—to deprive him of everything that constitutes his symbolic identity and reduce him to a spectre of his former self.

This violent spectralisation of the other as the price of one’s own singularity takes a different form, however, when the characters weigh their responsibilities towards the dead in their own camp, for now the emphasis is placed on the fact that the dead person is irreplaceable, that is, on his singularity. If Girart answers to the deaths of his father and uncle, Drogo and Odilon, killed by Thierry, Charles takes up the cause of Thierry, assassinated by Boson and his associates.

There are two principal reactions to the death of a relative in the _chansons de geste_, mourning and revenge, and the balance between the two in any particular poem could serve as a way of dividing one sub-group of the genre from another. The purpose of mourning, as Derrida puts it, is to seek to ontologise the dead: that is, to translate their absence into a symbolic presence, one carefully woven into the fabric of our social life.\(^{12}\) Scenes of lamentation, obsequies and entombment, the consecration of the dead as heroes or even as saints: all these processes, lengthily described in some _chansons de geste_, are forms of incorporation whereby the dead are laid to rest in reality by being integrated symbolically into our own sphere of being.

There are virtually no cases of such mourning in _Girart de Roussillon_. Instead, there is an overwhelming preoccupation with revenge, and revenge involves a far more troubled relation to the dead. It brings out more disturbingly than mourning the difficulty which we experience in accepting the fact of death, the loss of a loved one, and the implications which it has for our own mortality. True, the practices of mourning deny death as much as they commemorate it—by establishing the dead in a place like our own, such as a tomb to be visited, and by calling upon them there or addressing a cult to them—but this contradic-

\(^{12}\) See Derrida: “[Le deuil] consiste toujours à tenter d’ontologiser des restes, à les rendre présents, en premier lieu à _identifier_ les dépouilles et à _localiser_ les morts” (Spectres, p. 30).

_Olifant_
tion is exacerbated in the case of revenge. By exacting vengeance on behalf of the dead, the living agent places himself in the role of the dead man retaliating at the violence he underwent. Retaliation, although it is offered as retribution, is at the same time a repetition of the very wrong it sets out to punish and thus reiterates the offender’s act as much as it identifies with its victim. The trauma of loss is not repaired but reinforced as the avenger impossibly assumes the places of other men.

Thus when Boson kills Thierry, he acts on behalf of his father and uncle (“E per paire e per oncle en pres venjance” [ll. 3477]), thereby incurring the enmity of Thierry’s nephews, Uc and the sinister threesome of Aimon, Aimer, and Andefrei (ll. 3484-85, 3492-93). Girart’s baron Folcher kills Andefreit, prompting Aimon and Aimeri to exact vengeance for their brother:

«Ui, Andefre(n)t cons, fraire, chars amis,
Si cel qui vos a mort s’en torne vis,
Ja Deus ne nos ajut ne Saint Denis.» (5972-74)

“Alas, Andefret, brother, dear friend, if the one who killed you escapes with his life may God or Saint Denis never come to our aid again.”

Some 2000 lines later, Uc will finally succeed in killing Boson, only to die immediately as he is avenged by Boson’s brothers Gilbert and Fouque (“Lai prestrent de lor fraire vengeisun” [ll. 7137]). Gilbert in his turn is at once struck down by Charles’s men. If mourning seeks to ontologise the dead, such passages show how, by contrast, in vengeance the dead are spectralised. Acts of revenge call attention to the impossibility of laying the dead to rest. They continue to haunt and infect the actions of the living. Even more than our fellow who has been dispossessed is spectral-

---

13 The fundamental unacceptability of death is the insight elaborated by Freud in his *Totem and Taboo* and elaborated in much of Derrida’s recent writings (e.g., “Donner la Mort,” *Politiques*, and *Spectres*).
ised, the man violently and unacceptably bereft of life maintains an ac-
tive but unseen presence.

A particularly striking case of this spectralisation of the dead occurs
with Odilon, who receives his death wound some while before he actu-
ally dies and so lingers on between life and death while those around him
prepare to avenge him. As he drifts from life, Girart addresses Odilon as
if he were already dead, overriding his obvious preference for reconcilia-
tion and anticipating the vengeance he will exact for his loss:

–Eu comen amerai rei tant felon?
Teuris, sen consellers de sa maison,
A mort m’at mes mon paire, lo duc Draugon,
E mees lo ton cors, qui mare fon.» (2997-3000)

“How could I love such a felonious king? Thierry, his
privy counsellor, killed my father Duke Drogo and now he
has killed you too, alas for you.”

Unlike the mourner who seeks to weave together the gap caused by
death in the symbolic fabric, the avenger tears it wider. Suffering is in-
creased not assuaged. Because each vengeful deed eliminates a further,
unique person from the order of being, at each turn a further set of rela-
tives and friends are called upon to take revenge. Thus vengeance
spreads pulling more and more individuals into the teeth of its infernal
machine. People who initially were quite distant from the original crime
are drawn in. As the poem advances, the older generation of warriors is
gradually killed off. Only youths remain, but the memory of the deaths to
be avenged nevertheless seems never to be dimmed. The narrator de-
scribes how youths at the battle of Civaux identify especially strongly
with Thierry’s young sons, murdered at the quintain:

Li plus vielz n’a trente anz ne pel an chane.
Aiqui fun remenbrade la quintane,
E la mors as dous fiz Teuri d’Ascane,
Per que la ire aeine e li maus greine. (5859-62)

Olifant
The oldest of them is not yet thirty, with no white hair as yet. There they remembered the quintain and the death of Thierry d’Ascane’s two sons so that their anger waxes and their grief grows.

Whole families are wiped out. This is what eventually happens on Girart’s side at least. First the generation of Girart’s father is killed, then his cousins, all except for Fouques and his sons. Even then it is necessary for an agreement to be reached that there should be no more vengeance on either side, so that the king will desist from plotting against Girart’s life: “‘S’il unt mort vostres paires e vos les lor, / Non devez refreschir tam vielle iror’” ‘“If they killed your fathers and you theirs, / you should not seek to revive such old grievances”’ (ll. 8243-44). The last act comes when Girart’s knight hears him celebrate the feudal splendour of Roussillon. Fearing that Girart will set in motion the spiral of violence, he murders his sole surviving child so that he will have no future to which to answer for the past.

In the opening scenes of the poem, each of the two protagonists uses the law, or rather abuses it, to lever himself into a situation of autonomy. Appeal to law remains a constant of the poem throughout its long course. Notably, Charles uses it to inculpate Girart for Thierry’s death. Charles insists that he will hold Girart accountable for the murder unless he formally exculpates himself. We may suspect, as do many of Girart’s advisers, that the law is invoked here merely as a cloak under which to extend the reach of the king’s vengefulness. Some favour his complying with Charles’s summons, but he never does. Moreover, although when each man consults in council peaceable conclusions are usually reached, the actual encounter between representatives of the two sides always results in a more warlike posture being adopted. There seems to be an underlying inevitability about the recourse to arms rather than to the courts. That the doves should have their say at some length in the council scenes only underlines the triumph over them of the hawks. As the story goes on and becomes more complex, for both parties grounds for grievance and
for mutual accusations of treachery multiply. Eventually there is so much wrong on both sides that appeal to law becomes unthinkable:

–Quant m’ai(s) traï, dist Carles, e me renege,
Pois dis qu’en [fera] dreit, son gant me plég[e]!
Non derie per ren demi jor treg[e]
Tros non lairai d’onor sol une leg[e]!» (5566-69)

“He has betrayed me and denied me,” says Charles, “and then he says he will settle with me fairly in court and let him pledge me his glove! I wouldn’t give him so much as half a day’s truce before I’ve stripped him down to his last league of land!”

As in the opening scenes, then, we find the protagonists situating themselves in relation to the law but athwart its prescriptions in a position of elective isolation. Their defiance extends also to sacrilegious acts on both sides, placing themselves outside the law of God. In thus excepting themselves from regulation, they teeter on the brink of madness. Girart is reproached by Fouque for having always been “fols e fel e forsenaz” ‘crazy and violent and out of his senses’ (l. 5320). His self-imposed singularity has led beyond exclusion from the world of the law-abiding to exclusion from that of sense. Jarring with the symbolic principles and expectations of those around them, no longer enframed within intelligibility, the characters themselves are “out of joint.” Their crazed behaviour disrupts the ontological ground. In their insistence on singularity they have condemned themselves to spectrality.

I have argued, then, that the switch in emphasis from desire to death as the plot of Girart gathers momentum confirms the link between singularity and spectrality that was established in its opening scenes. The desire to dispossess the other utterly, to expel him from life and the symbolic order that confers consistency on it, spectralises the other. The desire to avenge the dead, and thus to maintain their fantasmatic agency and reiterate the act of their death, is to make oneself the agent of the revenant. To place oneself outside the law of man and God is to condemn
oneself to madness and expose the ontological order as “out of joint.” In the final section, I shall consider the wider implications of these findings for the narrative texture of the *chansons de geste*.

### III

If we try to gauge the narrator’s attitude to singularity, it is clear that it inspires in him a degree of horror. The “out-of-joint-ness” of his characters lends itself to stigmatisation as mad and as evil, but despite this there are ways in which he endorses the value of uniqueness. The narrator may sympathise with the text’s spokesmen for equal symbolic subjection to hierarchical rule, but he has difficulty envisaging a medium of mediation that would successfully integrate singulars to a generality. We have seen how regulation is unreliable given that laws are open to being flouted or exploited. Money is even less desirable as a common measure. Both Girart and Charles are tempted to dissolve the uniqueness of a human tie in the generalising flow of wealth, a temptation implicitly reproved as unworthy. Thus when Charles’s barons try to tell him that Girart was not necessarily guilty of Thierry’s murder, his mind keeps reverting to a different grievance, the theft by one of Girart’s men of his property, as though one loss could substitute for the other. In the same way, when Girart finds he cannot absolutely hold Charles himself responsible for the deaths of his father and uncle, he slips sideways into blaming him for the confiscation of his lands, as though this loss formed some common measure with his bereavement. The stamp of human individuality cannot, then, be exchanged in some universalising currency.

Before considering the implications which this commitment to singularity, however troubled, has for the narrative of *Girart de Roussillon*, it would be helpful to say more at this point about the term “singular.” A singular can be equated with a “particular,” that is, with one in a series: a one plus one plus one plus one…and so on, constituting a group such as a genus. The particular, in this sense, is the correlate of the universal, and that correlation provides the basis of its intelligibility. We recognise a particular man in relation to other men and as part of the species “man.” In the Aristotelian ontology which holds sway in academic circles at the
time when the *chansons de geste* were composed and is reflected in courtly literature, that species is itself intelligible as part of the genus “animal.” That is, Aristotle recognises a knowledge of individuals only insofar as they are already subsumed to the abstract. But the “singular” can also be conceived in a way that does not form part of a series; it is not part of a sequence of one plus one, it is just a one that either is or is not. In this sense of “one,” an individual man is utterly unique. He is not posited with reference to the universal. Theologians claimed that our knowledge of God and God’s knowledge of us is a knowledge of singulars in this sense. One of the tasks medieval philosophy will set itself in the late thirteenth century will be to find ways of accounting for such knowledge within a properly philosophical framework; Aristotelian epistemology will be progressively dismantled as it is adjusted to fit with Augustinian Neoplatonism.\(^{14}\) In endorsing the singular value of the human individual, however problematic, the narrator of *Girart de Roussillon* can be seen as gesturing towards the Augustinian turn which will come about in later medieval thought, although of course he does so in a way that is utterly at variance with medieval academic discourse.

Even with a “bolt-on” Neoplatonic extension to their Aristotelian conceptual framework, medieval thinkers concede that the unique necessarily poses a challenge to the medium of language. Language is a conceptual universal order that cannot recognise the individual as such. The singular is always “out of joint” with respect to it. The question needs to be asked, then, how far can a text really engage with singularity at all? Is it not inevitably effaced in favour of *particularity* that is then *thematised* as unique, that is, predicated with the universal quality of uniqueness? The answer to this question is obviously “yes” to some extent. That is, the individuality that finds its way into representation is one that has been subjected to the conceptual order and effaced in favour of abstraction.\(^{15}\)

---

\(^{14}\) This account is taken from Bérubé (*La connaissance de l’individuel*). A similar problematic is explored by Lacan (*Séminaire*, XX, 1972-1973). See also Žižek (*Looking Awry*, p. 132).

\(^{15}\) “Premier effet ou première destination du langage: me priver ou aussi bien me délivrer de ma singularité. [. . .] Je ne suis plus jamais moi-

*Olifant*
In the _chansons de geste_ “singularity” could be said to be a “concept” that is elaborated in its relation to the further concepts of desire and death, but I want to stress that I have not been talking just about “themes” that form part of the “representation” of the text. What I am trying to describe is rather a certain disruption of representation, its limitation, since the singular is precisely what _cannot_ be accommodated in the symbolic fabric but, rather, deforms or disturbs it. This is _why_ the singular and the spectral go hand in hand. Precisely because the unique cannot be signified in language but only sensed or experienced, it is condemned to spectrality; the spectral, in its conjuring of uncanny doubles and returns, is representation’s compromise with the unrepresentable uniqueness of the individual. What is remarkable about the _chansons de geste_ is that, unlike medieval philosophical discourse, they are true to the problematic of singularity since their narratives are imprinted throughout with its disruptive effects.  

As in other _chansons de geste_, the most obvious feature of narrative in which the “out-of-joint-ness” of its ontology imprints itself in _Girart de Roussillon_ is the use of the laisse. The story proceeds in a faltering way with rifts, overlaps, and occasional glimpses of alternative pathways. When Charles first calls on Girart to cede Roussillon to him, Girart is initially gracious, inviting the king to treat Girart’s property as though it were his own (l. 750). On second thoughts, however, when his men warn of Charles’s potential treachery, he defiantly asserts his exclusive control of his estate; to admit Charles to Roussillon would be mad (ll. 768-69). The _volte-face_ in Girart’s responses between these two lisses marks a reversal from an initial impulse towards social cohesion grounded in shared resources to a resolve to defend singularity grounded in exclusive possession. The abruptness with which he plumps for the latter causes a

mème, seul et unique, dès que je parle” (Derrida, “Donner la Mort,” p. 61).

16 Though the discourse of poststructuralist writing on the same topic does, of course, labour precisely to capture the “out-of-joint-ness” of singularity as is amply witnessed by any of the writings of Derrida or Lacan cited in this paper.
shadow of incoherence to fall across the narrative at this point as though the challenge to representation of the singular introduced a hitch in its textual consistency.

In a subsequent contention over Roussillon, when Charles seems to be sure of overpowering Girart’s forces and capturing the fortress but is unexpectedly repelled by Boson, the overlap in the narrative of two laisses quasi-similaires can again be read as a textual response to singularity. Charles is determined to eliminate Girart absolutely from existence and claim Roussillon as his own. The first laisse (451) presents his attack as an immediate success: Girart is on the point of flight. But a rally led by Boson with fresh troops, saves him, and instead it is Charles that is defeated. The second laisse (452), however, takes us back to the heat of Charles’s onslaught, presenting Girart’s situation as desperate. Once more Boson supervenes; this time the laisse concludes with Girart jubilant at the king’s defeat. Just as the protagonists are locked together in violence, so too the textual process is violent and unsettling. The parallelism of language brings out how the more each man seeks to establish himself at the other’s expense, the more his identity merges with that of his opponent. Each of the two stakes his singularity on the prospect of driving the other out of existence, and each, in consequence, is sucked into the spectrality to which he reduces the other. The laisses reflect this paradoxical, irrational situation. Much as Girart and Charles are spectral doubles of each other, the second laisse serves as a kind of revenant, or spectral repetition, of the first. The narrator allows the consistency of his narrating to be disturbed to the point where you almost ask yourself if you have missed something and have to do a double take. The out-of-joint-ness of the characters is carried through as a textual effect.

I could multiply examples of such laisses (the finest are maybe the death of Odilon, which is bound up with the miracle of the standards, and the murder of Thierry). The point is that the struggle for co-presence of narrative fragments constantly undermines narrative as totality, translates the singular will into the singular narrative moment, and confirms the problem of its integration to a social world or symbolic norm. Between the lesions in the laisses lie the traces of spectral insurgences that trouble the poem’s ontological coherence.

Olifant
On a larger scale, the disruption of textuality by singularity and spec-
trality is effected by what I have called “counter-narrativity” (Chansons
de Geste, ch. 2). This comes about when there is a competition for ex-
pression between the narrative strands in a poem, one of which, the
dominant narrative, succeeds in making the other, the counter-narrative,
appear fragmented and half-submerged. Like the struggle for personal
dominance at the level of character, this narrative phenomenon is an ef-
fect of power. It is especially common in epics of revolt and related
chansons de geste: poems such as Renaut de Montauban, Raoul de Cam-
brai, Daurel et Beton, or Orson de Beauvais. In Girart, the instances of
counter-narrative which I have discussed in the past are the strands asso-
ciated with the two sisters who spend most of the text in the slipstream of
male aggression but who nonetheless come increasingly to represent the
means whereby the textual world can be pulled into coherence around the
two poles of reformed monarchy and sanctity (Chanson de Gestes, ch. 7).
Although Berte is initially despised by everyone except the narrator and
his ecclesiastical characters and features only fragmentarily until the very
end of the poem, she ends up as the most significant figure within it.
When a counter-narrative becomes dominant, what we see (in the terms I
am using here) is the passage from spectrality to ontology. Something
which was, to start with, “out-of-joint” with respect to the text’s sym-
bolic framework of intelligibility comes to determine that framework. I
should like to add to my previous account of Berte by showing how her
story as a counter-narrative figure connects with that of Thierry.

Thierry too is a counter-narrative hero in Girart de Roussillon; the
fragments of his life story are scattered and apparently insignificant. He
really only assumes importance as a character once he is dead. He is
never much more than a ghost haunting the major narrative strands. The
only way he surfaces is as a shadowy presence in someone else, for in-
stance in the will to power of Girart and Charles, whose reciprocal en-
mity he provokes and fuels. His final spectral appearance is as the model
for his grandson (the offspring of the marriage between his daughter Au-
pais and Girart’s nephew Fouque) who is named Thierry after him and
like him entrusted with the fief of Ascane.
In this counter-narrative of Thierry, the inseparability of singularity and spectrality is perhaps at its clearest and most ethically disturbing. Thierry cannot be made fully present in the narrative, but nor can he be laid to rest. The symbolic loss his death has caused haunts the endless surge of violence that I have already described as occupying the poem’s dominant narrative. The resistance of the singular, and of the spectral, to narrative integration is indicated by the way the narrative constantly harks back to his death, repeating it under the guise of avenging it, unable (until the end of the poem) to pull away from it, forward, into closure. Even the poem’s temporal progression is hobbled, since the fact of Thierry’s having been killed on an Easter Monday serves to attract other major events to that day. The second loss of Roussillon, for instance, takes place on Easter Monday (l. 6414), and Girart’s return to France from exile coincides with the end of Holy Week (l. 7803).

The poem’s ending offers a variant on this repetitiveness when Girart’s narrative repeats that of Thierry. The extent of the repetition is uncanny. Like Thierry, Girart is exiled from his lands; destitute, he is reduced to ignoble labour; then, hard on his return to society, his young son is murdered. The major divergence between their stories comes in their respective denouements. Thierry is assassinated, whereas Girart voluntarily removes himself from human existence into piety: a choice which involves dying to the world in order to embrace salvation. In taking this course, he is for the first time modelling himself not on male behaviour but on that of his wife, Berte, who is already way ahead of him on the path to sainthood.

Until this point, spectrality has seemed an obscene by-product of male power and violence. It has emerged, as we have seen, in the desire for exclusive possession of goods and for the exclusive occupancy of positions of privilege, in the wake of violent acts and in relation to the urge to transgress, and in the desire to utterly eradicate everyone else from life. On these terms, the singularity to which male characters aspire may scarcely seem to be desirable: absolute singularity will ultimately entail the death of the very subject that desired it. Berte’s decisive influence on Girart’s rerun of Thierry’s narrative, however, marks the point where the uniqueness of one’s own death can be reread as the uniqueness
of one’s own salvation. It is thus the point where the spectral counter-narrative, the “out-of-joint-ness” of singularity within the secular symbolic framework, passes into a transcendental, Augustinian ontology. From this now dominant narrative perspective, it is the ontology of the everyday that appears as spectral and insubstantial.

Almost certainly, like the opening scenes, the Christian ending represents a late addition to the legend. It forms a pendant to them: the desire voiced in the opening scenes for possession as an index of position being countered with the will to ground identity in renunciation. Girart and Berte opt for symbolic death in a place apart where they will become the objects of a cult, so there is a sense in which they undergo the processes which I earlier described as being those of mourning. Their purpose, as I said, is to repair the absence of the dead as a presence within the symbolic fabric. Although edifying, this ending shows a certain bad faith in permitting the characters to reap the benefits of individual salvation without actually dying first. Although avoiding the path of revenge is no doubt a good thing, we may fairly ask ourselves, I think, what right they have to follow that of mourning without the deficit caused by an actual death?\footnote{A similar avoidance (or at least prolonged postponement) of death is found in other \textit{chansons} where the singular hero achieves salvation, as for instance in the various \textit{Moniage} poems. Unless we include the protagonist of \textit{Garin le Loheren} as a saint-in-waiting when he dies, \textit{Renaut de Montauban} is perhaps unique in allowing its hero to be murdered in the cause of his salvation.}

Nevertheless, the poem’s ending represents an interesting conclusion to what I have been arguing is a thought experiment that dispenses with the conventional mechanisms of thought. Like other epics of revolt, \textit{Girart de Roussillon} stays true to the premise of human singularity. The poem maintains uniqueness as symbolic limit and does not compromise with its unrepresentability except through the disturbing proliferation of spectres. If in its final scenes the narrator finds a justification for singularity in the uniqueness of salvation, this solution only underlines the extent to which singularity is disturbing so long as it remains in the secu-
lar domain: in the spectral deadlock of desire and death which has occupied virtually all of this magnificent poem.
Works Cited


Violence, Perspective, and Postmodern Historiography in *Raoul de Cambrai*

Peter Haidu
University of California-Los Angeles

I. Violence

“Violence” is notoriously difficult to define. It is in itself a phenomenological term, inscribing reference not only to the concept of an event but also the event’s effect on its victim and a judgment of the event itself. To recognize that complexity is not to undervalue or displace the problem of violence, but to recognize that violence has repercussions, in individual psyches and in the social body, which metamorphose the initial shock into more subtle forms, not necessarily less damaging.

The word’s primary meaning is physical and carnal. A first heuristic definition can be that it pierces skin, and as more than a pinprick. It pierces skin and inflicts serious damage. It may involve more than broken skin: broken bones, including those of the head, may be involved. It implies at least the danger of death, hence the *Song of Roland’s* descriptions of lances through the chest, sword point in the side, sword edge on the head, sword point in the small of the back, and sword whirled about with both hands—instances that allow a historian to list the heroes’ murderous exploits as an anthology of mortal blows (Fossier, *Enfance de l’Europe*, vol. 1, p.124).

This is a masculinist heuristics, specific to the male activity of mounted combat with metal weapons. Physical violence causes other damages that can be called “violations.” Breaking the skin is an attack on the integrity of the body and hence an attack on the person’s identity. After the fact, one is no longer what one was. Neither the body nor the psyche remains self-identical through and beyond violence. Psychic violence is oxymoronic. Intangible, the psyche is not directly harmed by sword, fist, or bullet, and yet it suffers at physical wounding, a psychic supplement of violence. The juxtaposition of “violence” and “violation”
recalls their common etymon, the French viol ‘rape.’ That is one physical event all would agree on calling violent that does not require the breaking of skin except with very young victims. Skin is in fact a metaphor. It is heuristic for a category whose deconstruction goes back to the phenomenological reduction of the inner and the outer—Jacques Derrida cited Husserl to this effect in the *Grammatologie* (p. 94). Derrida’s unlimited series of metaphors (from “trace” through “invagination” to “spectrality”) that mark the presence of alterity in identity make identifying rape as violence difficult. It also renders difficult consideration of the subject, a topic Derrida generally avoids.

A topos of contemporary theory is the rejection of the distinction between physical, material violence and the symbolic violences of language in particular. One of the rare moments when Derrida disassociates himself from the thought of Emmanuel Levinas is on this point precisely. In the historic 1964 essay on Levinas, “Violence et métaphysique,” Derrida rejects the distinction between discourse and violence. Discourse itself, the discourse of the proper, is ontological, hence in itself and per se violent. Derrida asks if discourse is not violent originellement, if it is not the case that war inhabits the philosophical logos itself, even though it is only in that logos that peace can be declared, a problematic that goes back to Heraclitus.¹ The distinction between discourse and violence looks doomed to remain an inaccessible horizon. Nonviolence, rather than the essence of discourse, would be its telos at most. Language can only reach towards justice indefinitely, while engaging in violence in itself. “Violence contre violence. *Economie* de violence” (Derrida, “Violence et métaphysique,” pp. 171 f.).

A textual economy of violence is exactly what we will examine in a bit. Let me cite Derrida’s language epigraphically as marking the topic of my discourse, which retains a certain polemical angle (polemical, rather than polemos: observing a certain limit, a verbal limit).

¹ “War is father of all and the king of all; and some he has made gods and some men, some bond and some free” (qtd. in Burnet, *Early Greek Philosophy*, p. 136).
In the *Grammatologie*, Derrida radicalizes the theme and asserts “the unity of violence and writing” as originary (p. 156). This is not writing in its narrow sense, linear, graphic, and phonetic. It is identified with the social. Any society that simultaneously produces and obliterates its proper nouns and plays with classificatory difference practices “l’écriture en général” (p. 162). Any organized society whatever, then, is violent by definition. “Writing,” in this larger sense, is the originary violence itself. Calling things by their names invokes a system of differences which classifies linguistic and social belonging. In doing so—and this is crucial—it deploys and perpetuates the impossibility of “the vocative point,” of addressing an Other directly without recourse to a social symbolic: talking to them “really,” in themselves, not via the displacement of a social code. Is an ethics of the visage still possible?

Derrida’s assertion of universal violence is based on a binary opposition between the individual and the social. The “vocative point” is an impossible purity (because the individual is posited as an asocial singularity) prior to contact with the social and its grid pattern of identificatory writing. The individual exists prior to the social: that is why “naming” is the originary violence of language, which negates the individual by inscribing him or her as (mere) difference, thereby classifying and suspending the absolute vocative. But is this not an ontologizing of the individual, the postulation of a presocial essence which one would want to address? Who, today, believes in such an essence? Derrida here leaps back behind Lacan and Althusser to a far earlier view of the subject—a view he cites repeatedly—to explain the maneuver of avoiding the topic. The argument needs an essentialist human nature to make possible the criticism that thinking the unique singularity within a system means jettisoning a presystemic proper (Derrida, *Grammatologie*, p. 162).

If writing itself is the first violence, a second violence is the effort to hide it. A third violence is evil, war, indiscretion, rape. It is at this “tertiary level, that of the empirical consciousness, that the common concept

---

2 Editor’s note: all translations from Derrida’s *De la grammatologie* are the author’s. Page numbers refer to the 1967 French edition listed under *Works Cited.*
of violence [. . .] should no doubt be situated” (Derrida, *Grammatologie*, p. 165). Originary violence resides in language; its appearance in the flash of the dagger, in the devastations of war, in the rape of girl or grandmother, in material violences, is merely “tertiary.” A question of identity arises: who speaks here? Lévi-Strauss? Derrida paraphrasing or extending Lévi-Strauss? Derrida writing in his own name? Haidu impersonating one of the two or both?

These initial remarks on the problematics of language and violence in Derrida mark the fusion of social violence and the letter of writing in his thought. It inspires the continuous attack on identity, up to and including *Spectres de Marx* and beyond. This book adds to the sequence of terms whose self-multiplication insistently avoids the ontological “naming” named above, starting with “trace” and going through “invagination,” by adding and now “covering” them (as a pop singer “covers” another singer’s song) with “specter.” Note Derrida’s consistency: if proper naming is violence, he avoids that violence by continually shifting his key term. Of course, the semiosis of the key term relies on the signifying power of all the signs in its cotext. Writing still makes sense, even when the central term’s “propriety” is avoided: the cotext bears the burden of meaning. Derrida, who has specifically argued for an equivalence of philosophy and poetry, is nothing if not a poet in his philosophical practice.

As Fredric Jameson has pointed out, however, in *Spectres de Marx* the figure of the specter is generated by occultation of the very core of Marx’s thought, materialism as a constitutive problem: this the “proper” of Marx (Jameson, “Marx’s Purloined Letter,” p. 36). Derrida claims his occultation performs a “‘radicalization’ of Marx.” As Slavoj Žižek notes in *Did Someone Say Totalitarianism?*, it has the practical effect of imposing the “renunciation of any actual radical political measures” (p. 154). Its occlusion renounces the exchange of violence and violation by restricting the field of exchange to the verbal: responses to the material violences of established power are verbal only, confirming the reduction of “revolution” to its metaphoric usage.

---

3 See also Montag’s discussion in “Spirits Armed and Unarmed: Derrida’s *Specters of Marx*."

*Olifant*
Derrida’s deconstruction proceeds by dismantling the ideas that compose Marxism: the opposition of the dominant and the dominated; the concept of social class and the class struggle; and the materialist determination of the superstructure (Spectres, pp. 95-97). The “ultimate support” of this ideological system is the notion of identity, the self-identity of a social class. Derrida himself reduces Spectres de Marx to this attack on identity: “[. . .] does everything in my book not come down to problematizing, precisely, every process of identification, or, even, of determination in general [. . .]?” (“Marx and Sons,” p. 226). The “guiding thread, the red thread” that runs all the way through the book is the idea of a messianic justice whose value depends on its eluding the sway of “that logic of identity and self-identity” (“Marx and Sons,” p. 227).

What is at stake in the serialism of that entire series of metaphors—trace, invagination, spectrality, etc.—is that of discrete identity: naming a singularity.

Violence is defined by the transgression of identity. Identity is necessary for the conceptualization of violence. Identity is not chosen: it indexes one, entering the field of vision from screen left, towards a double phallus of towering power that names us all. Identity is itself a constitutive violence. Violence and identity dance an identitarian carole. Deconstruction is another partner, dancing the violence of its dismemberment of another’s conjunctions.

It was not Derrida who first tied the knot between language and violence. I want to go back to Charles Sanders Peirce and his familiar trichotomy of icon, index, and symbol (“Logic as Semiotic”). The symbol is roughly the equivalent of Saussure’s arbitrary sign: its signification depends on the shared codes of interpreters to vanquish the violence of arbitrariness. The icon’s visual resemblance is also subject to interpretation: that grounds the contemporary problematics of representation. The

---

4 “[. . .] ce support ultime que serait l’identité et l’identité à soi d’une classe sociale [. . .]” (Spectres, p. 97).

5 There are passages in Spectres de Marx which raise uncomfortable questions about what Levinas called “le prophétisme messianique du bourgeois installé” (which he termed “hypocrite”).
meaningfulness of the entire system, however, depends on the index. The index—or better, the indexical function—anchors the entire system of signification to referential reality. Pointing anchors language in concrete reality.

The index points the entire system of language to that ultimate reference, “external reality,” not only physically but violently. Let me cite two examples from Peirce. The first is that of the weathervane. As the wind blows on its surface, the index turns to indicate the direction of the wind. The weathervane is a sign of the wind’s force and direction. The second example is aggressive, piercing, and shattering. Take a piece of mould. Shoot a bullet through it. The bullet hole is a sign of the shot that went through it, an index. Without the shot, no hole. But the hole is there “whether anybody has the sense to attribute it to a shot or not” (qtd. in Hoopes, *Peirce on Signs*, p. 240). The index is a sign in which physical violence replaces interpretive codes. We can dispense with the interpreter: the hole “means” a bullet went through the material, interpretant or no (Hoopes, *Peirce on Signs*, p. 239 f.).

Violence, aggressiveness, and brutality, terms associated with materiality in Peirce, are also associated with the realism of Duns Scotus and, specifically, with the doctrine of *haecceitas*, “the hereness and nowness” of things as ultimate qualities (*Essential Peirce*, ed. Houser and Kloesel, vol. 1, p. 275). For Peirce, a fact “in its isolated aggressive stubbornness and individual reality” is possessed of unquestionable brutality (*Essential Peirce*, 1:274-75). It is that which is, its “haecceity is the *ultima ratio*, the brutal fact that will not be questioned” (*Essential Peirce*, 1:275 f.).

What occurs between pairs, between two subjects, is “dynamical action, or action of brute force” (Peirce, “Pragmatism in Retrospect,” p. 282). “Every physical force reacts between a pair of particles, either of which serves as index (a sign) of the other” (Peirce, “Logic as Semiotic,” p. 114). Index, violence, conflict, and signification are related. “As experienced, haecceity is known as shock or brute resistance [. . .] [the] nonconceptual experience of dyadic opposition or ‘upagainstness’ [. . .]” (Murphey, “Peirce, Charles Sanders,” p. 74B). For both Peirce and Sco-

---

6 A hollow form for production of shaped objects, e.g., a bullet mold?
tus, haecceity is the principle of individuation: “only individual things have haecceity” (Murphey, “Peirce, Charles Sanders, p. 74B). “Singularity” is a rough equivalent of “the concrete individual,” minus its ideological associations. The singular admits of subgroupings of multiple singulars. 7

Dyadism is the structure of narrativity, as in Greimas’s initial narrative semiotics, whose constitutive function is conflict. Peirce contrasts the brutal, aggressive violence of dyadism to the life of the mind. “[E]very intellectual operation involves a triad of symbols” (“Logic as Semiotic,” p. 114). What Peirce calls “semiosis” is “an action [. . .] which [. . .] involves [. . .] coöperation of three subjects, such as a sign, its object, and its interpretant, this tri-relative influence not being in any way resolvable into actions between pairs” (“Pragmatism in Retrospect,” p. 282). Triadism structures “semiosis,” which for Peirce means the fusion of thought and expression, of signification and logic—a kind of “writing,” perhaps. Triadism is also the locus of law, knowledge, and community.

The dyadic, conflictual structure of narrative, as textualized, ordinarily morphs into a more complex, reflective triadicity. The model of the monosemantic exemplum, so important to medievalism, is hard to find: even exempla are polysemantic (Bremond et al., L’Exemplum). The agonistic basis of narrative implies the representation of the antagonist’s value scheme. If this representation is inadequate—frequently the case, perhaps the norm—it incites questioning at the least. To some degree, the text’s representation of anti-axiological values make of hybridity a norm of textuality. One might hazard the hypothesis that this incitement offers the essential rationale for narrative.

Neither Derrida’s flattening of violence to a monoplanar phenomenology nor the sharp opposition of physical violence to psychic or symbolic violence can work adequately. Violence as the fatal blow; violence as various degrees of physical struggle; violence as deprivation; violence as enforced labor; violence as ideological assault; violence as the neces-

7 “The being of a singular may consist in the being of other singulars which are its parts” (Essential Peirce, 2:208).
sary destructiveness of avant-gardism; violence as the multiple breaks and fissures of conventional textuality; violence as repression into which the victim is corraled and coopted; and violence—in some ways the worst, as Derrida sees—as utter silence: all are stations of suffering on a continuum not necessarily linear, archipelagoes among whose islands transfers and exchanges occur all the time. Think of a universal translating machine. The greater the distance the exchange travels, the more monstrous the event appears. But that distance is cognitive and aesthetic: it is not an objective, measurable fact; it depends on the understanding and expectations of parties. The entire process, however, requires recognition of the particular islands involved: both identity and exchange, both identity and spectrality.

Let me return momentarily to Derrida’s great teacher, Levinas. In “Esprit et violence” (a text to which Derrida refers), Levinas opposes spiritual life to violence. He cites Eric Weil with respect and admiration for the opposition of violence and discourse (Levinas, “Esprit et violence,” p. 18). Violence is not only in the shock of billiard balls, in the storm that ravages a harvest, in a totalitarian state that degrades its citizens, and in wars of conquest that enslave people. “All action is violent,” says Levinas, “where one acts as if one were alone in acting: as if the rest of the universe were there only to receive the action; any action is violent which we undergo without being entirely its collaborators” (“Esprit et violence,” p. 18).

However profound the differences between Peirce and Levinas, they share a similarity here. Peirce reduces dyadism to two trajectories of conflict—just like Greimas’s narrativity. It is when the interpretive function kicks in that things change. Though Peirce alternates between a disincarnated “interpretant” and one who, as flesh and blood, is an individual interpreter, it is when the act of interpretation occurs that discourse appears as the exchanges among sign, object, and the active mind. That is the cognitive axis of community that overcomes the initial brutal, aggressive “upagainstness.” That is the step, incremental but real, which allows Levinas to say: “The banal fact of conversation leaves, in one way, the order of violence. This banal fact is the marvel of marvels (la merveille des merveilles)” (“Esprit et violence,” p. 19). Conversation, Peirce’s

Olifant
regulative community, requires an inclusive recognition of differences; of presences with specific historicities; of interlocutors with the *haecceitas* of specific identities; of shared codes; and of what is most difficult of all today, an acknowledgment of commonality: “conversation” occurs under the implicit sign of universalism. Only then can the other’s visage—Levinas’s key term—be apprehended.

Peirce connects index, singularity, identity, and spectrality, negating the last. An index, he says, “always denotes a reacting singular.” He identifies singular, named identity, citing “such names as Theodore Roosevelt and Rudyard Kipling as singulars. They denote persons who we may roughly say are equally known to you and to me” (*Essential Peirce*, 2:221). Peirce has been led “to suppose that one person preserving an identity through the continuity of space, time, character, memory, etc., has been one singular connected with all these phenomena [. . .] all these phenomena unite to support the hypothesis that there is one singular Theodore Roosevelt quite unmistakable for a phantom or for any other man than himself” (*Essential Peirce*, 2:222).

For me, the denial of spectrality in the assertion of identity has to include identity’s deconstruction, which does not mean its destruction. Identity is not a rock-solid, exclusive, and unified haecceity. No identity today is unitary. The claim of such unitary identity is, precisely, a terrorist claim. “Identity” = the “address” for a “subject”: an internally divided field of forces occasionally forced into decisionary acts by ideological contradictions. Nevertheless, “identity” exists. It comes to us from the “outside,” from the social symbolic, and typically disguises itself as given by “nature.” Insofar as “identity” legitimates itself by “nature,” we can be sure it is ideological.

Using the term loosely, the singularity called “writing” is an institutionalization of violence which transcends violence in the very violence of yoking disparatenesses of meaning. In that act of yoking, of structura-
tion, writing yokes itself to constitutive alterities: the others of other
texts, the others of history (both plural). While the specificity of writing
in general is its dispersal into relations with alterities and is thus perhaps
undefinable (see the scribbles of the painter Cy Twombly), the specificity
of the singular text lies in the particular configuration it entertains among
its constitutive alterities.

If violence is difficult to define, it is that it is not a singularity but a
multiplicity, at least dichotomous. It is both logical and coherent accord-
ing to recognizable relations of cause and effect; it is also radically irra-
tional, unmeasurable, and unforeseeable. It is both logical and mon-
strous. Violence comports an interplay of logic and irrationality, the
copresence or comingling of narrative logic and its monstrous effects. To
what extent does this discrepancy, this violence on our epistemic catego-
ries, itself define violence?

Finally, I can do no more than mention a direction which would take
us far and be untimely. That is the current in modern thought that insists
on the positive necessity of violence. Among the thinkers to be cited
would be Georges Sorel, Walter Benjamin, Franz Fanon, Melanie Klein,
and Jacques Lacan, as well as Louis Althusser and the post-Althusserian
theorists working on the problem of the subject. One would need to cite
those events foundational for political modernity, the revolutions of
1775, 1789, and 1917. Each of these comported indubitable monstrosity
to some contemporaries. The question all these events raise, in their very
monstrosity, is the logic—the human and political logic—that led to their
undertaking.

---

9 A culture of “honor” has a substantive encoding in which attack calls
for revenge: $a > [b = a^1]$. Irrationality comes in two ways: a quantitative
disproportion of “b” in relation to “a,” of the “revenge” as against the
“attack”; or the displacement of targets. Raoul de Cambrai is justified in
feeling aggrieved by King Louis, but “taking it out” on Marsent is irra-
tional. But the categories of “rationality” and “irrationality,” of propriety
and disproportion, are largely aesthetic and hence cultural variables.
II. Raoul de Cambrai

In spite of my investment in the Roland, few medieval texts incite recognition of “the subject of violence” as does Raoul de Cambrai. Recent years have seen renewed interest in this puzzling, monstrous text, thanks above all to the new edition prepared by Sarah Kay and to her exploratory studies from the mid-eighties which define the problematics of the text for our time.\(^{11}\)

The connection of Raoul with the Roland is ambiguous.\(^{12}\) Their manuscripts are roughly contemporary, but their moments of composition, in their present forms, may be a century apart. If, as I have argued, the Roland is “one of the very first annunciatory signs” of the coming of the state to France (Haidu, Subject of Violence, p. 209), why is it that there is no trace of a stable, ordering power in Raoul as one of the late epic poems from the turn of the thirteenth century? Is it the fact, as Sarah Kay has suggested with some irony, that these later texts “de-invented” the state (Chansons de Geste, p. 14)?

An initial step in dealing with Raoul de Cambrai is to recognize its multiple violences and violations. The text’s physical fragmentation can stand as a sign for its structural and aesthetic fragmentations. What we identify as the more archaic epic narrative material occurs in the first part, the “Raoul” section of the poem. The manuscript presents this material in rhymed verse. What is likely to be more recent material, reminiscent of “romance”—a love interest, a pilgrimage adventure—occurs in a second part. The manuscript presents this material in assonanced verse.

---

\(^{10}\) The following pages are a somewhat different version of a section in my forthcoming The Subject: Medieval/Modern. Text and Governance in the Middle Ages.

\(^{11}\) See Works Cited for Kay’s articles and her OUP edition and translation, reissued by Livre de Poche with a new introduction and translation by William Kibler. Kay’s work has recently been joined by the important, if somewhat compressed, book by Baumgartner and Harf-Lancner.

\(^{12}\) See Bezzola’s “De Roland à Raoul de Cambrai” for a discussion of this ambiguity.
Thus, the older material is in the newer verse form while the newer material is in an older verse form. The whole thus takes the shape of a chiasmus between form and content, a doubled crossing-over.

The content itself is fragmented, heterogeneous. Its heterogeneity devolves from the conjunction of two different kinds of narrative material: monstrous violence associated with epic and elements associated with “romance,” namely, women and love (though it has to be added immediately that Raoul’s women and love are of a new kind not found in romance). In spite of the text’s heterogeneities, it has proved possible to speak of its “unity” in conjunction with its adherence to a specified “genre”—the different kinds of narrative material being considered merely as “motifs” belonging to the category of material (Stoff). A full consideration of this view would require passage through at least the Aristotelian notion of unity and its appropriation by French neoclassicism in the seventeenth century as it continues to inform romantic and postromantic aesthetics—an exercise to be bypassed, somewhat regretfully.

Raoul’s textual fragmentation tends to be discussed either in terms of authorial/scribal multiplicity or in terms of genre theory. Neither accounts for what I seek, less a matter of traditional “unity”—difficult to sustain with medieval texts in general—than some sense of a historic coherence: the text’s coherence with itself and the text’s coherence with its own historicity. Perhaps this is identical with what Sarah Kay has in mind in subtitling her book on the late chansons de geste “political fictions.” As a political fiction, Raoul de Cambrai’s reaction to efforts to civilize medieval society is largely negative and profoundly pessimistic. It produces this critique through its very heterogeneities. Coherence is grounded both in contradiction and self-différance. Like the Roland before it, I take Raoul to be a serious, multifaceted text oriented towards an examination of the problem of violence. Recognizing the conditions of production of orality, the Roland constructs itself as a rigorous, sequential logic. Raoul grounds itself in the very heterogeneities that shake the notion of coherence.

A historical reading of political fictions depends on two dialectical insertions: in the intertextualities of literary history and in political evolution. Both aim at textual Others out of which the text constructs its co-
herence. As against my much admired friend Alexandre Leupin, I do not believe that Raoul’s “knighthood and its private wars” are mere figures of the text’s own writing process (Leupin, “Raoul de Cambrai: The Illegitimacy of Writing,” p. 131): they are necessary interlocutors, Others who must be addressed. Raoul represents not simply a linear continuation of the earlier chansons de geste but a further stage in a general intertextual dialectic which embraces other types of texts. The initial “Raoul” section constitutes a radical denial of the idealizations of romance. Women, insistently represented, consistently lose out against the homosocial bond and its codes. Male warrior violence does not submit to the female instance: Raoul refuses to heed Alice and incinerates Marsent. The force of compagnonnage—whether straight up, as at the beginning, or inverted, as when Bernier revolts against Raoul—dominates male/female relations. Its violent dynamic, even in the second part, overcomes even the most earnest seeker after peaceful settlements of disputes. Bernier, who repeatedly seeks peace by humbling himself before other alpha males, himself becomes a pale reproduction of Raoul, impelled to violence before losing himself in the pilgrimage adventure of romance.

An essential (re)transformation occurs at the level of the Destinator. For strategic and structural reasons, Chrétien’s romance operated a displacement that falsified the equation of power. In a major shift from the romans antiques, Chrétien’s texts displaced the refulgent figure of Geoffrey of Monmouth’s King Arthur and reduced him to a secondary function as a king who, in Chrétien’s last works, is repeatedly ridiculed: Chrétien focalizes on the vassalic protagonist. Contra, Raoul insists on the king’s role and its effects in the sociopolitical diegesis. It is not a nice picture, not a flattering picture. Some of the late chansons de geste do show the effects of the increasingly “unified order,” announced by the Roland, that Philip II was laying: kingship is increasingly institutionalized; centralization in Paris has begun; and the king’s power vis-à-vis the

---

13 On the distinction of textual “types” and “genres,” see Zumthor, Essai de poétique médiévale.
feudal princes has increased (Gosman, *Rex Franciae*), but overall, its representation of the king is not a nice picture nor a flattering one. Sarah Kay is entirely right to point out that Raoul “holds no prospect of a unified order” (*Chansons de Geste*, p. 14). More specifically, there is little trace in the “Raoul” section composed at the beginning of Philip’s reign of the achievement of the end of his reign a generation later (he reigned for over 40 years). Nevertheless, the king’s role is essential to the poem.

Depending on one’s theoretical orientation towards violence as a social and philosophical problem, either the king’s malfeasance in granting fiefs causes the disasters of the narrative, or his manipulations of fief attribution work as the narrative precondition for the surfacing of Raoul’s savagery. The king first grants the Cambrésis, Raoul’s hereditary fief, to Gibouin le Manceau with the assurance that it will return to the boy Raoul when he is able to bear arms. When Raoul comes of age, however, King Louis refuses to restore the Cambrésis to him. Instead, the king promises Raoul the first fief that becomes available in its place. That compensatory fief turns out to be the Vermandois when Herbert of Vermandois dies leaving four sons and the grandson who is Raoul’s vassal and compagnon, Bernier. Pressed by Raoul, the king grants him the Vermandois, though without a royal warrant.

At the source of the major conflicts are the ill-judgments and injustices of King Louis: first an injustice to Raoul, then another injustice to the sons and grandson of Herbert of Vermandois. The effects of these grants are to set the two clans, the populations of Cambrai and the Vermandois, against each other. Raoul’s campaign to conquer the Vermandois as his fief leads to the scene which sticks most deeply in the memory, the conflagration of Origny at Raoul’s order in which the abbess of the local convent burns in flames along with another hundred nuns.

---

14 Gosman’s work is based on seven texts from the early thirteenth century: *Ami et Amile, Aymeri de Narbonne, Galien le restoré, La destructione de Rome, Simon de Pouille, Gui de Nanteuil*, and *La chanson des Saisnes.*
III. A feminist Raoul de Cambrai?

Scenes of the devastation of war are not infrequent in epic. Indeed, they are a frequent narrative convention. What is unusual about this particular occurrence is its closeup of one victim of the violence: the narrator zooms in on Marsent and her anguished death. The later narrative exploits and reinforces our memory of the scene: it is repeatedly referred to (eight times by my count) in the later action by Bernier and others.\(^{15}\) Think of a still frame of Marsent burning in the abbey founded in her honor occasionally interspersed throughout later episodes to punctuate various scenes and conversations. The singularity of the event becomes a leitmotif resounding through the narrative. Its repetition constitutes a trace working in the text, a trace which defines and affirms Bernier’s identity and leads to his murderous revenge.

That the featured victim is a woman is not accidental. The presence of women in this narrative has been amply noted, as has the fact that, although their presences remind one of romance, they are not simply migrants from romance. Their number, their importance, and the crucial role their love plays in the “Bernier” section may reveal the influence of romance, but the women’s character and the character of the love that is narrated are something else again. The text excels in representations of women who are shrewd, savvy, and carnal, and who nonetheless do not succeed in imposing their intelligence, understanding, and desire for peace on a social segment still patriarchal, still violent, and dedicated to war.

Raoul de Cambrai reacts dialectically to its complex, constitutive tradition by denying earlier assumptions: the notion of a good or well-meaning king; the king’s evacuation from the narrative scene; the willing subordination of Thanatos to Eros; the courtly idealization of woman; and the central narrative focus on a positively marked male hero.\(^{16}\)

---

\(^{15}\) In lines 1468, 1518, 1560, 1569, 1677 ff., 1708 ff., 1721, and 1839-44.

\(^{16}\) I disagree with the identification of the narrator’s voice with that of the son as hero, which in turn falsifies the representations of the text’s women. See Fenster, “The Son’s Mother.”
stead, the text shows the harsh effects of royal power; the reinstated opposition of Eros and Thanatos; images of women focused on this world, who, though admirable, do not succeed in imposing their intelligence, understanding, and desire for peace on a male class segment still dedicated to war; and finally—Raoul goes beyond the Roland in this—the representation of male characters who, awesome in certain respects, are so flawed as to make the very notion of the “hero” ideologically absurd. Awe at the courage, the prepossession, and the total commitment to self-assertion does not smother the critique of violence.

Bonds among male actors are economic and political as well as affective. They are mediated by the fief (a source of power), wealth, and status. A historian finds half a dozen technical meanings to the “fief” in this text (White, “Discourse of Inheritance”), but Leupin has grasped its essential narrative ambiguity. The fief’s instability—and hence the narrative’s—results from the fact that it is governed by two contradictory laws: inheritance by primogeniture and the sovereign’s right to invest whom he pleases with a fief upon its reversion (Leupin, “Raoul de Cambrai: The Illegitimacy of Writing,” p. 135). What this binarism bypasses, however, is the expectation of justice, that the king’s award of fiefs will recognize vassalic claims in discharging his right and responsibilities. The text leaves no room for doubt: royal malfeasance in granting fiefs initiates the disasters of the narrative. The king’s manipulations of fief attribution are the narrative precondition for the surfacing of Raoul’s savagery and Bernier’s revenge. In spite of his clear injustices to Raoul and to the descendants of Herbert of Vermandois, Louis is not demonized. Each error, each injustice, is given a context of political imperatives which make it comprehensible. However horrendous its effects, the initiating choice is rationally comprehensible. The king makes human mistakes, he is not a figure of evil incarnate.

All these injustices, however, haunt their victims as iterated spectres demanding the satisfaction of revenge. They set the two clans—the men of Cambrai with Raoul at their head and those of the Vermandois including Bernier—endlessly against each other. Spectrality haunts its hosts to the moment of death. Does it lift them from the horns of their dilemmas as subjects of contradiction? Does it relieve their vengeance of its ethical
and political weight? I think not. Spectrality does not relieve any actor of the burden imposed by identity or the past acts identity bears. On the contrary, spectrality haunts individuals unrelentingly precisely because of their identity, because of their genealogy and their earlier acts. The logic of violence is not humane, but it is human and subject to both ethical and political judgment.

The devastation of war is a narrative convention in epic, whose constitutive problematic is male warrior violence. That is the “genre”‘s conventional norm. It is a mistake, however, to see this particular text as exclusively concerned with the central relation of the *chansons de geste*, that between lords and vassals. Excessive focus on genre obscures what defines a text, the dimensions of meaning produced by narrative and verbal structures.

*Raoul de Cambrai* introduces a radically countervailing element into this conventional masculinity. The first major scene of devastation is part of Raoul’s campaign to conquer the Vermandois as his newly awarded fief, which leads to the conflagration of Origny at his order. Bernier’s mother Marsent is abbess of a convent founded there in her honor by the sons of Herbert of Vermandois. She burns up in the furnace of flames along with another hundred nuns. Flames pour out the doors: no one can get as close to the flames as a javelin’s cast. Alongside a great marble altar, Marsent is stretched out flat on the ground, her sweet face consumed by fire, on her breast the psalter burning (ll. 1300 ff.).

The violence of the event is concentrated by the zoom in of the narration on the victim, Marsent, and her anguished death. Repeated back reference later in the narrative exploits and reinforces our memory of the

---

17 Gaunt focuses exclusively on the *compagnonnage* of Raoul and Bernier and sees the text exhibiting “a nostalgia for a formerly heroic world [. . .] a yearning for a lost perfect world is manifest in virtually all *chansons de geste*” (*Gender and Genre*, p. 62).

18 On the issue of genre, compare Kay (*Age of Romance*) and Gaunt (*Gender and Genre*) with my “Romance: Idealistic Genre or Historical Text?”.
scene. Those spectral recurrences turn the singular event into a leitmotif resounding throughout the narrative. The effect is semantic as well as musical. Its repetitions define and affirm Bernier’s identity and lead to his murderous revenge: spectrality produces the narrative act.

The importance of women in this narrative has been amply noted. Their presence reminds one of romance, but they are not migrants from romance. Their number, their importance, and the role they play reveal an influence of romance, but their character and the character of their love are something else again. Béatrice, Guerri le Sor’s daughter, is a narrative world away from courtly ladies: no false timidity, no hesitation in self-analysis, no problematization of dominance, none of the complexities and subtleties of fin’amors or courtly love. On the contrary, she assumes desire and sexuality unhesitatingly and with anticipation (Baumgartner and Harf-Lancner, Raoul de Cambrai: L’impossible révolte, p. 88). Meeting Bernier at her father’s castle, she directly asks his name. Falling in love with the man in silks, she immediately calculates how to get him, whispering to herself:

“Lie la dame qe isil aroit prise,  
car molt a los de grant chevalerie;  
qi le tenroit tot nu soz sa cortine,  
miex li valroit qe nule rien qi vive.”  
[. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .]

“Q[u]i le loroit acoler et baisier,  
miex li v[a]lroit qe boivre ne mengier.”

Puis dist en bas, c’ele puet esplotier,  
qe le tenra encor ains l’anuitier. (5409-12; 5423-26)

“Lucky the lady whom this man were to choose, for he has a tremendous reputation for knighthood; anyone who could hold him naked in her sheets would find him worth more

---

19 Lines 1468, 1518, 1560, 1569, 1677 ff., 1708 ff., 1721, 1839-44, and more.
20 Compare Soredamor’s hesitation in Cligès.
than any living thing. [. . .] Anyone who was allowed to kiss and embrace him would find it better for her than meat and drink.” Then she added in an undertone that if she can manage it, she’ll have her arms around him by nightfall.²¹

A bit later, in line 5607, she tells her father she wants a husband for her body’s pleasure: “‘Mari vos qier por mon cors deporter’” ‘‘I want a husband who will make me really happy.’” Béatrice rejoins the narrative functions separated in the Yvain: Laudine as the site of desire and power and Lunete as the instrumental manipulator. She does so as a new feminine type, neither epic nor courtly. On the contrary, Béatrice is a dialectical rejoinder to their opposition (an Aufhebung perhaps?).

Béatrice is a narrative world away from the ladies of romance. Like the historical women of the time, she is the object of political manipulations. The king’s efforts in the “Bernier” section are oriented to marrying off Béatrice, who has become Guerri’s sole heir, to one of his feudal dependents, Herchambault de Ponthieu. His efforts include kidnapping her to try to force that second marriage on her, even while her husband, whom she has just married, is alive. While Béatrice is not one of the female combatants whose textual figure is formed during the twelfth century—perhaps as a result of the Second Crusade (Ciggaar, “La dame combattante”)—she does successfully oppose the king’s manipulations.

The king’s authority—arbitrary, ineffective, and divisive to the body of feudalism—is faced with a new force: Béatrice’s love for Bernier. Her passion is carnal, her sexuality driving and unhesitatingly assumed. Both passion and sexuality are directly and frequently expressed in complete disregard of the refinements, complexities, and subtleties of courtly love (we will return to this point later). A new kind of woman strides onto the scene of French textuality in Raoul de Cambrai. Though not successful in achieving permanent social harmony, Béatrice’s love for Bernier knits the two warring clans of the Cambrésis and the Vermandois through the marriage bond that then needs to be defended against the king, at least for a while. Only Béatrice succeeds in leaving her fief to the inheritor she

²¹ The translation is Kay’s, somewhat modified.
designates, in imposing her choice on the world, and in reconciling the sons of Herbert with Raoul’s uncle. Far from occasioning guilt or embarrassment, the carnal sexuality of her love is the basis for the closest the text comes to harmony and peace (Baumgartner and Harf-Lancner, Raoul de Cambrai: L’impossible révolte, p. 140). A woman’s self-assertion against even royal power succeeds.

Béatrice appears in the second major part of the text, however, which may be a late continuation dating from the later part of Philip Augustus’ reign. The first section, the “Raoul” section, contains no love interest comparable to Béatrice and Bernier, but it does field two female figures that are imposing in their own terms. Both stage a particular relationship, that of mothers and sons, which is crucial and redoubled in the “Raoul” section. They also perform a particular structural role.

The presence of woman is established as early as the second laisse, which announces four major characters: Guerri le Sor; Raoul de Cambrai; Herbert de Vermandois; and Lady Alice, described in line 38 as la gentil dame au gent cor avenant. Her presence recurs in laisses 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, etc. Nor is her presence merely a matter of linear frequency. She performs a narrative role, a cognitive role, that of political sagacity, when she recognizes, as her son Raoul does not, that Louis’s grant of the Vermandois is a dangerous trap. She understands and announces, prophetically, that the grant will result in Raoul’s own death. It is not that she had read the poem she occurs in ahead of time (as a poststructuralist turn might have had it) but that she grasped the king’s political strategy of divide and conquer. When she warns Raoul of the danger of the Vermandois, she adds rules of behavior: that he not destroy chapel or church, kill the poor, nor take booty or pillage (ll. 855-99). These reminders of the Peace of God legislation enrage Raoul. Alice curses him: “‘[. . .] let God who judges everything not bring you back safe and sound and in one piece!’ ” (ll. 956-57). She regrets it immediately, but the malediction is pronounced and hangs in the air. It correctly predicts Raoul’s death at Bernier’s hands. Is it causal as well? Alice’s malediction also demonstrates her susceptibility to the same rage that inhabits her son. Mothers and sons, in this text, have complicated relationships.
The first female figure of the poem textualizes a more profound understanding of the king’s political stratagem than that of her son the hero: her understanding is at the level of the king’s strategizing. Similarly, Marsent, the abbess of a convent founded in her honor by the sons of Herbert of Vermandois, shows courage and skill in negotiating a truce with Raoul without recourse to any but moral force as well as religious devotion in choosing not to escape from the town in flames (ll. 1300 ff.). Both mothers are women of strength, courage, shrewdness, independence, political savvy and sagacity, and have the capacity to negotiate even from positions of weakness.

Alice and Marsent’s structural role is not dissimilar from that of another mother being written at about the same time: the mother figure in Chrétien’s *Perceval*. Perceval’s mother appears at the inception of the text, in its first episode, voicing a harsh critique of the very knighthood that will be the object of her son’s quest. She too issues rules of behavior disregarded by her son. Perceval’s mother dies of grief at his departure; Bernier’s mother dies in grief at the hands of her son’s lord. Her condemnation of knighthood shadows the entire narrative text. While we cannot assume any direct influence between the *Perceval* and *Raoul*, it is possible in either direction. After all, Chrétien’s text is dedicated to Philip, the count of Flanders. It may have been written at his court. The similarities of roughly contemporary texts composed in the same place are perhaps not accidental.

The figure of woman constructed in *Raoul de Cambrai* is not only unanticipated by the courtly tradition, it is constructed in direct opposition to that tradition as a dialectical response to the romance image of the courtly lady. Secondly, like the mother figure in the *Perceval*, the presence of these mother figures which relay each other in the “Raoul” section has a specific structural function: they are more than a “motif,” more

---

22 Something I did not appreciate when I wrote *Aesthetic Distance*: “If the mother’s presence in the narrative is short, her absence remains present throughout Perceval’s adventures (Deist) and casts its spell on Gauvain’s as well” (Bruckner, “Rewriting Chrétien’s *Conte du graal*,” p. 225).
than an accident, more than a passing moment in a narrative conceived of as pure linearity. As previously stated, both of Raoul de Cambrai’s mother figures are women of strength, courage, independence, political sagacity, and the ability and readiness to negotiate even from positions of weakness. Join their representation to that of Béatrice: a new female *representamen* is being constructed. All three mothers are presented in binary opposition to knighthood, although in different ways.

My account of the horrific scene of Marsent burning to death as the victim of Raoul’s cruelty at Origny omitted one element. The text does not proceed only by “objective” narration of the event, although this would be normal narrative technique in both epic and romance. Instead, it brings an observer on the scene, Marsent’s own son, Bernier, vassal and boon companion of the feudal lord who orders the attack on the town. Bernier rushes up, sword in hand, only to be forced by the intense heat to watch his mother burn and die in the flames. A dual narrative object is textualized: the mother as the victim of raging feudal violence and the son who watches her die helplessly, her killer’s feudal vassal. The sadistic violence is observed and by one implicated in it.

Implication is not limited to Bernier: implication is recursive. As Bernier observes his mother, we observe both the mother burning and Bernier observing her. In staging so memorably the son’s gaze on the dying mother, a shameful fact, the text also inscribes our own voyeuristic, scopophilic gaze. The audience is implicated in his shame: the original medieval audience and we ourselves. The function of the perspectival observer is recursively re-enacted by various narrative actors. The poem stages scopophilic desire repeatedly. Scopophilia and its aural/oral equivalent are inevitable not only in cinema but in literary communication, which trades on “epistemophilia” (Melanie Klein’s term). What is striking here is its recursive staging in the text itself. The text leaves

---

23 My discussion stresses commonalities whereas Fenster argues for the characters’ differences and, specifically, an opposition between the “good mother” (Marsent) and the “bad” (Aalais) as projection of a guilty son’s matricidal fantasy (ll. 91 f.).

24 Bernier would want to deny it but cannot (l. 1679).
open, however, the question whether this recursivity turns our own gaze upon the structure of recursivity itself: that is the audience’s call.

Alice and Marsent are more than narrative “material,” “motif,” or “thematics.” They perform a particular structural role, that of observer, of witness. They establish a “point of view,” a “perspective” from which to view the narrative. Bernier observes as well. Since he is implicated and culpabilized by what he observes, he fuses gaze and the gazed-at, but de-idealized woman becomes the narrative observer par excellence and the judge of male violence. Her gaze is turned on the men whose violence kills and sometimes kills the women themselves.

Marsent’s spectral trace works through to Raoul’s and Bernier’s ends. The final haunted reference to her death occurs towards the end of the text in a passage which fuses the work of memory, guilt, and moral indeterminacy. Bernier, beset in battle, prays: “‘Lord God, Father,’ said noble Bernier, ‘never was I so fiercely attacked by any man. Some sin has caught up with me here [. . .]’” (ll. 6817-19). First he regrets having taken revenge on his lord: “‘I was mad in killing Raoul—he reared me and made me a knight’” (ll. 6820-21). Then he reverses field to discard guilt: “‘Holy Mary, what have I said? He burned my mother in Origny church, he wanted to rob my uncles of their vast lands, he wanted to exile and shame my father—how could I not kill Raoul? God judge me if I acted in wrong’” (ll. 6822-27). The indeterminacy of perspectivalism and the moral ambiguity of life under a hidden God have rarely been presented so hauntingly. Bernier’s identity is precisely to be the subject haunted by the moral indeterminacy.

IV. For a perspectival postmodern historiography

Perspectivalism itself needs to be placed in perspective. “Perspective” and “point of view”—I disregard a possible distinction—share two distinguished histories: Anglo-Saxon modernism and medieval French. As is often the case, modernism precedes medievalism. “Point of view”

25 Again, the base translation is Kay’s throughout, although I have taken the liberty of several modifications.
was constituted as a recognizable narrative technique in Henry James’s novels and identified and discussed in the prefaces collected and published as *The Art of the Novel*. James’s experimentation was summarized by Percy Lubbock (*Craft of Fiction*), recodified by the academic Norman Friedman (“Point of View”), and reviewed by (post)structuralist theorists like A.J. Greimas, Gérard Genette, and Gerald Prince.\(^{26}\)

In medieval studies, the issue of voice is integral to readings of Jean de Meun and Chaucer: the devices of wide-ranging discussions or the travelers’ individual tales set alternative subjectivities, in the guise of character(s) and author(s), at the undecidable heart of the text (Leicester, *The Disenchanted Self*; Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject of History*). The essential moments of its history in French medievalism would include early studies in verbal and narrative style masquerading under the signature of “irony.” More recently, Bernard Cerquiglini, Michèle Perret, and the late and regretted Suzanne Fleishmann represent essential moments. The matter has recently been reviewed and synthesized by Sophie Marnette’s linguistics of medieval narrat-or-ology (*Narrateur et points de vue*).

Obviously, major differences must be noted. James’s internal narrators (as well as Peircian semiotic pragmaticism) marks a phenomenological influence associated with the relativization at the heart of the late capitalist ideology of individualism and its alienation.\(^{27}\) Individuation is key here. Medieval textuality is not bound by the same ideological context or technological discipline, although it is not absolutely foreign either. The same form or structure acquires different significations in different cultural contexts. Form and structure themselves become signs of their culture in the arbitrary bond of signs generally.

One of the medieval perspectival techniques, seen in both *Perceval* and *Raoul de Cambrai*, consists of simply implanting a character who fuses the roles of participant, observer, and commentator, representing not only a personal ‘take’ on the action but a perspective from which a

---

\(^{26}\) Most recently, see Prince’s *A Dictionary of Narratology*.

narratee can *view* the unfolding action. The arrival of Blancandrin in Charlemagne’s camp in laisse 8 of the *Roland* leads the text to pass in review the Frankish warriors according to recognizable class distinctions from the foreigner’s perspective. In the *Perceval*, the hero’s mother’s denunciation of knighthood suggests an interpretive *point* from which the narrative may be *viewed* as bearing far more complex meanings than the narrative subject himself can grasp. A similar perspective is constructed in *Raoul de Cambrai*, although in a different manner.

Novelistic perspective itself is polyvalent. It may have some utility for a postmodern historiography. In fact, the process of adaptation has already begun. Jacques le Goff’s *St. Louis* limns a different image of the king according to each category of documents inscribing the king’s figure. It presents a fragmented and (although Le Goff does not say so) postmodern example of historiography. Another example is Gabrielle Spiegel’s *Romancing the Past*, directly pertinent to our text, which I follow here. Spiegel recounts Philip II’s relentless manipulations of his relations to successive counts of Flanders as part of a general strategy of expanding the king’s territory by weakening his vassals’ hold on their own lands and annexing what he could, by hook or by crook, through peaceable means or warfare. His technique was time-honored: destabilize the environment, undermine the nobility’s autonomy, divide and conquer, and sow conflict among opponents so as to weaken them. His main antagonist was Philip of Alsace (1157/63-1191). Between the two Philips, the “Vermandois Succession” was a central stake, as in our poem, affecting marital strategies and financial resources (Spiegel, *Romancing the Past*, pp. 31-44; Baldwin, *The Government of Philip Augustus*, pp. 99 f.). Open hostilities broke out, leading to the humiliation of Philip of Alsace and the loss of all practical authority over most of his county. By 1192, his lands were split five ways. In 1196 the king’s shenanigans led the Flemish aristocracy to take up arms against him. According to a contemporary chronicler, “There was scarcely any baron in this march of Flanders [. . .] who was not against him” (qtd. in Spiegel, *Romancing the Past*, p. 39). The violations of a trust which might have reigned between king and subjects led to the violences of “open rebellion.”
The intensity of the conflict was proportionate to the stakes. Flanders was one of the most successful of the twelfth-century ministates called “principalities” (Dunbabin, *France in the Making*), with a solid economic basis in the transformation of raw materials from England into finished textiles for resale throughout Europe. Its economy benefited from a highly centralized node of state formation. Its submission was a major triumph for the king. The acquisition of the Artois and the Vermandois financed Philip II’s successful campaigns against his Angevin and Flemish rivals in 1204 and 1214. They were key to his ultimate triumph, which led to the moniker “Philip Augustus.”

I hope to have perpetrated as little injustice as possible in summarizing Gabrielle Spiegel’s detailed account. However, anyone who knows the poem will stop me and say: But look here, Peter, none of this is to be found in *Raoul de Cambrai*. This is entirely true. The institutionalization of the French monarchy as the initiation of the French state, Philip II’s achievement, is not given in *Raoul de Cambrai*. What is found instead is the figure of a king who misuses his role of redistributing fiefs to vassals, who exercises that right in ways that sow discord and dissension among those vassals, and who profits from the conflicts that ensue, conflicts which deploy the characteristics of the aristocracy. What *Raoul de Cambrai* shows is a royal strategy analogous to that of Philip Augustus but seen from the opposite side: the reverse of the king’s point of view, its negative side. *Raoul de Cambrai* is not narrated from the perspective of a wily, cunning, and centralizing king or his idealization but from the perspective of vassals who are its victims. The dreadful narrative of Raoul, Bernier, Guerri le Sor, etc., is not the constructive side of state formation. On the contrary, the story represents the deleterious effects of state formation on those who would have hoped to stand in its way so as to retain their independence precisely from that state. It is a counternarrative to the creation of statehood in France, the *feudal narrative* of a feudal class losing ground before the advances of the *monarchical state*. It is a counternarrative to the creation of France. *Raoul de Cambrai* is the exploration of Philip Augustus’s politics from the other side, the side of its opponents, the Flemish nobles. These are the patrons who commissioned different versions of the *Pseudo-
Turpin as part of a body of vernacular literature by and for the Flemish aristocracy to valorize its own ideological premises in opposition to the hegemonic aspirations of a Frankish monarchy. The Pseudo-Turpin appropriated the monarchical-leaning Song of Roland for the ideological purposes of the Flemish nobles. Raoul de Cambrai is a far more ambitious dialectical response to the sequence of vernacular textualities of the twelfth century, revised and rebutted from the perspective of a complex but distinctly feudal subject position. The poem refracts the disintegrative effects of Philip II’s divisive strategies on the late twelfth-century Flemish nobility, as in the conflicts over the Vermandois succession, through the prism of historical memories of ancient wars between the clans of the Vermandois and the Cambrésis going back to the ninth and tenth centuries. The link between past and present is specified by the contemporary Chronique de Waulsort: “Sed virus praeteritae commotionis in Viromannorum et Cameracensium serpit visceribus usque in praesens tempus” ‘The virus of these past passions creeps still today in the men’s viscera of the Vermandois and the Cambrésis’ (qtd. in Baumgartner and Harf-Lancener, Raoul de Cambrai: L’impossible révolte, p. 159).

The Flemish nobility, however, is only a local metonym for a larger class throughout a “France” that does not yet exist, a class weakened and fundamentally threatened by an expansionist monarchy. The poem inscribes “the ideological aspirations of a declining social class” (Spiegel, Romancing the Past, p. 97), the subject position of a dominant historical class seeing its position of dominance undermined and fractured by the fulfillment of what had only been a promise in the Song of Roland, the institutionalization of the state by the stratagems of Philip Augustus, stratagems whose basic effects are the same as those of Louis in Raoul de Cambrai. That was the feudal class compounded of the barons and the knights who held a major slice of power—social, economic, and political—and saw it threatened. That was the class, previously dominant, whose sensed marginalization the poem dramatizes. That is the problematic which gives not Aristotelian unity but semiotic coherence to the

---

28 See Kibler’s summary in the Introduction to the Livre de Poche edition (pp. 11-22).
poem’s heterogeneities. Linearities exist, but neither this textual narrative nor the narrative of history constructs a simple, linear, teleological unity. Both are internally complex: they integrate heterogeneous instances. They are “hybrid.”

My reading of Raoul de Cambrai is perspectival. So is my reading of medieval history. While modern historians quibble, there is little question but that medievals conceived of society as constituted by major social classes, if not exactly in a Marxist sense of “class.” Comparison of those medieval classes with modern conceptualizations of classes is necessary, keeping in mind that Marx was concerned to analyze the class structure of industrial capitalism. That said, any useful definition of class will include elements of economic interest as well as the exercise of political power and violence as constitutive elements, amply recognized by medievals themselves, observing society in terms of their own systems of logic. When the dust settles on contemporary historiographical discussions, medieval history is impelled largely by the frictions and conflicts of social classes and class segments.

The literary scholar does not legislate for his colleagues in history; s/he may express needs or desiderata. Different kinds of historiographical praxis are needed. One is a perspectival history in which specific groups constituted by perceptions, ideologies, and actions and operating within the horizon of a social totality are seen as differentiated, relatively autonomous agents or subjects. The recent argument over whether the medieval period was or was not violent is not a tempest in a teacup. The overall structure of medieval society and the shape of medieval history are in question, but the resolution to the question will come, it seems to me, not as a choice between the two terms of the binary “violent vs. non-violent” nor as a delicate verbal adjustment between the two terms. It

____________________________________________________________________

will come by a recognition that activities which seemed a profoundly objectionable violence to some segments of society—clerics, women, peasants—were a perfectly ordinary and appropriate performance of noble entitlements to others. Violence, aggressiveness, and brutality, terms associated with materiality in Peirce, are also associated with the realism of Duns Scotus and, specifically, with the doctrine of *haecceitas*, “the hereness and nowness” of things as ultimate qualities. For Peirce, a fact “in its isolated aggressive stubbornness and individual reality” is possessed of insistent brutality. It is that which is, its “haecceity is the *ultima ratio* [. . .] the brutal fact that will not be questioned” (*Essential Peirce* 1:274 f.) One meaning of that “brutality” is its obdurate refusal of subsumption by our constructs of the Real. That insistence on a preverbal, preconceptual brutality of fact which refuses totalizing integration into our Reals and violates all epistemological framings, combined with precisely those shaken frames in textual perspectivalism, incorporates an understanding of the class structure—however problematic—of medieval society, its violence, and its connection to the material bases of existence and reproduction.
Works Cited


The sobriety, not to say dreariness, of my title reflects the tedious attention which I am wont to accord to minutiae, but I trust you expect me to find some dazzling little gem therein, and I hope not to disappoint you. I will not claim to have known in advance that fastidious examination of any particular detail would lead to the discovery of beauties, but it is the case that the longer I work on the Charroi the more I find truly remarkable finesse in seemingly banal details.\footnote{Integral to the presentation of this paper was the projection of various displays from the computer screen. The conversion to print has required eliminating much of the variety of display, but I have not tried to take out the chatty tone which I used to cover up the clumsiness inevitable when one is trying to keep one eye on the written text, another on the audience, a third on the keyboard, and a fourth on the screen at the front of the room.} Verses in which the narrator presents a character’s speech are a case in point.

It must be over twenty years ago that I began paying attention to such verses, without any clear notion of where they might lead. It was simply that, speech being a rather banal and frequent component of narrative, I had encountered a large number of occurrences of various types and found in them food for thought. Following a fairly straightforward line of analysis, for example, we can recognize degrees of amplification. The zero degree of realization, that is direct quotation without any verb of speech introducing it, tends to correspond to an acceleration or intensification of the narrative such as the heating up of an argument. The more or less base form uses the verb \textit{dire} in the third person, present or pret-erit, or, at a slightly greater degree of information, the verb \textit{respondre}. 

\textbf{Edward A. Heinemann} 
University of Toronto
Other verbs of speech carry further semantic weight whether relevant or not to the narrative, and they are considerably less frequent.\textsuperscript{2}

In the base degree of realization, the verb occurs in the first hemistich along with the subject, which can range in importance from verbal flexion to pronoun to noun. When this last is the case, the presentation of speech usually fills the entire hemistich. Since hemistich, verse, and laisse act as something of a set of reference points for measuring out the importance of elements of the story, the status of a full hemistich confers weight, so to speak, to any given element.

Being two syllables longer than a first hemistich, a second hemistich filled by a discourse presentation represents a slight amplification over the base degree of realization.

There is little need to pursue the point. The first set of examples illustrates increasing degrees of importance, a range of narrative rhythms affecting the speed of the narrative. In line 1064, responding to the question in line 1063, the zero degree of realization is the most compact; line 703 is the base type, with a slightly heavier version in line 428, where the subject of the verb is a noun occupying two full syllables as well as a posttonic one; the second-hemistich version in line 376 is a slightly amplified variety; and line 725 amplifies the detail to a full verse:

\begin{tabular}{lll}
Si li demandent & quel avoir fetes trere & 1063 \\
Nos syglatons & et dras porpres et pailes & 1064 \\
Sire dist il & molt es buen chevalier & 703 \\
Et dit Guillelmes & sire Bertran beaus niés & 428 \\
Granz merciz sire & dïent li chevalier & 376 \\
Molt belement & le prist a aresnier & 725 \\
\end{tabular}

The effects in these different degrees of importance derive from allusion to the tradition, that is to say, from reference to the many occur-

\textsuperscript{2} In “Fréquence lexicale et rythmes du vers épiques” I made a first attempt at pulling together some of the threads of the analysis which I had pursued in previous studies. In this regard, see also Whitehead (“La poésie épique”) and Zumthor (“Le vers comme unité d’expression”).
rences of speech presentation in many *chansons de geste*. It may well be that no other narrative detail is such a narrative constant, but that is another issue.

I had more or less pushed the question of presentation of speech not just to a back burner but completely off the stove when, working (“playing” would perhaps be a more accurate choice of word) on questions of lexical frequency (again, without any clearly defined purpose), I began collecting verbs of speech in my textbase of the three poems in the kernel William cycle: the *Couronnement de Louis*, the *Charroi de Nîmes*, and the *Prise d’Orange*. I began with a paper to the American-Canadian branch of the Société Rencesvals in which I collected a set of verbs of speech (“Mapping Echoes”). Two subsequent papers examined questions of frequency (“Fréquence et disponibilité lexicales” and “Whitehead’s ‘Elementary Old French’”).

When I submitted the abstract for this paper, I had in mind a small number of patterns which had been showing up in a different vein as I was working my way systematically through the *Charroi* in search of recurrent phrasing. The type *Looïs sire dist Guillelmes* li... + adjective runs through the first episode largely as the opening verse of a laisse in which William utters a reproach of one sort or another. The hemistich *Et dist Guillelmes* seems to concentrate in another scene. I will eventually come to the first of these patterns, but a funny thing happened on my way to this forum.

I have been working with the textbase of these three poems for a number of years, and, in addition to accumulating a rather depressing list of the typos I had found in it, I was also accumulating thoughts on ways in which it could be better organized. In the spring of 2001, I took advantage of the time a sabbatical provides, and I overhauled the textbase. One of the improvements I have been undertaking is a systematization of the indexing. Not wanting to put you to sleep just yet, I pass quickly over an endless string of tedious technical details and restrict myself to one aspect of this tidying up.
The program, the UseBase component of Tact, provides a query language for specifying search criteria, and it provides a mechanism for recording both the results (called an AGroup in the program) and the criteria of the search (the Query). Linking group to query is such a useful way of indexing the information I find in the textbase that I have taken to referring to the pairing as GQs (groups-queries) as a way of indicating the fundamental relation between these two functions of the program. Again, I refrain from a good deal of tedious explanation, but I have put in the Appendix those GQs which I use in this paper.

I have been working at rationalizing the names of GQs and the kinds of queries. An example (the significance of which I do not claim to grasp) is the set of sixteen second hemistichs in which one character accuses another of talking like a fool (see Appendix, "2-parler-folie"). The display of all sixteen shows that there are a number of phrases which recur word for word, the most used being the five occurrences of de ne-ant ("2-v-parlez-d-nea"). Others, like "2-d-folie-parlez, occur only twice, and one of those occurrences is in the Couronnement. The set of all sixteen, as we could have guessed, shows that most are in the Prise (3 in CL, 1 in CN), where the detail is something of a leit motiv.

"2-parler-folie

---

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CL XXXII 1405</th>
<th>Respont li quens de folie parlez</th>
<th>De traïson ne fui</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CL XLII 1806</td>
<td>Voir dist Aliaumes vos parlez en pardon</td>
<td>Il nel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CL LVIII 2424</td>
<td>Respont li quens vos parlez folement</td>
<td>Quant Looïs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CN XL 998</td>
<td>Et dist Bertran por neant en parlez</td>
<td>Ge ne sai tant ne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PO XIX 591</td>
<td>Dist Arragon de folie parlez</td>
<td>Or manderai en</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PO XXIX 910</td>
<td>Oncle Guillelmes vos parlez de neant</td>
<td>Par amistiez</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PO XXXIII 1033</td>
<td>Oncle Guillelmes vos parlez en pardon</td>
<td>Que par</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PO XXXIV 1057</td>
<td>Oncle Guillelmes vos parlez de folaige</td>
<td>Que par</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

3 Developed at the University of Toronto by John Bradley with the assistance of Lidio Presutti and Michael Stairs under the direction of Ian Lancashire (see Lancashire et al, Using TACT with Electronic Texts).

Olifant
Patterns in the Presentation…

Two observations. First, I would like to point out the play of variation against a base form (in this case the five occurrences of *de ne-ant*), a matter of the musicality of language. This point is one of the funny things that have distracted me from my original purpose. Second, this particular motif is important in the *Prise*: do the occurrences in the other two poems derive from an assembler’s desire to emphasize the unity of the three poems? No answer is possible without examination of many other poems for similar hemistichs, but the question arises, along with an accompanying doubt whether it is worth checking up on.4

Now, the point on which I am working rises out of two patterns (one of which I have mentioned) that I noticed while working my way through the *Charroi* before I began overhauling the textbase. The first appears thirteen times, eleven of them in the first verse of a laisse:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sire Guillelmes</th>
<th>dist Looûys le ber</th>
<th>/I/, 73</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sire Guillelmes</td>
<td>dist li rois Looûys</td>
<td>IV/, 106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sire Guillelmes</td>
<td>dit Looûys le ber</td>
<td>XI/, 278</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sire Guillelmes</td>
<td>dist Looûys li frans</td>
<td>XII/, 294</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sire Guillelmes</td>
<td>dit Looûys li prouz</td>
<td>XIII/, 300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sire Guillelmes</td>
<td>Looûys li respont</td>
<td>305</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sire Guillelmes</td>
<td>dit li rois Looûys</td>
<td>XIV/, 315</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sire Guillelmes</td>
<td>dit Looûys le fier</td>
<td>XV/, 328</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4 The skewing of this set of statistics brings us back to Milman Parry’s exclusion from his count of repeated hemistichs those repetitions which are made for effect (“Studies in the Epic Technique,” pp. 80-83).
Sire Guillelmes  dist Looûs oiez  380
Sire Guillelmes  dit Looûs le ber  XVI/, 404
Sire Guillelmes  dit li rois entendez  XXII/, 512
Sire Guillelmes  dist li rois frans guerriers  XXIII/, 538
Sire Guillelmes  dist Looûs li frans  XXIV/, 580

The second occurs eight times, five of them in laisse-initial position:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Looûs frere</th>
<th>dit Guillelmes le ber</th>
<th>/I/, 64</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Looûs sire</td>
<td>dit Guillelmes li fers</td>
<td>III/, 94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looûs sire</td>
<td>dit Guillelmes le ber</td>
<td>/V/, 133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looûs rois</td>
<td>dit Guillelmes li sages</td>
<td>VI/, 153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looûs sire</td>
<td>dit Guillelmes li prouz</td>
<td>VII/, 182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looûs sire</td>
<td>Guillelme a respondu</td>
<td>IX/, 256</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looûs sire</td>
<td>dit Guillelmes le fort</td>
<td>XIX/, 490</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looûs sire</td>
<td>dit Guillelmes le fier</td>
<td>/XXVI/, 753</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Clearly, these two sets are markers in the long dialogue which covers most of the first episode of the poem. The pattern is quite striking:

Vocative in the first hemistich, comprising two base forms (*Sire Guillelmes*, *Looûs sire*) and two minor variations (*frere* and *rois* substituted for *sire*) to one of them;

in the second hemistich the verb *dire* in initial position, the speaker in middle position, and an apposition in final position.⁵

---

⁵ As befits the second hemistich, there is a fair range of variations, the most important of which is the occurrence of *respondre* once in each set entailing a change in word order.
Nine of the thirteen occurrences of the first set introduce or lead to the offer of a fief or the recognition that Louis is unable to come up with a satisfactory offer: I, XIII (305), XIV, XV (both occurrences), XVI, XXII, XXIII, XXIV.

The occurrences in XII and XIII (300) echo each other and launch the series of offers in XIII-XV. In IV and XI Louis is maintaining, against the obvious, that William’s claims are unjustified. Here, too, we have a base type with variations playing around it: these verses introduce an offer of a fief or a rejection of the necessity of offering one.

In the second set, the occurrence in laisse V opens William’s narration of a first service he has performed for the king, that of VI opens the second service, and that of VII opens the fourth service. (The third service takes a variant form.) Laisse IX sums up the services as an ensemble, and the occurrence in laisse I introduces a comparison between the military services which William has rendered and effete ones which he has not rendered. Five of the eight introduce a service.

In laisse III, William evokes a compensation offered by Gaifer de Police, and XIX is the first of three parallel laisses in which he waxes lyrical about the fiefs in Spain for which he has asked. Two occurrences are associated with the counterpart of service, that is to say, recompense.

In laisse XXVI, the only other occurrence in the set, 753 occurs after William has punished wicked old Aymon; he turns toward Louis and reminds him not to listen to losengiers and returns once more to his intention of conquering new lands in the name of the king, something of a compensation and service rolled into one. I concede that I am forcing the point somewhat here, but it does seem like one last reminder of the rather important theme of service and compensation.

In other words, these seemingly banal presentations of speech appear to be part of a poetic pattern in the story and are not just marking the two speakers in an argument. They mark the two themes which the two speakers develop: Louis stumbles through one misguided offer after another, and William reproaches him his failure to reward faithful service.

Since first noticing these two sets, I have encountered other possible sets as well (such as Et dist Guillelmes), but time ran out before I arrived here in front of you. For having the textbase raised the possibility of sub-
jecting this hypothesis to something of a control, seeing what other formulations of speech presentation occur when William and Louis open their mouths. The other patterns still await examination, and I have had time only for William. 

First of all, I collected the mentions of William—not all, but those in which a noun designates him, leaving aside pronouns and verb endings: the name Guillelme, the nickname Fierebrace, and the noun cuens. (I thought of marchis somewhat later, but, seeing that none of the 27 occurrences occurs in conjunction with a verb of speech, I have left them out for the time being.) Of course, a good many of the 702 occurrences ("guillaume") are redundant, occurring in phrases like li cuens Guillelmes or Guillelme Fierebrace. Consequently I created a second GQ to restrict hits to the main word in such phrases ("guillaume"), hitting 593 occurrences. I then gritted my teeth and sorted out the 429 occurrences (including one typo which I have still not eliminated!) in which the noun is subject of a verb ("guillaume"suj), after which I was home free. 

Well, not quite. Looking for verbs of speech in the same verse as William used as subject produces double hits in lines like Respont li quens si com vos commandez (CL 1395). Still, it took just a little work to arrive at the 151 occurrences in the three poems of William’s opening his mouth to speak ("guill•parle). (You may be getting an inkling by now of why I have not had time to track down the occurrences of speech presentation for Louis.)

Looking at those occurrences in the order in which they appear in the texts, we will skip over the Couronnement (at the beginning of which a series of dit / dist and respond show the story line unfolding) and limit ourselves to the Charroi (52 occurrences). Various things show up as we scroll through: a preponderance of dit, dist, and forms of respondre; a

---

6 Not quite. Checking once again in the week before the conference, I found that in CL 1650 Li quens Guillelmes au cort nes li marchis is subject of the verb apeler in 1651, an amplification of speech presentation to two verses. There is another round of checking, very probably rather tedious, to be performed for speech presentations amplified to greater than a single verse.
fair number of instances in which Guillelmes follows dit or dist; and, most important for the question at hand, even the blur of shapes on the screen shows you that there are a variety of formulations in which the narrator presents William’s speech. In other words, the set of eight verses (five of them in initial position of the laisse) that I brought to your attention stand in opposition to various other formulations of the narrative detail. The association which I suggested between the theme of service-recompense and this formulation does seem to hold.

Restricting ourselves to the 22 occurrences in the second hemistich (”guill•parle•2), we see a little less clutter and a bit more order.

7 Here I ask the reader’s indulgence and imagination, for the blur of lines scrolling up or down on the screen actually conveys information. Closely occurring similar phrases like lines 133, 153, and 182 printed here stand out, looking like columns separated by blank spaces.
There are indeed other patterns in this set, some of which I believe I have managed to situate and others not yet, but time has not allowed me to put together an adequate presentation of them. Still, I have shown you today two more little gems in what is becoming quite a large set of little, seemingly insignificant details in a pattern of remarkably intricate composition. The set of thirteen discourse presentations does indeed seem to mark the beginning of passages in which Louis makes an offer to William, and that of eight, passages in which William reproaches him the lack of recompense for loyal service. The Charroi is a masterpiece.
Appendix: GQs Used in this Paper
(Organized into Hierarchies)

Items prefixed with @ refer to groups, as opposed to word forms which occur in the text. The remarks enclosed in asterisked parentheses indicate in very abbreviated form the span within which co-occurrences must occur: (*0 h*) means within the same hemistich, (*-2 +1*) means within the two preceding words and the one following word. The various dots and codes would require of my reader more patience than I have a right to ask. I have, however, posted a relatively brief explanation at:


“2”parler·folie:   @parler & (@°d·fol, beffes, pardon, neant) (*0 h*)
   parler:  parl.*, parolent
   °d·fol:  fol, folement, @ °ds·folie
       °ds·folie:  folie, @folage, @foletez, foloiement
                     folage:  folai*ge
                     foletez:  foletez*

“2·v”parlez·d·nea:  vos | >parlez | de | neant

“2·d·folie¨parlez:  de | folie | >parlez

°r·guillaume:  @guillaume, @cuens·guillelmes, fierebrace
   guillaume:  guillaume, guillelmes*, giuillelmes
   cuens·guillelmes:  @cuens·l -(@cuens·aymeri, @cuens·bertran, @cuens¨autres)
       cuens·l:  @cuens·f, @conte·comte
               cuens·f:  [cq]uens
               conte·comte:  conte -@conte·account
                               conte·account:  ne | sai | >conte | (noncier, tenir)
cuens·aymeri:   @cuens-l | @aymeri, le | gentil | >conte

aymeri:   aymeris*

cuens·bertran:   @cuens-l | @bertran, bertran | le | >conte, cele
| tonne | que | li | >quens | dut | mener, (cuens; when pm po; when v 1663)

bertran:   bertrans*

cuens¨autres:   @cuens-l | (foucon, gillebert), (del | >gentil, li, xiii) | >conte, ne | li | >cuens | del | troton, ne | >cuens, un |
>conte, morz | est | li | >quens, le | >conte | a | guillelme | apaié

°r·guillaume¨:   @cuens·guillelmes ~(fierbrace, @guillaume), fierbrace ~@guillaume, @guillaume (*-2 +1*)

°r·guillaume¨suj:   @ r·guillaume¨ -(conte, guillaume, guillelm., (conte, la) | >fierbrace, (he | >gentix, merci | >frans) | >quens,
@°r·guillaume¨voc, @°r·guillaume¨pred

°r·guillaume¨pred:   (((ai | >ge, j | >ai) | >non), ge | >sui, m | >apel-
lent) | >guillelmes, tu | >guillelmes | iés, es | tu | || | >guillelmes

°r·guillaume¨voc:   (oncles*, ahi, diva, merci, par | >dieu, bertran) |
>guillelmes, @¨1·sire¨guillaume, guillelmes | quar | seez, es | tu |
lassus | >guillelmes

¨1·sire¨guillaume   sire | >(guillaume; when h 1

°¨guill·parle·2:   @°¨guill·parle; when h 2

°¨guill·parle:   @°¨vb·discours -(commander, @demander, dis, dites, parlez) & @°r·guillaume¨suj -(sai | ge | bien | >dire, avrai | >dit, qui | >dit |ce) (*0 v*)

°¨vb·discours:   @apeler, @araisnier, @commander, @demander, @dire, @escrrier, @huchier, @noncier, @parler, @respondre, semoing, sermona, @¨2·metre·a¨reson, @faire·discours
apeler:   apel.*
araisnier:   araisoné, areson.*, aresn.*
commander:   @comant-commander, @comment-commander, co[mn]m*and.* -commandement
comant·commander:   en | li | >comant, te | >commant
comment-commander:  a | mauvè | le | >comment
demander:  demand.*, demant
dire:  @di¨dire, die, diënt, dies, dir.*, di[sz], disant, disoit, dist, dit[es]*
        di¨dire:  di -@di·jour
di·jour:  le | tierz | >di
escrier:  escri[aei].*
huchier:  hui*chier
noncier:  noncier*
parler:  parl.*, parolent
respondre:  respon.*
¨2·metre·a¨reson:  reson & @metre (*0 h*)
        metre:  met.*, mis[es]*, mist, meïs
faire-discours:  (fet, fait) | (il, l[ei] | cortois | portier, aymes | le | viell)
Works Cited


I plan to speak today on the legendary youth of Rodrigo Díaz, the Cid. The figure best known to hispanists is the mature Cid of the *Cantar de mio Cid*, but recent scholarly work on the poem dedicated to the young Cid, the *Mocedades de Rodrigo*, has led to an appreciation of that period of the hero’s life most inspired by the imaginative fire of myth. The first account of Rodrigo’s youth is the brief mention of a single combat in the surviving passage of the *Carmen campidoctoris* (c. 1083), a poem written during Rodrigo’s lifetime, but more significant for our purposes today is a prose text judged by modern historians to be an accurate biography of Rodrigo Díaz on most counts, the Latin *Historia Roderici* (c. 1110). This narration contains what contemporaries took to be the pertinent details of Rodrigo’s youth.

The *Historia Roderici* (*HR*) dedicates the equivalent of five paragraphs (from a total of seventy-seven) to Rodrigo’s youth, from his birth to his marriage to Jimena Díaz. It first gives paternal and maternal genealogies for Rodrigo and then details the important battles won by his father in the process of acquiring his many properties. Upon his father’s death these properties pass to Rodrigo. The text next mentions his apprenticeship and his knighting by Sancho, king of Castile and lord of Spain, whom he serves as commander of his army in major victories.

---

1 See *Works Cited* for editions.
2 Both Fletcher (*The Quest for El Cid*, pp. 93-99) and Martínez Díez (*El Cid histórico*, pp. 21-24) follow Menéndez Pidal in favoring an early date of composition for the *Historia Roderici* (c. 1110) and in affirming that the author of his biography must have witnessed some of the deeds of the mature Rodrigo Díaz.
3 Paragraphs 2-6 detail Rodrigo’s youth. See *Works Cited* for editions.
against Ramiro, king of Aragon, and against king Sancho’s own brother, Alfonso. Rodrigo fights honorably in the siege of Zamora, then against the Navarrese champion Jimeno Garcés, and finally against a Saracen at Medinaceli, whom he not only defeats but kills. When king Sancho dies, Alfonso receives Rodrigo with honor as his vassal and welcomes him into his court with great esteem, giving him his niece, Jimena Díaz, to wed. This text is written in a plain style with little detail, but the facts it offers are noteworthy as points of comparison for later legends. Rodrigo serves his king in battles and quickly becomes a valuable asset, which leads Alfonso to give him Jimena Díaz as a marriage prize.

Another version of Rodrigo’s youth appears in late thirteenth-century vernacular chronicles, but there is no reason to assume a genesis later than the protagonist’s own lifetime since these chronicles are the first to include substantial epic material. Contemporary with the vernacular chronicles is the epic poem in Castilian on the youthful deeds of Rodrigo de Vivar, most frequently referred to as *Mocedades de Rodrigo* (c. 1300).

Much has been made of a few real world events that may have played a role in shaping the narrative tradition of Rodrigo’s *mocedades*, but this narrative has a mythic force that overpowers contemporary social conditions. The following paragraphs offer a brief account of the main actions pertinent to the focus of this paper.

Rodrigo’s father, Diego Laínez, has been attacked by count Gómez de Gormaz in a cattle raid and in retaliation conducts a destructive incursion against the count, burning property and taking men, cattle, and “por dessorrra, las lavanderas que al agua están lavando” ‘as a dishonor, the washerwomen who are at the river washing’ (l. 305). The count is en-

---

4 For the earliest chronicle references to Rodrigo’s youth, see Armistead, “Las primeras alusiones.”
5 See Deyermond for an excellent review of critical opinion on the genesis and dating of the poem. For the 1300 dating of *Mocedades*, see Martin, *Les juges de Castille*.
6 Translations here and throughout are my own.
raged and demands an equal battle with one hundred knights on each side.

Rodrigo, age twelve, is anxious for his first fight and joins his father’s fighting force against his wishes. He is the first to strike in battle and in short order kills the count and captures his two sons. The dead count’s three daughters, dressed in mourning clothes that seem to have turned festive, subsequently present themselves at Vivar to plead for the freedom of their brothers. Rodrigo’s father refers their request to his son, who reprimands the father but recommends granting the request. The two brothers immediately begin planning a retaliatory raid on Vivar, but the youngest sister, Jimena, proposes that they allow her to make an appeal for justice to the king at Zamora.

Jimena arrives weeping at the royal court and beseeches redress for the wrong done. The king confesses to a quandary: a just decision—one against Rodrigo—may bring an insurrection by the unruly Castilians. Jimena proposes a happy solution: “‘Datme a Rodrigo por marido, aquel que mató a mi padre’” ‘“Give me Rodrigo as a husband, the one who killed my father”’ (l. 378). The king’s advisor seizes upon the idea and urges him to issue a summons to Rodrigo and his father. The messenger, on his arrival in Vivar, gives assurances that Rodrigo is to be honored by the king, but the two remain deeply suspicious. They expect a treacherous act as punishment for the count’s slaying, which for their part they regard as a justifiable act of war.

Rodrigo’s mistrust of the king brings on an enraged state that will soon be recognized as furia guerrera or furor belli. He declares to his troops that if the king kills his father, then regicide will not be an act of treachery. As he enters the royal court, all fall back in terror before his gaze. The father kisses the king’s hand, but Rodrigo refuses and instead makes a threatening move with his sword that brings a cry for help from the king: “‘¡Tiratme allá esse peccado!’” ‘“Get that devil away from me!”’ (l. 428). In the face of Rodrigo’s denunciations, the king commands, “‘Dadme vós acá essa donçella, despossaremos este lozano’” ‘“Bring me that damsel; we’ll betroth this spirited fellow”’ (l. 433). Jimena appears, looks Rodrigo over, and states, “‘Señor, muchas merçedes, ca este es el conde que yo demando’” ‘“Many thanks, for this
is the count I request” ’ (l. 437), attributing to him a rank equal to hers, which in fact he does not have.

With that the troth is pledged. The doncella ‘damsel’ (l. 433) is now “doña Ximena Gomez” (l. 438). Rodrigo is still furious at the king and expresses displeasure: “‘Señor, vós me desposastes, más a mi pessar que de grado’ ” ‘‘Lord, you have betrothed me more to my grief than to my liking” ’ (l. 440), but he now calls the king “señor” and makes no move to avoid the betrothal. He swears never to kiss the king’s hand or be intimate with Jimena until he has won five pitched battles. Though he postpones it, his integration into society has begun. The king is amazed: “‘Non es este omne, mas figura ha de peccado’ ” ‘‘This is no man; he has the look of a devil!’ ’ (l. 445). 7

Rodrigo will immediately be expected to take on the most hazardous defense assignments against the Moors. Among the notable battles that ensue is his single combat against the champion of Navarre, Martín González, for the city of Calahorra, a combat mentioned in the HR as a fight against the Navarrese champion Jimeno Garcés and in the Carmen campidotoris (ll. 25-26) against an unnamed Navarrese champion. The Mocedades version is noteworthy because in it the young Rodrigo is again transformed by an episode of furor belli.

Throughout the epic text Rodrigo is independent and blatantly offensive to the king, whom he regards initially as an enemy, then as a monarch to be obeyed but not served, and finally as an inept yet necessary leader. The society depicted is one of rival warrior clans that the king cannot fully control. Among its most compelling aspects are Rodrigo’s state of fury and the important role Jimena has in containing it. Thomas Montgomery notes in the Mocedades story a rite of initiation and has identified a prototype in the Irish epic hero Cuchulainn of the saga Táin Bó Cuailnge. The Irish hero is a youth of seven and a force of unbridled destruction when in a state of fury, furor belli, or ferg. On his return home from a killing spree he demands more men to slaughter, spreading

7 In this summary I follow Montgomery (Medieval Spanish Epic, pp. 31-33). I have made minor changes to his summary with an eye toward economy of expression and the narrower focus of this talk.

Olifant
dread throughout the town. In order to avoid deaths among his subjects, the king, with everyone’s general agreement, orders the queen with all the young women of the community to appear naked before Cúchulainn. The boy hides his face and turns toward his chariot, whereupon the men seize him and immerse him in three successive vats of cold water. After the third his wrath has cooled, and he emerges radiant and beautiful. The queen dresses him in festive garments, and he occupies a place of honor at the feet of the king.⁸

As Montgomery points out, the state of fury is brought on by the combat and is not under the young man’s control. In the end it is the hero’s own community that must confront the danger he poses. The thirst to kill—the ultimate masculine quality—although necessary for the survival of the population, is also dangerous to it and must be counteracted, overpowered, by the ultimate feminine quality, seductiveness, which is also necessary for the community’s continuation and survival. Montgomery equates the essential and benign role of the women who pacify Cúchulainn with that of Jimena in Mocedades, while recognizing variations reflective of differing social conditions and customs (Medieval Spanish Epic, pp. 33-34).

While the comparison between the two poems allows for a deeper understanding of Jimena’s role in Mocedades, the recreation of her plea for justice in the Romancero contains details that are not readily evident in the extant epic poem. These romances, or epic-inspired ballads, appear in written form some two hundred years after Mocedades was put to parchment and were without equal in popularity during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The most prominent ballads of epic provenance are those related to Rodrigo’s mocedades. These brief narrative poems resemble passages from the epic poem but clearly experienced a life of their own outside its context. The parallels between them are noteworthy, and their study has contributed to a more thorough knowledge of the mocedades tradition, especially regarding the dynamics of the relationship between Rodrigo and Jimena.

---

⁸ This summary also follows Montgomery (Medieval Spanish Epic, pp. 29-31).
The imaginative possibilities suggested by the circumstances behind the marriage between Rodrigo and Jimena fire the imagination of *juglares* or bards and their audiences from the start. While the schematic and perfunctory narration of *Mocedades* and the purportedly truncated ending of the poem’s unique manuscript do not allow for a full reckoning of the aftermath of the initial passions, the *romances* explore the implications of the story with exuberance. Three variant versions of the *Quejas*, or grievances of Jimena, date from the sixteenth century and have been studied in detail. They are known by their first lines, which are “Día era de los reyes,” “En burgos está el buen rey,” and “Cada día que amanece.” “Día era de los reyes” has few discrepancies with *Mocedades* and so serves our purposes well enough:

Día era de los reyes, día era señalado,  
cuando dueñas y doncellas al rey piden aguinaldo;  
sino es Jimena Gómez, hija del conde lozano,  
que puesta delante el rey d’esta manera ha hablado:  
-Con mancilla vivo Rey, con ella vive mi madre,  
cada día que amanece veo quien mató a mi padre,  
caballero en un caballo y en su mano un gavilán,  
otra vez con un halcón que trae para cazar.  
Por me hacer más enojo cébalo en mi palomar,  
con sangre de mis palomas ensangrentó mi brial;  
enviéselo a decir, envióme a amenazar,  
que me cortara mis haldas por vergonzoso lugar,  
me forzara mis doncellas casadas y por casar,  
matárame un pajecico so haldas de mi brial.  
Rey que no face justicia, non debía de reinar,  
i cabalgar en caballo, ni espuela de oro calzar,  
i comer pan a manteles, ni con la reina holgar,

---

It was Three Kings’ Day, a special day, when ladies and maidens request a favor from the king; except for Jimena Gómez, daughter of the proud count, who set before the king in this way spoke to him:

“I live with a stain, king, with a stain lives my mother, every day that passes I see him who killed my father, knight on a horse and in his hand a hawk, or with a falcon that he carries for hunting. To spite me even more he baits it in my dovecote, with the blood of my doves he stained my apron, I sent him a message, he sent me a warning, that he would cut my skirt in a shameful place, he would rape my ladies in waiting both married and to be married, he killed a young page under the skirts of my apron. A king who does not grant justice should not reign, nor mount a horse, nor wear a gold spur, nor eat bread on tablecloths, nor enjoy the queen’s company, nor hear Mass in a sacred place because he does not deserve it.”

In the ballad Jimena goes to the king to demand justice, as she does in *Mocedades*, but the ballad is noteworthy for the more detailed plea

---

10 Citation from Díaz-Mas edition of “Día era de los reyes.” A second version has been edited by Mercedes Díaz Roig. A third version, entitled “En burgos está el buen rey,” has been edited by Colin Smith. All three versions appear in Alvar, *Cantares de gesta medievales*, pp. 182-84.

11 The translation may be open to debate. The verbs *cortara*, *forzara*, *matárame* could each be translated in two ways: “he would cut/he cut,” “he would rape/he raped,” “he would kill/he killed,” but the ballad seems to allow the ambiguity.
Jimena presents to the king. In this plea Jimena tells of sexual aggression against her and those dear to her and then attempts to shame the king into granting her justice by impugning his ability to govern and ultimately his manhood (“Rey que no face justicia [. . .]”). In the Mocedades Jimena leverages her social status and her vulnerability as an orphan to resolve a crisis in a way that serves her needs as well as those of the king who desperately needs Rodrigo and the Castilians on his side in the struggles that are about to besiege him. In the ballad Jimena portrays Rodrigo in all his masculine savagery as a threat to her sexual integrity and to the community around her and then challenges the king to be man enough to act. In both cases the king hesitates before the terrifying prospect of confronting Rodrigo and the Castilians. This allows Jimena to suggest the solution she desires: her marriage to Rodrigo, a fearless warrior, therefore full of potential as husband and as father to her children.

This ballad is part of an oral tradition (romancero) that forms the basis of much of the Golden Age drama of Spain, the Comedia, and Rodrigo’s mocedades enjoy a handful of recreations. The best of these plays is Guillén de Castro’s Las mocedades del Cid (c. 1612), his most celebrated work. Castro adapts the traditional legend by portraying Jimena and Rodrigo as already in love when Rodrigo’s father suffers public humiliation at the hands of the count of Orgaz, Jimena’s father. The situation requires deadly redress. Their love survives the ensuing turmoil and in the end they marry, but in the course of the drama Jimena and her repeated cries for justice are ridiculed, and Rodrigo’s mythic stature is reduced to that of a lovelorn obedient son. The dramatic tension of the play is maintained by the discordance between Jimena’s duty as an only child to avenge the death of her father and her love for Rodrigo. Rodrigo’s duty as the first-born son is to avenge the stain of his elderly father’s shame by washing it clean with the blood of Count Orgaz. Readers may recognize in this plot the French dramatist Pierre Corneille’s Le Cid (1636-37), a later adaptation of Guillén’s play.

In reference to the earlier oral tradition, a few observations are in order. The sexual violence alluded to in the ballad, and possibly in the epic as well, has disappeared. The two youthful protagonists of Guillén’s play are no longer part of a warrior culture but are the dutiful children of
courtly nobles. They respect their elders to the point of denying their own desires, and presiding over all of them as the embodiment of social order and stability is the elderly and wise monarch. This is the same king Fernando I portrayed in Mocedades as a young and incompetent leader whose manly virtues are no match for the terrifyingly violent presence of twelve-year-old Rodrigo. Jimena has a legitimate complaint in each of these tales, but the king is not able to redress the wrong done to her in any of them. In the epic and in the ballad tradition, she herself comes up with the solution of marriage to her father’s killer, although in the ballad the king is perplexed by the marriage solution she offers and attributes it to feminine fickleness.\(^\text{12}\) It seems that the medieval audience saw no contradiction in Jimena’s demand for justice and her desire to marry Rodrigo, that is, her birthright to redress and her mythic role as a sexual force necessary for domesticating the destructive will of a warrior youth for the good of the clan. The sixteenth-century ballad reflects on the contradiction but remains true to the medieval legend. In the seventeenth-century Comedia the medieval motifs and tensions have succumbed to the good manners and restrictive codes prevalent in a more stable and hierarchical society.

In this sense, then, Jimena has been stripped of her most important societal function, and, consequently, in Mocedades del Cid her demands for justice are ridiculed as a nuisance to the king. The king perceives no threat from any faction; he is firmly in control and thus Jimena has no leverage to apply. Her pleas for justice are construed as an obstacle to

\(^{12}\) The king’s response to Jimena’s request to marry Rodrigo is:

\begin{quote}
-Siempre lo oí decir y agora veo que es verdad,
que el seso de las mujeres que no era natural,
hasta aquí pidió justicia, ya quiere con él casar.- (27-29)
\end{quote}

“I always heard it said and now I see it’s true,
that women’s minds are not natural,
until now she asked for justice, now she wants to marry him.”
the valor and career of the king’s prized vassal Rodrigo, and they fall on deaf ears. Society’s expectations make it difficult for her to be true to herself. In public she must conform to societal strictures and demand justice, but in her heart she loves Rodrigo and wants to marry him. The king knows this and attempts to trick her into revealing her true feelings by having her believe that Rodrigo has died in combat. Once the truth is known, Jimena hides her heart’s desire by issuing a call for Rodrigo’s head in exchange for her hand in marriage. Rodrigo then playfully deceives her into believing that his challenger has won justice for her. This occurs as the victorious Rodrigo approaches the court while a herald proclaims that “Rodrigo’s head” is approaching. So as to avoid marriage to his challenger, Jimena confesses her love for Rodrigo to the king just as Rodrigo emerges to declare that the head of his challenger is indeed his (in Rodrigo’s possession) and that as the victor he will marry her. While society demanded that Rodrigo kill Jimena’s father, it now ridicules women who attempt to involve themselves in the affairs of men.

Finally, we turn to the twentieth-century Hollywood extravaganza based on the legend of the Cid, producer Charles Bronston’s El Cid, directed by Anthony Mann and starring Charlton Heston and Sophia Loren (1961). The movie is based on a variety of Spanish sources, among them the story line from Guillén de Castro’s play. Some creative liberties are taken, but for the most part Rodrigo’s mocedades and especially the love between the hero and Jimena provide the dramatic tension that sustains the movie. In this regard three episodes are especially pertinent.

In the first scene Jimena awaits the arrival of Rodrigo on their wedding day. Rodrigo has been delayed and the wedding will be as well, but for now Jimena wants to believe that all is well. Her words are those of a young woman in love: “‘They say all women in love are tormented that way, because they don’t dare believe that such happiness can really be theirs.’” Later, after Rodrigo has killed Jimena’s father so that she must avenge his death, Jimena promises herself to Rodrigo’s rival at court if he will kill Rodrigo during a mission to the Moorish lands to the south. Before he sets out on the mission, Rodrigo asks the king for Jimena’s hand in marriage based on the assertion that “‘[..] by ancient custom when a lord deprives a lady of her support he is himself required to give

Olifant
her shelter.’ ” The king approves the request in order to put an end to “this hatred.” In these scenes the young lovers have put duty before their own desires. Rodrigo kills Jimena’s father after he shamed Rodrigo’s own father in public, and Jimena is compelled to seek redress because it is the final wish whispered by her dying father. Rodrigo subsequently becomes the king’s champion in place of Jimena’s father and so has a place of honor at court. Jimena is left no option but to leverage her beauty and social status in order to seek revenge. In this case, a powerful and respected monarch reigns over all his subjects. Although Jimena’s desires for revenge are not ridiculed as in the Golden Age drama, she has no official recourse against the king’s champion.

In the third scene we experience the aftermath of the long-delayed marriage between Rodrigo and Jimena, the drama of two enemies who must now confront their life together as husband and wife. We may have sensed this tension as it animates previous versions, but the wedding night was left to the imagination. This is not in keeping with the voyeuristic tendencies of cinema that now invite us to witness to the dramatic tension of “sleeping with the enemy.” The wedding night is no love fest, to be sure, and when the final confrontation comes in the bedchamber, we understand that Jimena has agreed to the wedding as the only means left for her to avenge the death of her father. As Rodrigo moves to take his wife she reveals that the passion in her is vengeance, not love: “ ‘Do you know why I married you, Rodrigo? It was the only way left for me to avenge my father. It is true that if you want me it is your right as my husband to take me. But you will never get a woman’s love from me.’ ”

In sum, the recreation of the youthful adventures of Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar has fueled the imagination of medieval Spanish juglares, the Spanish population as a whole in the ballads of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, dramatists in Spain and France, and finally the movie moguls of the Golden Age of Hollywood. The powerful forces harnessed in the narration of the Mocedades de Rodrigo play out in different ways in the

---

13 I take this phrase from Lingl, “El papel de la mujer.”
varied works treated in this talk; each of these recreations reflects distinct cultural norms and the varied expectations of audiences. A trend can be discerned, however, and it is that in each successive work Jimena’s power and status are diminished, and her sphere of influence gradually moves from the public court of the king to her private bridal bedchamber.
Works Cited


Bailey, Matthew, ed. *Las “Mocedades de Rodrigo”: estudios críticos, manuscrito y edición*. King’s College London Medieval Studies XV. London: King’s College London Centre for Late Antique and Medieval Studies, 1999.


Frutos, Alberto Montaner. “Las quejas de doña Jimena: formación y desarrollo de un tema de la épica y el romancero.” *Actas: II Con-


Situated in cantos 9, 10, and 11 of Ludovico Ariosto’s *Orlando Furioso*, the Olimpia episode is made up of three narrative blocks recounting three distinct events. In canto 9, Olimpia tells her tale of forced separation from Bireno, her lover. Orlando unhesitatingly takes up her cause. He unites the lovers and punishes the villain, King Cimosco. In Canto 10, Bireno sets sail from Holland with Olimpia on board. He abandons her on a deserted island and sails off with King Cimosco’s young daughter instead. Finally, in canto 11, Olimpia is plucked from the deserted island by pirates who offer her as a human sacrifice to the sea orc at Ebuda. Orlando intervenes once more. He saves the damsel and offers her in marriage to Oberto, King of Hibernia. I will concentrate mostly on the first of these three narrative blocks in this paper.

Olimpia is declared an exemplary model of feminine virtue, a paragon of fidelity by the *Furioso*’s narrator:

Fra quanti amor, fra quante fede al mondo
mai si trovâr, fra quanti cor constanti,
fra quante, o per dolente o per iocondo
stato, fèr prove mai famosi amanti;
più tosto il primo loco ch’il secondo
darò ad Olimpia: e se pur non va inanti,
ben voglio dir che fra gli antiqui e nuovi
maggior de l’amor suo non si ritruovi [. . .] (X,1)

Among all the lovers in the world who ever gave proof of constancy, through adverse times and in prosperity, however renowned they be, I should award the first place, yes, the first to Olympia. And if she be not the first, I shall still
Ita Mac Carthy

maintain that, in olden times as today, no one takes precedence over her as a lover.¹

I argue, however, that the Dutch princess is more foolhardy than faithful. I compare her unfavourably to other Ariostean damsels in distress and to Bradamante, Ariosto’s true vergine saggia. I argue that by explicitly declaring Olimpia a “paragon of fidelity” and then implicitly describing an ingenuous and often cruel princess, Ariosto stealthily injects an element of harsh realism and cynicism into his epic poem.²

It is important to bear in mind that Olimpia’s tale is among a number of additions inserted into the third edition of the Orlando Furioso, published in 1532. In the eleven years between the last two versions of the Orlando Furioso, critics have noted an “intensification” and a “darkening” of narrative tone.³ It is said that Ariosto’s growing disillusionment and mistrust of human affairs in light of the turbulent internal politics of Italy and its frequent invasions from abroad is given expression in the sharpened sense of cruelty and violence of his later work. While nothing new has been introduced into the last Orlando Furioso, an older and more mature poet seems intent on developing to greater extremes those themes and motifs already present in the earlier editions. Indeed, in the Olimpia episode, events featured in the earlier Furioso are repeated and reworked. Previously introduced themes and motifs are reintroduced and developed by a sharper and more critical Ariosto. Previously presented

¹ Editor’s note: all translations have been added from Ludovico Ariosto, Orlando Furioso, trans. Guido Waldman (London: Oxford UP, 1974).
² To interpret the narrative commentary of the Orlando Furioso as indicative of the poet’s views is often dangerously short sighted. For further discussion of Ariosto’s narrative techniques see Zatti, Il Furioso fra epos e romanzo.
³ See Binni (Due studi critici), Blum (“Pillars of Virtue”), Caretti (Introduction to Ariosto, Opere minori), Moretti (L’ultimo Ariosto), and Saccone (“Appunti per una definizione de cinque canti”).

Olifant
stories are modified somewhat and infused with elements of social upheaval and moral corruption, apparently in an effort to redress previously insufficiently treated themes.

In the story of Olimpia’s affair with Bireno, for example, the tale of Bradamante’s betrothal to Ruggiero is recalled. Both women have chosen their own suitors, but both are being set up by their parents to marry others. By telling the tale of prenuptial relationships and political matchmaking not once but twice, Ariosto affords insights into his views on the correct management of the chastity of young women. Comparison of Bradamante and Olimpia reveals the poet’s vision of the vergine saggia (Bradamante) versus, as we shall see, the more foolhardy than faithful maiden (Olimpia).

In the Orlando Furioso, the narrator explicitly recommends that young women take lovers. However, he urges caution in the choice of lover and the degree to which young men are to be trusted. In the somewhat tongue-in-cheek preamble to canto 10, he informs his female readership that in order to effect faithfulness in lovers it is necessary to manipulate their desire and to administer favours sagaciously:

Non vi vieto per questo (ch’avrei torto)  
che vi lasciate amar; che senza amante  
sareste come inculta vite in orto,  
che non ha palo ove s’appoggi o piante.  
Sol la prima lanugine vi esorto  
tutta a fuggir, volubile e inconstante,  
e corre i frutti non acerbi e duri,  
ma che non sien però troppo maturi. (X, 9)

Not that I am telling you to resist being loved—that would be quite wrong of me: without lovers you would be as vines growing wild in a vineyard, with no stakes or shrubs for their support. But I do urge you to avoid the downy-cheeked lad, flighty and inconstant, and to avoid plucking fruits which are bitter and unripe—though neither should they be overblown.
It is in the management of their chastity that Olimpia and Bradamante’s fates begin to diverge. The true nature of the princess’s sentiments is questioned when her youth and inexperience are emphasised:

«La bellezza e l’età ch’in lui fioriva,
e li non più da me sentiti amori
con poca guerra me gli fèr captiva [. . .] » (IX, 23)

“Handsome and young he was, and ready as by then I was to offer my heart’s love, he conquered me with scarcely a struggle [. . .]”

She recognises a reciprocity of affection between herself and Bireno swelling during the days of their brief courtship which she expresses tentatively:

«[. . .] tanto più che, per quel ch’apparea fuori,
io credea e credo, e creder credo il vero,
ch’amassi et ami me con cor sincero.» (IX, 23)

“[. . .] the more easily in that from all appearances he honestly loved me, and still loves me: so I believed and still believe, and I am sure I am right to do so.”

Overemphasis on the verb credere ‘to believe’ and use of the verb apparire ‘to appear’ underline Olimpia’s insecurity about Bireno’s feelings. Her own words suggest an implicit doubt as to the correctness of Olimpia’s perception. No evidence of the duke’s commitment to Olimpia is provided. Nevertheless, Olimpia unwisely entrusts her virginity and her realm to the errant young duke.

Bireno responds to Olimpia’s gift by immediately departing to try out his chances in Frisia, taking the king’s daughter with him as his prisoner. This latter, he claims, will provide a suitable wife for his younger brother. Soon, however, it is disclosed that Bireno’s intention is to aban-
don Olimpia in favour of the princess of Frisia with whom he himself had fallen enamoured:

Di sopra io vi dicea ch’una figliuola
del re di Frisia quivi hanno trovata,
che fia, per quanto n’han mosso parola,
da Bireno al fratel per moglie data.
Ma, a dire il vero, esso v’avea la gola;
che vivanda era troppo delicata:
e riputato avria cortesia sciocca,
per darla altrui, levarsela di bocca. (X, 10)

I was telling you how they came upon a daughter of the
King of Frisia, whom Bireno, from all accounts, intended to
give as wife to his brother. But truth to tell, he fancied her
for himself: she was too dainty a morsel, and he would have
considered himself a fool to pass her up in order to give her
to another.

Before conceding realm, body, and self to Ruggiero, Bradamante, on
the other hand, puts her lover through a series of trials. Even with the as-
surance of Melissa and Merlino, Bradamante protects herself from the
compromising situation in which naive Olimpia places herself. On occa-
sion of their second reunion in canto 22, Ruggiero and Bradamante joy-
fully embrace each other.

At a strategic point in the embrace, Bradamante withdraws herself
from Ruggiero’s hold. Willing to concede only what a wise virgin will,
unlike Olimpia who impetuously gives herself to Bireno, Bradamante cal-
culatingly withholds the ultimi frutti.

Bradamante, disposta di far tutti
i piaceri che far vergine saggia
debbia ad un suo amator, sí che di lutti,
senza il suo onore offendere, il sottraggia ;
dice a Ruggier, se a dar gli ultimi frutti
lei non vuol sempre aver dura e selvaggia,
la faccia domandar per buoni mezzi
al padre Amon: ma prima si battezzi. (XXII, 34)

Bradamant was ready to concede all the pleasures that an honest virgin may give to a lover in order to keep him from sadness without hurting her own honour. Now she suggested to Ruggiero that if he was not to find her forever restless and stubborn about giving him the ultimate fruits, he should ask her father Aymon, in due form, for her hand—after accepting baptism.

Elsewhere the poet expresses his understanding of sexuality as an impulse driving both sexes towards each other and concedes that neither partner should receive blame for indulging in sexual relations. For Ariosto, who appears to share Rinaldo’s views, sexual relationships in themselves are without fault, even laudable:

S’un medesimo ardor, s’un disir pare
inchina e sforza l’uno e l’altro sesso
a quel suave fin d’amore, che pare
all’ignorante vulgo un grave eccesso;
perché si de’ punir donna o biasmare,
che con uno o piú d’uno abbia commesso
quel che l’uom fa con quante n’ha appetito,
e lodato ne va, non che impunito? (IV, 66)

If the same ardour, the same urge drives both sexes to love’s gentle fulfilment, which to the mindless commoner seems so grave an excess, why is the woman to be punished or blamed for doing with one or several men the very thing a man does with as many women as he will, and receives not punishment but praise for it?
However, where the negotiation of a future marriage or the assurance of male fidelity is desired, the woman must be aware of the essential fickleness of youthful passions and must learn to manipulate them to her own advantage. To this end, virginity is used as the most powerful currency for the acquisition of a partner’s fidelity. By allowing Bireno’s appetite for her to be assuaged, Olimpia demonstrates ignorance of this keystone law of human commerce and sets herself up for imminent abandonment. In contrast, Bradamante, the vergine saggia, keeps Ruggiero in a constant state of desire, aspiring towards her ultimi frutti until they are safely married.

Bradamante and Olimpia have both chosen partners, and both refuse those husbands chosen by their parents. In attempting to reconcile their parents’ social aspirations and their own desires, the two maidens once again differ greatly. Both lovers insist on remaining faithful to their chosen men. Bradamante, however, is successful in eventually pleasing parents, public, and king while at the same time achieving her desires. Olimpia, instead, instigates the destruction of her family and people and eventually loses her lover too. In the face of adverse parental will, Bradamante again proves the wiser and more successful.

Olimpia refuses Cimosco’s political marriage proposal by relying on the indulgent affection of her father. She cries. She threatens suicide:

«Io ch’all’amante mio di quella fede
mancar non posso, che gli aveva data,
e ancor ch’io possa, Amor non mi conciede
che poter voglia, e ch’io sia tanto ingrata;
per ruinar la pratica ch’in piede
era gagliarda, e presso al fin guidata,
dico a mio padre, che prima ch’in Frisa
mi dia marito, io voglio essere uccisa.» (IX, 26)

“Unable to forswear the promise I gave to my beloved—and even had I been able to do so, I would not have been willing, for Love would not have let me be so fickle—I told my father, in order to put an end to the affair, which
was well advanced and indeed almost concluded, that if I was to be wedded to the Frisian I would sooner be killed.”

Equally impulsive and sentimental is her father who, apparently without explanation to Cimosco, abruptly breaks off the marriage negotiations in order to comfort his daughter:

«Il mio buon padre, al qual sol piacea quanto a me piacea, né mai turbar mi vòlse, per consolarmi e far cessare il pianto ch’io ne facea, la pratica disciolse [. . .] » (IX, 27)

“My dear father, whose only pleasure was my pleasure and who could not bear to see me unhappy, broke off the negotiations in order to comfort me and dry my tears.”

In Olimpia’s story, no attempt to reconcile the conflicting private and public aspirations of participants is made. Olimpia ignores her duty as noblewoman, playing on her father’s sentimentality to aid her personal desire. Her father, in turn, responds equally impulsively, disregarding his public duty for thoughts of his daughter’s sorrow. Cimosco, understandably indignant at the unexplained breakdown of political negotiations, overlooks Olimpia and the count’s personal motives, taking the gesture as purely political and offensive. The impulsive, reactive, and violent chain of events results in the destruction of both the Dutch and Frisian families and realms.

In contrast is the far more complex diplomatic and political process by which Bradamante avoids parental plans for her marriage to Leone. Initially, Bradamante ostensibly complies with her parents’ wishes, obediently remaining in isolation from Ruggiero at Roccaforte. Although unguarded, Bradamante stays there, apparently submissive and obedient:

Sta Bradamante tacita, né al detto de la madre s’arrisca a contradire; che l’ha in tal riverenzia e in tal rispetto,
che non potria pensar non l’ubbidire. (XLIV, 39)

Bradamant remained silent, not daring to contradict her mother, whom she so worshipped and respected that the thought of disobeying her would never have entered her head.

To many, Bradamante’s submission to Beatrice and Amon undermines the poet’s earlier presentation of a relatively emancipated warrior damsel. For her meek compliance with her mother’s commands, Bradamante becomes the cause of disappointment for many feminist readers. However, Bradamante’s silence in the face of her parents’ proposal is ambivalent. It is both a wish to avoid filial disobedience and a refusal to accept their intentions. By initially feigning compliance with Beatrice, Bradamante avoids openly disobeying her parents. Through her initial silence, she demonstrates strategic sensitivity to the delicate balance between her personal objectives and her filial duty. After contemplating the arguments for and against her union with Ruggiero, she eventually defies her parents in a far less brazen manner than Olimpia. Rather than cry or threaten suicide, tactful Bradamante approaches Charlemagne with her dilemma. After paying due tribute to her mother’s will, Bradamante takes the issue of her marriage to a higher authority. Her suggestion is that the dilemma be resolved with a duel between herself and any contenders for her hand:

«Il don ch’io bramo da l’Altezza vostra, 
è che non lasci mai marito darme,“
disse la damigella “se non mostra 
che piú di me sia valoroso in arme.” (XLIV, 70)

“Here is the boon I crave, Your Majesty,” requested the damsel. “Permit no husband to be bestowed upon me until he has demonstrated greater prowess at arms than I possess.”
At Roccaforte, Bradamante’s duty as a daughter is in conflict with her desire for conscientious self-governance. By having the matter transferred into Charlemagne’s jurisdiction, an overly conflictual conclusion of the dilemma is avoided. Her suggestion to the emperor is that the issue be resolved by a duel. Whosoever should vanquish her in a military arena will fairly win her hand. In this way, the conflict need not be pushed to a conclusion in the political domain. Neither she nor her parents need cede to the other in the controversy between tradition and individuality. Bradamante safely posits the resolution of the dilemma in the more diplomatic arena of military competition.

In contrast to Bradamante, Olimpia now appears to be more foolhardy than faithful. Far from an exemplary figure of female excellence, the Dutch princess in this light appears ingenuous and boorish next to her diplomatically tactful counterpart. What could have been read as a tale of female martyrdom now appears to be an account of senseless cruelty.

Within Olimpia’s narrative, the story of her marriage under duress to Arbante is grafted. To avenge her dead family and dispossessed kingdom, Olimpia conspires to murder her betrothed, Cimosco’s son. In this insert, Isabella and Drusilla of the earlier Orlando Furioso are intentionally recalled. In canto 29 (ottave 3-26), it is told how Isabella offers her bare neck, supposedly protected by a magic herb, to a drunken Rodomonte, her captor. Rather than jeopardise her chastity, Isabella chooses to die at the hand of her sexual aggressor:

Quel fe’ tre balzi; e funne udita chiara
voce, ch’uscendo nominò Zerbino,
per cui seguire ella trovò sí rara
via di fuggir di man del Saracino. (XXIX, 26)

Her head bounced thrice: from it a voice could be clearly heard pronouncing the name of Zerbin, to follow whom she had found so novel a way to escape from the Saracen.
Similarly in canto 37 (ottave 51-75), Drusilla poisons both herself and Tanacro during their marriage ceremony in preference to surrendering to her husband’s murderer:

«Fini il parlare insieme con la vita; e morta anco parea lieta nel volto d’aver la crudeltà così punita di chi il caro marito le avea tolto. Non so se prevenuta, o se seguita fu da lo spirto di Tanacro sciolto: fu prevenuta, credo; ch’effetto ebbe prima il veneno in lui, perché piú bebbe. » (XXXVII, 75)

“Speech and life died in her at once; but, dead, the smile still lingered on her face, happy to have punished the cruelty of the man who has wrested her dear husband from her. I do not know whether she was preceded or followed by the departing spirit of Tanacre—preceded, I suspect, the poison acting more quickly upon him as he had drunk deeper.”

Olimpia’s instincts for self preservation prove stronger than her counterparts’. She will live to enjoy her revenge on Arbante, or more precisely on his father. Not only is she ingenuous and foolhardy, then, Olimpia is also cruel and vindictive. A new and resilient breed of female figure has been introduced into this final <i>Orlando Furioso</i>.

Again, as when marriage to Arbante is initially proposed, Olimpia’s thoughts turn to suicide. First, however, revenge must be achieved.

«Io che sforzar cosí mi veggio, voglio, per uscirgli di man, perder la vita; ma se pria non mi vendico, mi doglio piú che di quanta ingiuria abbia patita.» (IX, 36)
“Seeing myself constrained in this way I looked to death as the only way to elude him; but to go without first avenging myself would have been far more bitter to me than all the hurt I had suffered.”

Like both Drusilla and Isabella, Olimpia will feign complacency until the moment of her vendetta arrives. On their wedding night, Olimpia’s faithful servant remains concealed behind curtains until Arbante approaches the princess. At the right moment, he emerges and splits the prince’s head open with an axe. To finish off the job properly, Olimpia herself leaps at Arbante and slits his throat. It is in this act and Olimpia’s next line that the essential difference between Olimpia and her counterparts is revealed. After recounting her superfluous gesture on a dead man, she reveals no remorse towards her victim. On the contrary, she reveals a chilling disregard for human life, expressing her satisfaction at having claimed revenge not on the dead man himself but on his father. Both Isabella and Drusilla punish an actual adversary. Olimpia triumphantly mutilates an innocent pawn in the cruel match between herself and Cimosco:

«Come cadere il bue suole al macello, 
cade il mal nato giovane, in dispetto 
del re Cimosco, il più d’ogn’altro fello [. . .]» (IX, 42)

“Like an ox felled at the slaughterhouse—so fell this young man of evil birth, thus spiting the king, the most wicked of men. Cimosco was the villain’s name [. . .]”

Ariosto’s paragon of fidelity is capable first of obstinacy which leads to civil war and then of treachery which leads to her cold-bloodedly mutilating the body of her dead husband. To the traditional tale of romantic female martyrdom, an older Ariosto has injected an element of harsh and, at times, sadistic realism. In the later Orlando Furioso, the princess’s lover is not always worthy and faithful; the damsel-in-distress is not al-
ways passive and innocent; and the knight-errant who comes to her rescue, as we shall see, is not always heroically successful.

Elsewhere, I have argued that the self-contained narrative units featuring the plight of a distressed damsel are essentially concerned with the benevolent knight-errant who intervenes on her behalf (“Docile Damsels”). I believe that the damsel-in-distress is frequently a narrative device employed to develop the hero protagonist’s character and to refine the themes treated in the rest of his/her story.

In effect, Orlando’s identity as faithful lover and defender of the traditional concept of chivalry is significantly developed in the Olimpia tale. Therein he defends Olimpia, the paragon of fidelity, and punishes Cimosco, the antichivalric foe. When he dumps Cimosco’s thunderbolt weapon in the ocean, he clearly attacks devastating modern warfare. In addition, not only his character but also his individual quest is developed in the Olimpia episode. His pursuit of Angelica, fraught with anxiety over her fidelity and chastity, is recalled when he defends Olimpia, the symbol of fidelity. In ensuring the princess’s reunion with her lover, he conjures up an illusion of the fulfilment of his own quest.

In this light, Olimpia, like her damsel-in-distress counterparts, functions as a narrative device facilitating the development of the hero protagonist’s character and individual quest. As events unfold, however, Orlando’s role in Olimpia’s tale and the success of his venture are complicated. Explicitly, Orlando’s steadfast devotion to Angelica and his allegiance to the chivalric code are celebrated in the episode. Implicitly, however, as we shall see, those very values themselves are put into question before the end of the story.

In canto 10 we learn that the uniting of Olimpia and Bireno and the vanquishing of Cimosco provide only temporary closure for the Olimpia story. Rather than fading into Orlando’s history, Olimpia soon reappears, abandoned by Bireno on a deserted island. Orlando’s victory as champion of fidelity is weakened by Bireno’s subsequent infidelity.

Orlando’s conquest in the name of chivalry is also temporary. The disposal of the archibugio, Ariosto informs us, is a mere postponement of the dominance of modern warfare and the parallel decline of chivalry. Next we learn that while Orlando’s course to Ebuda is delayed by con-
trary winds and his adventure in Holland, Ruggiero frees Angelica from the sea orc (X, 92-115). Rather than indicating proximity to his own goal, the Olimpia adventure has proved to be a detrimental deflection from Orlando’s individual quest. Furthermore, when Olimpia is betrayed by Bireno soon after the apparent closure of the adventure, Orlando’s ultimate failure, and not the eminent achievement of his individual quest, is presaged.

At first glance, then, the Olimpia episode facilitates the development of Orlando’s identity as invincible champion of fidelity and chivalry. From a closer viewpoint, however, Orlando’s exploits in Olimpia’s story may be considered quixotic. The errant-knight’s chivalric behaviour does not suffice to ensure a lieto fine for Olimpia and Bireno. It would appear that the ideological and political framework that once supported society has evolved, and Orlando’s faithful adherence to the chivalric code is ultimately ineffectual against the emerging order. The Olimpia episode appears to function in the final edition of the Orlando Furioso as an added insight into Orlando’s eventual insanity. It is here that the process of degradation which terminates in Orlando’s madness in canto 23 begins.

Once more it becomes clear that an older Ariosto is intent on injecting a novel element of harsh realism into the traditional tale of romantic knightly heroism. In the later Orlando Furioso, the damsel-in-distress is more foolhardy than faithful. Her lover is more wily than worthy, and the chivalric hero is more enthusiastic than effective. As an older Ariosto tires of the constant foreign invasion of Italy, the romance and romantic heroism of his earlier poem changes tone and colour. As a more cynical poet wearies of the irreconcilable polemics between the nation-state leaders of Italy, he portrays traditional archetypes in a negative and colder light. In the Olimpia episode, as perhaps in sixteenth-century Ferrara, elements of social upheaval and moral corruption seep in. In the Olimpia episode, as perhaps in a turbulent, pre-Reformation Italy, distressed damsel, lovers, heroes, and miscreants become both victim and villain at the same time.

Olifant
NOTE

I would like to thank Prof. John C. McLucas of Towson University for sharing with me his unpublished article, “The Unlikable Lady and the Can(n)on of Chivalry: the Archibugio Episode in *Orlando Furioso*” (delivered at the Kalamazoo conference of 1995) and relevant passages from his dissertation, “Ariosto and the Androgyne: Symmetries of Sex in the *Orlando Furioso*” (Yale 1983). I saw these after the writing of this paper.
Works Cited


The indefatigable Maestro Andrea da Barberino (c. 1372-c. 1431) translated and reworked French *chansons de geste* into a huge narrative cycle of nine texts in Italian prose. His masterpiece, commonly known as *Guerrino meschino*, presents the adventures of an original hero whose personal quest to find his lineage and identity are bracketed by conventional opening and closing books that employ romance and epic tropes. A virtual “best seller” of the Renaissance, the text survives in sixteen manuscripts, fifteen incunabula, and many more Italian editions printed as recently as 1967. It was translated and published more than once in Spain and in France as well. One reason for *Guerrino’s* international circulation and extended longevity may have been Andrea’s interpolation of nonchivalric material such as Prester John, the Trees of the Sun and the Moon, the spice route and pepper harvest, and Mecca and the floating sarcophagus of Mohamet. Unfortunately, the lack of a critical edition has prevented this work from being studied by modern scholars.

The pseudohistorical fabric of this narrative includes the hero’s encounters with numerous strange beasts and exotic races in “India.” Book Two of the eight books features the commencement of the hero’s travels throughout the known world and contains a remarkable series of encounters with savage animals. These include actual zoological species such as the hippopotamus, lion, camel, elephant, and crocodile but also mythical beasts such as the unicorn, gryphon, and manticor. In addition, several animals are not found in the *Physiologus*: the *centrocho (leucrota)*, the yale, and the *lonza*, one of the three beasts in Dante’s *Inferno*, canto 1. One monster, the *centopoc[h]os*, is found in no source known to me and may have been maestro Andrea’s invention.

Throughout his entire narrative cycle, maestro Andrea was clearly attempting to assemble a history of his heroes that drew on genealogy...
and chronicle for its verisimilitude. He avoids allegory and deliberately strips away magical and supernatural elements whenever possible. Thus there are no moralized explanations glossing his exotic beasts as one finds in French bestiaries. In fact, even though Andrea could read French, this genre did not serve as the model for the beast descriptions in Guerrino nor did the so-called “Tuscan bestiary” edited by McKenzie and Garver. Elsewhere, I have examined Andrea’s possible sources and found instead that he relied on the natural history tradition of Latin texts that descended from Pliny the Elder, including those by Solinus and Albertus Magnus (“The Medieval Compiler”). In particular, Pliny’s Natural History, Book 8, chapters 20 and 21 (3:55) describe Ethiopia and India and are saturated with various exotic species that appear in Guerrino. Certain of Andrea’s creatures (gryphon, yale) do not appear in either the French or Tuscan bestiary traditions. His descriptions of the hippo, unicorn, gryphon, leucrota, manticor, and yale essentially follow these classical authors; however, the selection and ordering of Andrea’s beasts do not follow any single written source or textual tradition; instead, they are a synthesis of elements found in other texts amplified with details drawn from other unidentified sources and perhaps his own consultation with merchants and travellers who had returned from the East.

Andrea’s narrative goal was ostensibly both to entertain and to inform. He was trying to be stunningly exotic but always within the realm of believability. Here, as in his other texts, he displays his erudition by compiling the most detailed and verisimilar descriptions of these animals that he possibly could for a sophisticated contemporary lay readership. Guerrino is clearly intended to be read: the text refers to lettore twice within the chapters that describe beasts, but nowhere does it use the plural form of address to indicate a listening public.

---

1 The exceptions that prove the rule are his early work, Ugone d’Alvernia, which contains a voyage through the Inferno; a Storie di Rinaldo in prose that I have attributed to him which contains obligatory references to Malagigi’s magic; and Guerrino, which includes the hero’s pilgrimage to Saint Patrick’s Purgatory where he encounters demons and angels.
Andrea displays a typically Florentine obsession with precise measurements of the beasts his hero encounters. This practice corresponds to near-contemporary Florentine and Tuscan pilgrimage accounts, for example, those by Niccolò da Poggibonsi, Frescobaldi, Gucci, and Sigoli. One older, simpler model Andrea knew was the French *chanson de geste Aiol*: when the hero looks at a serpent he has just killed, the text includes the measurement of its length (l. 6373). Yet the fight with the serpent in *Aiol* consists mostly of prayer to God for help and then thanking God for surviving the ordeal. The passage is written in a pious key, not scientific or naturalistic. By contrast, after Guerrino has killed a beast, he examines it in detail, giving the reader an account in first person narration. His travelling party encounters the hippo “over 100 *braccia* from the river” (MS Ricc. 2226, f. 42r). Its mouth was “three palms” long, slit back to the ears and its claws extended around its feet more than a *braccio* (f. 42v); the unicorn’s horn was “about four *braccia* long” (f. 43r); the the gryphon’s two talons could spread a *braccio*, and its wing span was ten *braccia* (f. 45v); the boar-like tusks of the *centopoc[h]os* extend out its mouth four palms and its neck is eight *braccia* long (f. 49r, 53v); and the yale’s straight horns are three *gomiti* (cubits) long (f. 54r).

The scenes in which the hero encounters these beasts follow a parallel structure, although there is much variety within the pattern (see Table One): first, the country and habitat are described (either by the narrator, by Guerrino’s guides, or even in first-person narration by Guerrino himself); next, the beast appears, and its behavior is described in naturalistic terms; the hero, usually unassisted, fights and kills the beast; finally, the hero inspects the corpse and gives a detailed description of the animal. These descriptions are fascinating since, being couched in naturalistic terms, they give us a detailed glimpse of what the late medieval Florentine mind considered within the realm of possibility. There is no allegory, moralization, symbolism, or stylization. These exotic animals are a far cry from the Yelping Beast of the earlier *Tristan* tradition or the winged *hippogryph* of Ariosto’s later Renaissance epic.

---

2 All translations from the Italian are my own.
The fact that, even though a beast does not necessarily attack first, the warrior feels compelled to kill it raises ethical and moral questions which offend our modern-day “animal rights” sensibilities. Of course, medieval thinking founded upon Scholasticism did not correspond to our own. Obviously, if animals were believed to have no souls, they could be dispatched with little thought to their salvation. In disputing whether one may kill living things, St. Thomas followed Aristotle and Ambrose when he stated in his *Summa Theologica*: “Dumb animals and plants are devoid of the life of reason whereby to set themselves in motion; they are moved, as it were by another, by a kind of natural impulse, a sign of which is that they are naturally enslaved and accommodated to the uses of others” (Linzy, *Animal Theology*, p. 13). Since animals were “irrational,” possessing no intellect, and, by extension, no soul, they simply existed to serve humans or to be our property, and we humans owed no charity toward them. Thus, animals could be dispatched without regard to their salvation.

Andrea’s portraits of exotic species participate fully in the discourse on the “irrational” nature of beasts. In his quasi-philosophical proem to *Guerrino*, a feature common to all complete manuscripts, Andrea discusses human nature by contrasting it to the bestial. We all descend from “father” Adam, and we all have free will accompanying our higher intellects:

E però siamo chiamati “animali razionali”; e uscendo [MS Ricc. 2266: fuori] della ragione, siamo simili agli animali inrazionali, cioè bestiali; e però si conviene a noi [MS Ricc. 2226: a molti] la punizione del fallo. Per questo niente altro animale è subietto a leggi di punizione che noi, perché non anno la ragione, e per questo sono chiamati “animali inrazionali” [MS Bodl. canon. it. 27: inraguonevoli], cioè sanza ragione [. . .].

Joyce E. Salisbury dedicates an entire chapter to the property function of animals (*The Beast Within*, pp. 13-41).
And for this reason we are called “rational beings”; and straying from reason, we are similar to the irrational beings, that is, bestial; and therefore we deserve to have our failings punished. Because of this no other animal is subject to the law of punishment except us, because they [other species] do not have reason, and therefore they are called “irrational beings,” that is, without reason.

Written at the dawn of the Age of Discovery, Guerrino meschino also points the way to the type of ruthless exploitation and even annihilation of other species/races which would occur at the hands of European conquerors of the New World. The revolutionary positioning of Man at the center of the universe by the later fifteenth-century humanists also opened the door to excesses willfully perpetrated against Nature. In this respect, Guerrino’s attitudes toward our four-legged friends can only be deemed a fair representative of its age.

In Guerrino’s attitude toward killing there appears to be a clear line of demarcation between wild beasts (as dangerous, bad, and therefore deserving death) and domesticated or tameable animals (useful to mankind, good, and therefore deserving to live). The usefulness of domestic animals had long since been expressed in their names in Isidore’s Etymologies, Book 12, a separate tradition which drew on the contents of the Physiologus with additional conflation of material in later centuries. Traces of Isidore’s glosses of the names of animals recur throughout the later bestiary tradition (Salisbury, The Beast Within, p. 7; Baxter, Bestiaries and Their Users, pp. 85 and 128).

The exception which perhaps proves the rule in Guerrino is the unicorn. This is the only animal which gives no indication of attacking nor does the hero provoke it into battle. Perhaps this is simply another example of Andrea’s realism: in its later medieval incarnation, the unicorn was reputed to be the fiercest, swiftest animal and could not be captured without the requisite virgin. To attempt to fight a unicorn would be suicidal, and, lacking a maiden, there was no way to successfully entrap it.
The function of combats between a knight and a wild animal in the chivalric text has its narrative precedent in classical mythology. Since antiquity, capturing, taming, or killing a powerful beast was a way to demonstrate a hero’s worth: we need only consider Alexander taming Bucephalus, Perseus killing the sea monster, or several of Hercules’s labors. On the narrative level, the man-beast combats provide an occasion for the display of knightly prowess since they take place before an audience of some type (guides, frightened citizens, shepherds, and, of course, the reader). Some man-beast combats may have symbolic roots: any fight with a serpent replicates the one which took place between St. George and the dragon, which in turn re-enacts the biblical struggle between St. Michael and Satan. Although rare in Andrea’s literary predecessors, fights with serpents do appear, for example, in *Aiol* (laisses 154-63) and in Chrétien’s *Yvain* (laisse 326), although the combat in *Aiol* consists mainly of praying to God, first for aid and then in gratitude. Since Andrea did a reworking of *Aiol*, he may have had Aiol’s struggle with the serpent in mind as a rudimentary model for the beast combats in his own text, yet whereas Aiol’s fight with the serpent is cast in a pious key, in *Guerrino* the secular hero’s deeds, rather than God’s mercy, are valorized.

Within the narrative economy of *Guerrino*, something more is going on. I have long felt that *Guerrino* should be read as an early *bildungsroman*. Its eight books are framed not only upon inherited epic conventions, a genealogical subtext, and the map of the known world but are designed to reveal and celebrate the growth of the hero which takes place over the course of his many adventures. If we situate Guerrino’s numerous beast combats within this perspective, we see the confident young hero progress from inviting bloody battles with animal opponents and celebrating his own skill and cunning in vanquishing them to fearing death and trembling before his own mortality to coming at last to grips with an unmerited attack which does not follow the neat discourses of chivalry or philosophy but exists, in fact, on that very level of brutality or irrationality ascribed for so long to Nature and to the animal kingdom itself.

*Olifant*
A few chapters after the tightly written sequence of monstrous combats discussed above, Guerrino encounters a “dragon” (crocodile) along the Nile that almost kills him. Although this scene follows to the letter the typology for beast combats that I have outlined above, one senses a difference: here the emphasis is not on wonderment or measurement of the vanquished creature but on the social role of the hero in saving a village from the deadly onslaughts of a man-killer. The man-beast struggle here is very vivid, very difficult, and the hero narrowly escapes with his life. It is the only case in which Guerrino literally swoons from exhaustion after killing the beast and must be revived and nursed back to health by the villagers, a recovery that takes eight days. His brush with death leads to a crisis of confidence that is quite modern, described in the chapter that immediately follows. After this nearly fatal battle, Guerrino tells in first person how he remained “molto pensoso [. . .] dolendomi della mia fortuna” ‘very thoughtful, sorrowing within myself over my fate’ (MS Ricc. 2226, f. 80r). He contemplates giving up his quest, a thought perhaps unprecedented for any epic or romance hero. The local priest confesses him and counsels him not to abandon his “noble” undertaking. Perhaps not coincidentally, there are no more fights with exotic beasts after this. The ethos of fighting animals changes within the narrative economy from this point on.

This change is underscored in a later episode at the beginning of Book Three. The hero and his traveling party are attacked by a “large quantity of dogs [over one hundred] [. . .] as big as lions” (MS Ricc. 2226, ff. 92v-93r). It is a vicious and gory scene in which one horse is attacked and killed without warning, its rider narrowly escapes, the men struggle to lead their horses and pack animals into the Nile to ensure their survival and then proceed on foot to battle the dogs on the shore. Here, in a remarkably premodern, antiheroic, and “irrational” moment, the rules are violated as supposedly “good” and “useful” domestic animals turn savage. Ironically, a nearby group of herdsmen and shepherds do nothing to call off their dogs. The irony is not wasted on the hero who muses on the ignoble situation even as he is engaged in battling the huge dogs:
“Tra•nme medesimo m’adirai perché aveo cerch[at]o tutta quanta l’India e chonbattuto chon diverse fiere, e ora mi vedevø me e’ mia chonpagni mang[i]are a chani” (MS Ricc. 2226, f. 92v).

“Within myself, I grew angry because I had searched the whole of India and fought with various beasts, and now I saw myself and my companions about to be eaten by dogs.”

To conclude, Andrea da Barberino employs a very interesting conflation of distinct genres and discourses in his animal combats: 1) topography and geography; 2) natural history; 3) philosophy; and 4) the narrative norms of epic to display knightly prowess. Andrea insists on naturalistic, plausible descriptions of beasts in their environments and then inserts the warrior into the scene. He overlays “scientific” matter onto the epic’s need to depict the hero’s skill. The additional moral and psychological development of the hero as a result of the series of beast encounters contributes to the creation of a fascinating and remarkable literary achievement.
Table One

Typology of Combats with Animals in *Guerrino Meschino*

Abbreviations: H = hippo; L = lion; U = unicorn; G = gryphon; C = *centrocho*; M = manticor; CP = *centopochos*; E = yale; CR = crocodile

Does not fight domestic (useful, good) animals: camels, elephants, horses.

I. Description of habitat
   C. Refers to element (land, water, air, fire - N/A): H, CR
      G called “uccello” i.e., air creature

II. Animal’s behavior at beginning of the encounter
   A. Aggressive, attacks first: H, G, M, CP, CR
   B. Passive, does not attack: U, (Birds f. 53v)
   C. First passive, then aggressive: C, Y
   D. Attacks, because it knows hero wants battle: L

III. Animal’s reactions during the encounter

IV. Physical description of the animal
   A. Size (measurements): H, U, G, CP, Y, CR
   C. Color: H, U, G, M, Y
   D. Eating habits:
      carnivore: H, G, CP, CR
      herbivore: C
   F. Sound it makes: H, G, C, M
   G. Not described: L
V. Hero’s behavior in the encounter
   A. Dismounts
      1. Because horse refuses to go closer: H
      2. Seems cowardly to flee: C, CR
      3. To protect horse: G, M
      4. No exact reason given: L
   D. Sense of wonder at animal’s attributes: H, C, M, CP, Y, CR
   E. Does not fight it: U
A Typology of Beast Combats…

Works Cited


Les campagnes d’Alexandre: de l’histoire à l’épopée

Pierre Kunstmann
Université d’Ottawa

Les historiens de l’Antiquité qui se sont penchés sur la personnalité d’Alexandre et ses conquêtes manifestent tous un parti-pris très net pour les Grecs (entendons par là essentiellement les Macédoniens) contre le métissage avec les Perses. Le roi de Macédoine est présenté comme un nouvel Achille, dont il descendait légendairement par sa mère Olympias. Ils racontent les révoltes successives des soldats d’Alexandre, qui, parvenus sur les rives de l’Hypharsis, se refusent à pousser jusqu’au Gange. C’est contre son gré que leur chef est forcé de retourner vers l’Ouest. Le comble fut le mariage avec Roxane, fille d’un satrape de Bactriane. Par un bel effet rhétorique, Quinte-Curce [VIII, 4] en souligne la disparate et le scandale: «Hoc modo rex Asiae et Europae introductam inter convivales ludos matrimonio sibi adiunxit et captiva geniturus, qui victoribus imperaret.»

Le premier roman d’Alexandre (Pseudo-Callisthène, fin IIIe s.?) exalte, au contraire, le brassage, le métissage physique et culturel. Alexandre est moins le fils de Jupiter Ammon (dont le sanctuaire se trouve en Lybie, dans l’oasis de Siwa) que celui de Nectanébus, le dernier pharaon d’Égypte, qui aurait fui en Macédoine pour demander

1 Diodore de Sicile et Quinte-Curce au Ier s., Plutarque, Arrien et Justin aux IIe et IIIe s.
2 «De la sorte, le roi de l’Asie et de l’Europe s’unit en mariage à une femme, qui lui fut présentée au nombre des attractions d’un festin; une captive allait lui donner l’enfant qui commanderait aux vainqueurs.» [La traduction est celle de Bardon.]
3 Je reprends le titre de Pseudo-Callisthène (qui désigne en fait son auteur supposé, mais c’est une métonymie consacrée par la tradition) pour le distinguer du roman français du XIIe s.
l’aide de Philippe et qui aurait séduit la reine Olympias par ses enchantements. Son auteur était probablement d’Alexandrie d’Égypte—première des villes fondées par notre héros, où il sera enterré; creuset du métissage gréco-égyptien, que le conquérant étendra ensuite à la Perse. Ce roman est connu au Moyen Age par

- les *Res gestae ab Alexandro Macedonis* de Julius Valerius (IVᵉ s.) et l’Épitomé («Abrégé») de son oeuvre⁴;
- la traduction du grec effectuée par Léon le Diacre au Xᵉ s.;
- l’*Historia de Proelis*, qui, au XIᵉ s., remanie le tout en utilisant Valerius, Léon et des historiens.⁵

Le *Roman d’Alexandre* français du XIIᵉ s. (dorénavant *R.A.*)⁶ s’inspire de ces traductions et adaptations latines du *Pseudo-Callisthène*. Il refuse l’adultère et la bâtardise; ceci dès le début du siècle, chez Albéric de Pisançon:

_Dicunt alquant estrobatour_  
Que l reys fud filz d’encantatour._

⁴ C’est la source du *Roman de Toute Chevalerie* de Thomas de Kent, au dernier quart du XIIᵉ s.  
⁵ Source du *Roman d’Alexandre en prose*, du XIIIᵉ s.  
⁶ Rappelons que nous avons conservé de ce roman trois rédactions successives: les deux premières fragmentaires (rédactions octosyllabique et décasyllabique); la troisième (rédaction en alexandrins) est l’oeuvre d’au moins trois auteurs successifs (c’est du dernier, Alexandre de Paris, dont le remaniement date d’environ 1180, que provient le texte édité jadis par l’équipe de Princeton, texte complet puisqu’il va de la naissance à la mort du héros). Mes références correspondent à l’édition Armstrong du *Medieval French Roman d’Alexandre (MFRA)*. Parallèlement au roman en langue vulgaire, mentionnons aussi que Gautier de Châtillon composa vers 1180 son *Alexandreis*, belle épopée de 5500 hexamètres dactyliques, qui obtint un succès considérable parmi les lettrés et devint au XIIIᵉ s. un classique de la littérature latine; l’auteur s’inspire essentiellement de Quinte-Curce.

*Olifant*
Les campagnes d’Alexandre…

Mentent, fellon losengetour.
Mal en credreyz nec un de lour,
Qu’anzt fud de ling d’enperatour
Et filz al rey macedonor. (27-32)

On trouve en écho, vers la fin du siècle, chez Alexandre de Paris (avec une belle «dislocation à gauche» sur 2 vers):

Li rois qui Mascedoine tenoit et Alenie
Et Gresce en son demaine et toute Esclavonie,
Cil fu pere a l’enfant dont vos orrés la vie […] (I, 145-48)

Dans le Pseudo-Callisthène, le héros se dirige vers l’Occident (Sicile, Rome, Carthage) pour se tourner ensuite vers l’Orient; au centre, entre Occident et Orient, se trouve l’Égypte: le temple d’Ammon et la fondation d’Alexandrie. Dans le R.A., Alexandre se dirige résolument vers l’Est; il n’est plus question de l’Égypte (ni de l’oracle d’Ammon, ni de la fondation d’Alexandrie7, quoique ce soit dans cette ville que sa dépouille sera amenée et mise dans un magnifique tombeau à la fin du roman).

Pour cerner mon propos, la comparaison des campagnes d’Alexandre chez les historiens latins et dans le roman français médiéval, je me limiterai aux récits de batailles et de sièges.

Notre héros doit affronter trois grands adversaires sur les champs de bataille: Nicolas de Césaire (d’Acaranie dans le Pseudo-Callisthène, donc près de l’Étolie d’Olympias), Darius (Darius III Codoman, roi de Perse), Porus (Paurava, roi d’Inde). Le lecteur attentif remarque facilement un parallélisme entre Nicolas et Darius, un autre aussi entre

7 Dans le R.A., la première cité fondée par Alexandre est Bucéphala, en Inde; la fondation d’Alexandrie d’Égypte est cependant mentionnée (IV, 1577) mais en 5e position dans la liste des 12 cités que le héros a fait construire.

22.1-4
Nicolas et Porus. Il convient de noter la relation de parenté entre Nicolas et Darius et d’alliance entre Darius et Porus.

Précisons que Nicolas n’existe pas chez les historiens. Dans le Pseudo-Callisthène et chez Julius Valerius (ainsi que dans l’Épitomé), Alexandre demande à Philippe la permission d’aller à Pise (sic), aux Jeux Olympiques, concourir dans l’épreuve de char; et c’est dans une course qu’Alexandre bat Nicolas, qui tombe de son char et meurt renversé. À partir de l’Historia de Proeliis, il ne s’agit plus de Formule 1, mais de bataille rangée. Dans le R.A., le royaume de Nicolas n’est plus situé en Grèce; Nicolas menace d’arriver en Grèce avec Arméniens et Turcs. Tout comme plus tard Darius, il réclame de Philippe un tribut, le considérant comme son vassal.

Parallélisme donc Nicolas / Darius: Nicolas annonce Darius. L’épisode de Nicolas se situe, en quelque sorte, dans les Enfances Alexandre, suivant la tradition épique. Le jeune Alexandre est encore sous l’autorité de son père Philippe et sous l’influence de son maître Aristote. Le défi de Nicolas arrive juste après la scène de l’adoubement d’Alexandre; Philippe reste muet, tête baissée, comme le roi Marc devant le Morholt, comme il fera lui-même plus tard devant le messager de Darius. C’est Alexandre qui relève le défi pour son père, comme Tristan pour son oncle. Suivent les conseils d’Aristote qui l’invite à la largesse:

Qui tout veut trestout pert, des auquans le dist on.
Se volés larges estre, plus en serés preudom
Et conquerrés la terre jusqu’en Occeanon [. . .] (I, 679-81)

Alexandre comble de bien les chevaliers pauvres, le cas le plus illustre (quoiqu’exceptionnel) étant celui du neveu de Darius, le jeune Samson, réfugié en Grèce après le meurtre de son père et la perte de sa terre. Ces largesses sont possibles grâce à l’argent qu’Alexandre a saisi aux usuriers, ces sers de put afaire (I, 649)—effet de contraste avec Darius, qui dépendait entièrement de ses serfs. Le fils de Philippe se

8 On retrouve les mêmes thèmes dans les recommandations d’Aristote au début de l’Alexandreis (I, 85-104).

Olifant
Les campagnes d’Alexandre…

choisit ensuite (ou plutôt demande à Aristote de choisir pour lui) douze pairs qui soient ses compagnons—les amici des historiens latins, choisis parmi les hétairoi «compagnons», c’est-à-dire les nobles Macédoniens constituant la grosse cavalerie.

Parallélisme aussi entre Nicolas et Porus, dont les royaumes semblent situés aux marges occidentales et orientales des terres qu’Alexandre va conquérir sur Darius. Les affrontements se font, à chaque fois, en deux temps. Comme il est de coutume dans l’épopée, on assiste d’abord à la lutte de deux armées, ce qui permet d’ailleurs aux nobles barons de s’illustrer; mais l’issue du combat restant incertaine, les chefs de chaque camp (défi de Nicolas, défi d’Alexandre) décident de s’affronter en combat singulier. En fait le cas de la campagne contre Porus est plus complexe, car on assiste à un dédoublement du combat entre les deux armées: la première bataille se termine par la fuite de Porus; la deuxième par sa soumission: il devient le vassal d’Alexandre. Mais quand Porus apprend que les arbres du soleil et de la lune ont annoncé au Macédonien sa mort prochaine à Babylone, il désire se venger de son ancien adversaire (thème classique du baron révolté); Alexandre lui propose alors rupture du lien vassalique et combat singulier. Dans le corps à corps, l’Indien arrive à trancher les deux jarrets de Bucéphale; Alexandre abat Porus, mais l’épargne et lui accorde une trêve jusqu’à sa guérison. Porus guéri, le combat reprend (deuxième dédoublement): le roi de Macédoine, pensant à la perte de Bucéphale,

A mont desor son elme li a grant caup feru.
Ne li vaut ses haubers la monte d’un festu
Q’il n’en trenche la teste et le vis et le bu
Et la sele d’yvoire et le cheval qernu,
Quatre moitiés en fist devant soi en l’erbu. (III, 4252-56)

Mais passons aux batailles contre Darius. Ici plus de parallélisme: le roi de Perse occupe une place centrale et singulière dans le roman. Dans le Pseudo-Callisthène, Alexandre a trois pères:

- l’un qu’il tue par ignorance; c’est Nectanébus, que les auteurs du R.A. rejettent avec dégoût; Alexandre de Paris
le considère toutefois comme un grand astrologue (I, 186-94) et le roi de Macédoine en aperçoit la statue avant
d’arriver à la cité de Tarse (I, 2589-96).

- les deux autres, auxquels il s’affronte pour les remplacer: Philippe, son vrai père dans le R.A.; Darius, son beau-père
  virtuel dans le roman (mourant, il offre à son ennemi la
  main de sa fille), beau-père réel dans l’histoire puisque
  notre héro épousera Stateira à Suse un an avant sa mort à
  Babylone.

Des trois grandes batailles que le Macédonien livra au Perse dans
l’histoire (le Granique en 334, Issos en 333 et Gaugamèles deux ans
après), le R.A. n’en a gardé que deux, presque une seule, car la seconde
est à peine une bataille. Du Granique, il ne reste qu’un nom, bloc
erratique (à la fin du roman, dans l’évocation de la construction des 12
Alexandries):

Et as puis Gramaton une autre en estoras,
C’est uns rois que par force meîs de haut en bas [. . .]
(IV, 1592-93)

Comme le remarquent dans une note les éditeurs de Princeton (MFRA
VII, 124): «The river Granicus has been metamorphosed into a king by
the French poet.»

La seule vraie bataille dans le R.A. est livrée après le siège de Tyr et
combine des éléments correspondant à la bataille d’Issos des historiens et
d’autres empruntés à la bataille de Gaugamèles: c’est celle des Prés de
Paile (Pratum Palliorum). De Gaugamèles relèvent les chars perses
garnis de faux, semant la mort sur leur passage; dans le R.A.,
curieusement ce sont des éléphants qui tirent les chars! D’Issos est retenu
l’épisode de la capture de la mère, de la femme et de la fille du Grand
Roi, lesquelles sont traitées avec un profond respect par Alexandre–
traitement qui vaut au roi la déclaration suivante dans une lettre que
Darius lui adresse:

«Et durement m’en poise qant de moi es eschis.» (II, 3036)
La seconde bataille, qui pourrait se situer près de Gaugamèles, n’en est pas vraiment une puisque Darius se voit abandonné de tous ses alliés (le roi Porus, mais aussi les nobles perses, qui reprochent à leur chef d’avoir suivi ses serfs et déshérité ses vassaux) et en est réduit à la fuite. Il est ensuite tué par deux de ses “serfs” (en fait des satrapes), dont le fameux Bessos que poursuivra Alexandre jusqu’en Bactriane au-delà de l’Oxus et qu’il fera supplicier à Ecbatane.

Mais plus qu’aux batailles rangées, le R.A. s’attache aux sièges de villes et aux combats qui en sont l’occasion. Il s’agit surtout du siège de Tyr avant la grande bataille contre le roi de Perse et du siège de Babylone après les merveilles de l’Inde et le voyage aérien d’Alexandre. Il est à noter, d’ailleurs, que le retour d’Inde s’effectue avec une facilité étonnante; il n’est pas question des difficultés rencontrées par l’armée dans la basse vallée de l’Indus ni des souffrances des soldats traversant les déserts de Gédrosie.

Le siège de Tyr est historique (les auteurs du roman suivent souvent Quinte-Curce); celui de Babylone est tout à fait fictif. Reste que les deux offrent un remarquable parallèle, et nos auteurs donnent libre cours à leur talent d’amplificateurs : pour l’épisode de Tyr, 2634 vers (ou 3059 si l’on inclut la prise de Gaza et celle d’Escalon–pour P. Meyer (II, 154) «près de 4000 vers»); pour celui de Babylone, 2005 vers. Soit un total de 4639 à 5064 vers pour un roman qui en comprend 15924. Presque un tiers de l’oeuvre! P. Meyer, au sujet des combats autour de Tyr, parle de «l’interminable série de combats singuliers dont se composent les batailles de nos chansons de geste» (II, 156); et la traductrice des Lettres Gothiques, L. Harf-Lancner, de sabrer 3020 vers pour l’épisode de Tyr et de supprimer 768 vers pour celui de Babylone, ce afin de pouvoir publier le R.A. en un seul volume–autres temps, autres goûts!...

L’élément le plus frappant du parallèle entre les deux sièges est l’épisode de fuerre, de razzia, où des fourriers accompagnés de chevaliers sont chargés de s’emparer d’un abondant bétail. C’est le fuerre de Gadres (c’est-à-dire de Gaza) dans le premier cas: la razzia s’effectue dans le Val de Josaphat; dans le second cas, le pillage se fait dans le Val
Daniel (du nom du prophète biblique). Quinte-Curce mentionne qu’au siège de Tyr le Macédonien avait voulu faire construire un môle pour rattacher la ville au continent; à cet effet, il envoie des hommes sur les hauteurs du Liban pour abattre des arbres. Les soldats-bûcherons sont attaqués par des paysans arabes, et Alexandre vole à leur secours. À son retour, il s’aperçoit que les Tyriens avaient, pendant son absence, incendié et détruit le môle en construction. Les éditeurs de Princeton ont clairement montré les sources de l’épisode:

- un incident raconté par Albert d’Aix dans son *Historia Hierosolymitana* quand en 1112 Baudoin 1er assiégeait Tyr;
- une razzia au Val de Josaphat dans la *Chanson de Jérusalem*;
- le motif du conflit entre sagesse et prouesse (aucun de ces preux chevaliers n’acceptant de quitter le combat pour aller prévenir leur roi—variations sur le thème *Roland est preux et Olivier est sage*).

L’expédition du Val Daniel reprend le schéma de celle du Val de Josaphat. Citons les éditeurs (*MFRA* IV, 21): «Non seulement les deux fuerres sont construits de la même manière mais le fuerre babylonien pousse l’imitation jusqu’à reproduire les expressions et les mots de son modèle.»

Mais pourquoi les auteurs du roman ont-ils privilégié ces deux villes? Risquons une explication. Tyr, d’une part, est la métropole de Carthage, la grande rivale de la Grèce et de Rome en Méditerranée occidentale (Sicile et Espagne). Carthage, dans le *R.A.*, est associée à Nectanébus; quand Alexandre en aperçoit la statue et demande qui elle représente, on lui répond :

> «Por dant Nectanabus, qui ci vint de Cartage; Onques n’ot en cest siecle un seul home si sage.»

(I, 2593-94)

Tyr évoque pour les auditeurs l’Orient des croisades, mais aussi le monde biblique, le peuple de la côte, hostile à Israël, Baal contre Iahvé. Le lien

*Olifant*
avec la Palestine est évident dans le choix du Val de Josaphat pour la razzia, val qui se trouve à 150 kilomètres de Tyr à vol d’oiseau! Mais cela permettait le rapprochement avec Jérusalem. C’est dans cette ville, en effet, que se rend Alexandre après la prise de Tyr et de Gaza; en nouveau Cyrus (celui de la Cyropédie, qualifié de Messie dans la prophétie d’Isaïe), le conquérant de la Perse, ému à la vue du peuple hébreu qui s’incline devant lui, promet à Israël paix et sécurité.

Quant à Babylone, ville des jardins suspendus et de la tour gratticiel, elle semble, dans le R.A., exercer sur notre héros un attrait irrésistible:

«Je ne m’en irai mie, ne je ne mi dansel,
Devant que j’aine prise la fort tor de Babel
Que firent li gaiant de chaus et de quarrel.» (III, 6237-39)

Vers auxquels fait écho, dans la branche IV, le passage suivant:

Qant li rois ot conquis la terre barbarine [. . .] (IV, 624)
Et Babilone prise et la tor gigantine [. . .] (IV, 626)

Je ne suivrai pas L. Harf-Lancener qui rapproche notre héros de Nemrod, roi de Babel, qui, dans une nacelle tirée par des oiseaux, comme celle d’Alexandre, se serait élevé dans les airs pour atteindre Dieu. Le fils de Zeus ne pouvait être tenté de faire comme les géants! À vrai dire, le R.A., dans son orthodoxie chrétienne, ne mentionne pas l’origine divine d’Alexandre (ou sa prétention à une origine divine). Mais, contrairement aux géants, à Nemrod, le roi de Macédoine ne s’est pas dénaturé, sa mesure était l’empire du monde, il ne s’en est jamais pris à Dieu. Babel évoque plutôt la désunion, la confusion; Alexandre semble vouloir

9 Dans l’Alexandreis, Gautier de Châtillon fait dire à notre héros, s’adressant une dernière fois à ses compagnons avant de mourir, qu’il s’en va dans l’Olympe soutenir le vieux Jupiter, car les géants, dans leur présomption, pourraient remonter à l’assaut du ciel (X, 403-17).
prendre la tour pour la garder, la surveiller; à sa mort, il la remet d’ailleurs à Tholomé (c’est-à-dire Ptolémée):

Apela Tholomé que il pot tant amer,
De la tor de Babel l’a fait asseürer,
As citioins l’a fait et plevir et jurer. (IV, 1405-07)

Mais Babylone s’avère être Bagdad! Elle est aux mains des sarrasins, qui adorent Mahomet et Apollin. L’émir a nom Nabugor et son sénéchal Nabuzardan (on reconnait le couple Nabuchodonosor/Nabuzardan du IVe Livre des Rois [MFRA VII, 71]). En filigrane encore, la silhouette du Grand Cyrus qui délivre les Juifs de l’exil et d’autre part la guerre de croisade.


avait accordé le gouvernement de Tyr et de Sidon, se sentent menacés (comme naguère les deux serfs de Darius) et font empoisonner le roi.

En conclusion, le R.A., comme les historiens classiques, situe bien les exploits d’Alexandre en Orient; il passe sous silence l’épisode de l’oracle de Jupiter Ammon et celui de la fondation d’Alexandrie, se démarquant ainsi des historiens de l’Antiquité et du Pseudo-Callisthène. Son but est ailleurs: c’est d’exalter la chevalerie d’Alexandre. Le roman se termine sur deux regrets:

- celui du héros, de n’avoir pu conquérir l’Europe de l’Ouest: il aurait fait de la France la tête du monde;
- celui de l’auteur, qu’Alexandre n’ait pas été chrétien:

Se il fust crestïens, ainc tels rois ne fu nes [. . .] (IV, 1556)

Alexandre apparaît donc comme la figure annonciatrice du chevalier français du XIIᵉ siècle finissant, en route pour la troisième croisade.
Works Cited


If There Wasn’t “a” *Song of Roland*, Was There a “Trial” of Ganelon?

Mary Jane Schenck  
University of Tampa

Everything has changed; nothing has changed. How strange it has seemed to work since September 11 on the finishing touches of a paper on the *Roland*, that quintessential celebration of bloody, holy war.\(^1\) Part of me has not wanted to finish the paper, because it seemed an idle academic exercise at this moment; part of me wanted to find out that US Air would cancel the flight to Baltimore, because I didn’t want to fly anyway, but the part of me that won out was the part that also loves teaching, just coincidentally, in two different courses, the book of *Job* and *Farewell to Arms* the very week of the attack. I loved turning to Job’s lament in the face of seemingly senseless and excessive suffering and listening to God’s response in the form of questions that don’t provide answers but do provide evidence of spiritual presence. I truly felt the emotional flatness of Hemingway’s reflection on the absurdity not just of war but of life. The students and I could reflect about what heroism means in the modern world and how not only to face death but to go on with our heightened knowledge of the precarious nature of life. So *Roland* too will become a very teachable moment next week when I return to my World Literature class, introducing the Middle Ages with selections from the New Testament and the Koran. I hope that the *Roland* will provide young people with scenes to imagine and words to ponder that have been found to express great personal loss, national tragedy, religious self-righteousness, and the costs of revenge.

But to get to the point of this academic exercise: I have taken my title from the article in last January’s *Speculum*, “Was There a Song of Roland” by Andrew Taylor, because his examination of the codicological setting of the Oxford *Roland* as a poem reinforced questions I have been

\(^1\) This paper was presented October 5, 2001.
asking about the emphasis placed on the word “trial” in “The Trial of Ganelon,” our common label for designating the final phase of Ganelon’s pathetic story. Much of Taylor’s argument is not germane to what I have to say about what I prefer to call the “punishment” rather than the trial of Ganelon. Nevertheless, he opens up a fertile avenue of interpretation by suggesting that the *Roland* and its co-text in Digby 23, Chalcidius’s translation of Plato’s *Timeaus*, which have typically been disassociated, should be reconsidered as connected materially and culturally. Taylor focuses on the provenance and performance history of the *Roland* in order to fit it squarely into a literate, clerical milieu. I think he is entirely too dismissive of the concept of *mouvance* and the oral traditions present in the poem, and I wish he had addressed the possibility of thematic “cross-talk” between it and Chalcidius, i.e., reading the two texts as Havelock does with Homer and Plato.

Yet many of us would accept that both nineteenth-century French political history and romantic evocations of the *séance épique* have played a crucial role in identifying the poem as a “song.” To accept that “it was to be the editors, not the poets, who would fulfill Marchangy’s call for a literature of chivalric revival, not by writing poems but by shaping them” (Taylor, “Was There ‘a’ Song of Roland,” p. 34) or to say that the poem may come from a literate milieu does not preclude it being poetically a palimpsest of values and multivoiced. Taylor takes his stand in the oldest scholarly divide between those who emphasize the unity of the poetic vision and those who see its fault lines as part of a nuanced, even fractured worldview. As Sarah Kay pointed out in *The Chanson de Geste in the Age of Romance*, the Old French epic is still considered almost without question to be univocal, and even poststructuralist critics see the values of this text as stable. She notes Bloch’s comment in *Etymologies and Genealogies* that “The early chanson de geste in particular implies a great communality of experience and social interest subtended by the pervading presence of an essentially uncontested linguistic field” (qtd. in Kay, *Chansons de Geste*, p. 3). This is quite similar to his assessment of justice in the *Roland*, expressed back in the seventies in *Medieval French Literature and the Law*.

*Olifant*
The challenge to this position, whether expressed in the case “tenebrism” (Paden) or “specularity” (Kay), shows the text to be more complicated, perhaps even polyphonic. I align myself with those who hear the multiple voices and will show in my discussion of Ganelon’s trial the traces of simultaneous pressures within the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries as a militant Christian morality fuses with political expediency, leaving a counter-memory, as Foucault would call it, of other models of dispute resolution, the law, and pre-ethical custom.

When I ask if there was a trial of Ganelon, I am asking if we have tried too hard as editors and readers to find the historical reality of an archetypal “Frankish, feudal trial” where, in fact, there are merely fragments of various legal procedures fused in the service of a literary, if not hagiographic, spectacle.

The final segment of the epic has been used principally for two interpretive tasks: to illuminate the character of Ganelon and to date the poem as a whole. The issues are obviously intertwined in the sense that if we consider Ganelon’s defense legitimate, then the ethos of the poem (regardless of the date of the version called the Oxford Roland) would be the old, Germanic tribal culture where feud and vengeance were not only common but acceptable. Varieties of this interpretation offered by Ruggieri, Jones, and Jenkins developed empathy for Ganelon. This line of thinking surfaces in Haidu’s The Subject of Violence: The Song of Roland and the Birth of the State when he comments, “Upon the body of the victim is inscribed the ultimate (in)justice done Ganelon who had the system of revelant justice switched on him in mid-course” (p. 172). If we start, however, with the date of the Oxford Roland (anywhere from 1090-1140 or later if we accept Keller and Mickel’s view), then the gravity of Ganelon’s actions and his severe punishment are “primitive” but justified by the increasing danger of treason to the Capetians’ drive to centralize their power.

Mickel’s work on the trial is valuable on many procedural points, but I feel that there are some possibilities that have been overlooked or undervalued. We must always keep in mind that there are only a few pre-Carolingian law books, a handful of Carolingian legal decisions, and then virtually no books written on the customary law that governed the lives
of the warrior class until the end of the twelfth century at the earliest. Our views of the law in northern France have been shaped as much by literary sources as documentary ones for the period relating to the *Roland*, although there is much documentary evidence about the Anglo-Norman legal world. The same cultural and political history that Taylor credits with giving a misleading title to the epic and launching it as the French epic has also meant that the law has been looked at principally from a continental perspective. On the other hand, the very pro-British historians of common law rarely look to the continent for their shared legal history. To counter this tendency, Paul Hyams makes the point that “the so-called feudal custom of Anglo-Norman England demonstrably belongs to one of the three regional groups into which French custom can be divided” (“Henry II and Ganelon,” p. 25). We are more than justified in trying to see legal issues in the *Roland* from this cultural perspective, particularly because the Anglo-Norman *Roland* offers a unique version of the trial. It is depicted quite differently in the Chateauroux MS and is missing altogether in the *Carmen de proditione Guenonis*, one of the poems proposed as an intermediary between the legends and the poem in Digby 23 (Chanteux, *Recherches sur la Chanson de Roland*). In the Oxford *Roland*, we get little glimpses of procedures that seem both old and new, and inconsistencies abound. Is that because, as Howard Bloch claimed, “the feudal court resembled more than superficially the literary performance” (*Medieval French Literature and the Law*, p. 3)? Mickel claims that this is a “somewhat elaborate trial” (*Ganelon, Treason, and the Chanson de Roland*, p. 13), but also points out repeatedly that the events are presented in ways that serve the emotional and symbolic needs of the poem’s audience.

I want to focus on a few details that may be explained by considering the Anglo-Norman world of customary, not yet common, law, whose voice is muffled but not lost in the strident call for a public spectacle of revenge. I hasten to add that I am not going to revisit the issues raised by others, such as Taillefer at the Battle of Hastings and the Bayeux tapestry (Douglas, “The *Song of Roland*”) or even Payen’s quite valid point that the Norman realm is certainly evoked by references to Roland’s and Charlemagne’s conquests (“L’hégémonie normande”). Instead, I will
point to several passages that allude to the pleadings, the question of an oath, Pinabel’s origin and skills, the interruptions in the judicial battle, and the issue of revenge, not in the old Germanic sense of private feud but in a sanctified-by-God vision of holy war.

The description of the proceedings begins in laisse 271:

Il est escrit en l’anciïene geste
Que Carles mandet humes de plusurs teres.
Asemblez sunt ad Ais, a la capele.
Halz est li jurz, mult par est grande la feste,
Dient alquanz del baron seint Silvestre.
Des ore cumencet le plait et les noveles
De Guenelun, ki traïson ad faite.
Li emperere devant sei l’ad fait traire. (3742-49)

It is written in the venerable chronicle
That Charles summons vassals from many lands.
They have assembled at Aix, in the chapel.
It is a holy day, the feast is very solemn,
Some say it is noble Saint Silvester’s Day.
Now begin the allegations and the countercharges
Concerning Ganelon, who committed the act of treason.
The Emperor had him dragged before him.

Line 3747 brings together two key terms, le plait et les noveles. The first has sometimes been taken as the trial; Bédier elided the second term and rendered the first in his translation as plaid, the archaic word referring to a judicial assembly. Goldin translates the phrase as “trial and pleadings.” Sayers renders them “the judgment and the plea,” which seems inverted. If plait means judgment, then it should be mentioned after the plea.

2 All Old French citations are from the edition by Brault.
Brault suggests that *noules* is a bit obscure. He opts for translating the pair “allegations and countercharges,” but I think *noules* hints at a different distinction. If *plait* is the assembly/event itself, *noules* could refer to the accounting or recounting of the case. In the other nine places where the word *noules* is used in the *Roland*, it means the news or the story and no doubt refers only to an oral rendering, but here in a legal context it refers to the story of the events as they become pertinent to a trial, in other words “the argument.” We know that judicial proceedings were recorded, judgments and fines noted very early on by the administratively gifted Anglo-Normans. The earliest pipe rolls we have are from 1130, but the Domesday Book of 1086 is a much earlier record of what witnesses report about land and chattel holdings. The word used in Anglo-Norman law for the pleaders in the earliest common law courts was *narratores*, whose work describing proceedings, cases, and judgments appears in pipe rolls and the Yearbooks. While the words *plait* and *noules* of line 3747 seem related to the oral pleadings, they could also be the poet or scribe’s way of commenting, in effect: here begins how the trial was recorded or here the story of the trial begins. The laisse begins, after all, with an allusion to writing (l. 3742: “Il est escrito en l’anciène geste” ‘It is written in the venerable chronicle’).

The pairing of the terms could also echo the earlier lines in laisse 127, where, in reference to the fallen heroes, three different words for writing are used. In the scene where Roland, Oliver, and Turpin are fighting valiantly, just prior to Roland deciding at last to sound the olifant, the poet refers to their fame having been recorded:

Cels qu’il unt mort, ben les poet hom preiser:
*Il est escrito es cartres et es brefs,*
Ço dit la Geste, plus de .iii. milliers. (1683-85)

We have a good idea of the number they killed:
It is written in the documents and records,
The Chronicle says that there were more than four thousand.
David Douglas presents line 1684 as part of his argument for the Anglo-Norman origins of the *Roland* because the formula *es cartres et es brefs* is familiar in Anglo-Norman legal texts. The contrast is made between charters and briefs or writs, the latter of which is “a distinctive product of the Anglo-Norman chancery” (“The *Song of Roland,*” p. 104). Foulet had remarked that this line could refer to “short official records” (ctd. in Douglas, “The *Song of Roland,*” p. 104), but as Douglas makes even clearer, the usage of writs which predates William the Conqueror is continued both as practice and in wording by Henry I. As Douglas says, the simultaneous usage between 1066 and 1100 of two distinct terms for written records “would be hard to parallel so adequately in any other contemporary kingdom in Western Europe” (“The *Song of Roland,*” p. 105). Likewise, the two terms of line 3747 evoke the progressive Anglo-Norman courts and chanceries more than the Capetian ones.

Furthermore, when Charlemagne says to the barons, “‘Seignors barons [. . .] / De Guenelun car me jugez le dreit!’ ‘My lord barons, [...] Now give me a verdict concerning Ganelon’ ” (ll. 3750-51), he is asking them to tell him the law. He is the convener and they the judges, offering not a “verdict” (as Brault translates it) but a *jugement* on what the law says about the consequences (composition or punishments) or what proofs should be used to verify an oath that might be sworn if the charge is denied. I disagree with Mickel when he says Charlemagne does not present an accusation that Ganelon can deny and defend in single combat or other ordeal because he is presumed guilty (*Ganelon, Treason,* and the *Chanson de Roland,* pp. 42-44). There is always the presumption of guilt in medieval law, and Charlemagne clearly states the charge in laisse 272, accusing Ganelon of having betrayed Roland, and he even gives a reason:

“Il fut en l’ost tresque en Espaigne od mei,  
Si me tolit .XX. milie de mes Franceis  
E mun nevold, que jamais ne verreiz,  
E Oliver, li proz e li curteis;  
Les .XII. pers ad traït por aveir.” (3752-56)
“He was with me in the army all the way to Spain,  
He took twenty thousand of my Frenchmen away from me,  
My nephew, whom you will never see again,  
And worthy and reliable Oliver;  
He betrayed the Twelve Peers for gain.”

Mickel says it is important that Ganelon doesn’t answer word for word or deny the accusation, “offering to plead guilty to a lesser charge, a charge that he seeks to portray as no crime at all” (Ganelon, Treason, and the Chanson de Roland, p. 44), but this is anachronistic. Ganelon doesn’t “plea bargain.” He is presenting a defense. Responding to the accusation word for word is only crucial at the moment of taking an oath. He presents his argument, first in addressing Charlemagne, by denying treason and saying that Roland cheated him; then, in addressing the entire assembly of Franks, judges, and his own kinsmen, he rather elegantly rehearses his story, claiming he avenged himself and repeats that it was not treason. What is important here is that Ganelon offers a two part defense in this epic where heroes are not particularly verbose. He has been praised as saives hom (ll. 278-79 and 294) when Roland names him for the mission, which may imply his skill in speaking as well as diplomacy. At the trial, he is setting up an argument over semantics, and, except for his appeal to Pinabel to help him, he does not speak again. There is no oath taken by him or by the fighters. This seems a strange omission if the trial followed what we think are the procedures of an early feudal one based on the exculpatory oath, because the trial by battle was only used to prove the veracity of the oath, not the facts of the case. If a trial were truly important here or if the trial reflected an assembly when irrational proofs were still very important, then there would be a scene of speaking the oath, and relics would be brought out. It would be at least as clear as the scene when Ganelon swears the oath to Marsile. The absence of the oath is related, I believe, to who Pinabel is and also to the narrator’s rush to depict the judicial battle.

One might wonder also about the significance of Pinabel being from Sorrence:

Olifant
Ço est Pinabel del Castel de Sorence
Ben set parler et dreite raisun rendre
Vassals est bons por ses armes defendre. (3783-85)

It is Pinabel, of Castel de Sorence.
He is a skillful speaker and knows how to argue convincingly.
He is a brave warrior well able to defend his arms.

Commentators have placed Sorrence anywhere from the Bay of Naples (Keller, “The Song of Roland”) to Spain (Chanteux, Recherches sur la Chanson de Roland); in the Chateauroux MS he is supposedly from Florence, and if he is perhaps from Italy, as his name may suggest (Keller), we can more readily understand line 3784. To describe this man first as gifted in speaking well and knowledgeable in straight reasoning before mentioning his physical prowess or fighting skill seems highly significant. If he is from Lombardy and he is skilled in rhetoric, reasoning, or presenting the raisun, (another common word used for the “case” or the “plea”), then I think the most obvious reason he has come forward as Ganelon’s champion is not his brute strength, which is so emphasized by the critics, but his ability to defend Ganelon in court. The connection between Lombardy and rhetoric may, in fact, suggest several things: first that the laws of Lombardy were not the laws of the Franks if the time frame is Carolingian. This would help to explain why Pinabel emphasizes that no Frank will be allowed to hang Ganelon as long as Pinabel is there to defend him, because the characteristic of the Germanic peoples was to respect personal law, i.e., Pinabel may be suggesting that Ganelon cannot be tried according to Frankish law. Another possibility is that the Norman incursions into Italy at the end of the eleventh century have brought new attitudes and procedures, so that effective arguing in court, a trial which attempts to facilitate judgments, is as important as picking a champion to fight physically. Still another possibility, and perhaps equally obvious, is that for the poem’s audience, Lombardy evokes the study of Roman and/or canon law because this is the region, of course, where the Roman law was rediscovered and studied even before the first
university at Bologna was founded. Lanfranc, one of the first to study at Pavia, a monk in Normandy, followed William to England, became Archbishop of Canterbury, and was instrumental in bringing Vacarius, a famous teacher of Roman law, to Canterbury in the mid-twelfth century. This is not to suggest that Romano-canonical law is a major influence on the *Roland*. That would not be accurate for the Anglo-Norman or Frankish *bellatores* for whom custom is the principle law. For the *oratores*, yes, the ecclesiastical courts were increasingly influenced by Roman law. But why, then, is Pinabel praised for oratorical skills if they were not meant to be put to the test? Perhaps he is educated in the law, not in the model of the old “law-speaker” of Danelaw, but an educated member of the warrior class, aware of new methods of arguing cases and used to being a justice in ducal courts.

While the literary text obscures this possibility by quickly thrusting him into the role of fighter, there are two interruptions in the judicial battle that are little recognized for what they are. Rather than seeing laissez 283 as evidence of an attempt to seduce Thierry into giving up a losing battle in a way that saves face for him (Jenkins, “Why Did Ganelon Hate Roland?”), or rather than assuming that this is part of a familial tendency toward treachery (Brault, *The Song of Roland*), I think this interruption shows Pinabel’s rhetorical skills at work and a genuine attempt to stop the violence:

Dist Pinabel: “Tierri, car te recreiz!
Tes hom serai par amur e par feid,
A tun plaisir te durrai mun aveir,
Mais Guenelun fai acorder al rei!” (3892-95)

Pinabel said, “Thierry, concede defeat!
I shall be your vassal in friendship and in good faith,
I shall give you what I have to your heart’s content,
But reconcile Ganelon with the King!”

Pinabel does not say: if I win, Ganelon walks away free and you can be allied with us, Thierry. What Pinabel proposes is his own submission to
If There Wasn’t “a” Song of Roland…

Thierry, which is illogical in either case. If he is going to win because he is the stronger, why would he then submit? Or if Thierry capitulates, Pinabel certainly would not then submit to him. Also, most significantly, Pinabel wants Thierry to work to reconcile Ganelon and Charlemagne (l. 3895). This demonstrates first off what Green, Nelson, and others have shown. Contrary to the impression given by literary texts, the judicial battle was the court of last resort. It was not often actually fought, because means of compromise were found either before it took place or during the contest itself. Pinabel has no reason, since he is winning, to make this offer, but the urge to defuse the situation, to find a mechanism to stop further escalation of violence, and most especially to bring the aggrieved parties into harmony is paramount in his mind. This is the spirit of the folklaw: it is not who is right but the need to get the forces that are out of balance back into equilibrium. As Berman says of folklaw, “The answer is not to be found by asking the question: who is right? The answer is to be found by saving the honor of both sides and thereby restoring the right relationship between them” (“The Background of the Western Legal Tradition,” p. 589).

When Thierry rejects the offer, he says he will not consider it because he believes God will show who is right: “ ‘Deus facet hoi entre nus dous le dreit!’ ” ‘ “Let God this day show which one of us is in the right!” ’ (l. 3898). Oddly, in the very next laisse, he praises his opponent and asks him to stop fighting:

Ço dist Tierri: “Pinabel, mult ies ber,  
Granz ies e forz, e tis cors ben mollez,  
De vasselage te conoissen ti per.  
Ceste bataille car la laisses ester,  
A Carlemagne te ferai acorder.  
De Guenelun justise ert faite tel,  
Jamais n’ert jur que il n’en seit parlet.” (3899-905)

Thierry said: “Pinabel, you are very brave,  
You are big and strong and your body is well built,  
Your peers recognize you for your courage.
Leave off fighting this duel,
I shall reconcile you with Charlemagne.
But such justice shall be done to Ganelon
That no day shall pass without it being mentioned.”

He wants to play the role of reconciling Pinabel to Charlemagne. If he is so certain that the judicial battle will yield “the right,” then why would he care to stop it? He is on the road to glory. If he believes that the outcome signals God’s judgment, then how could Pinabel be reconciled to Charlemagne? He would be not just the loser but perhaps be dead. So it seems that the interruptions hint at the way the warrior class actually conducted their battles, seeking to avoid the bloodshed if possible, seeing reconciliation as always a possibility, and settling disputes by the customary law which was not judging “rights” but “possession” in the broadest sense (in other words, it judged according to what was practical, what had been the state of affairs ante the dispute, and what would balance out more or less co-equal powers). As those writing about traditional law note, in the absence of a strong centralized state, procedures of settling disputes between equal powers are not decisions about who is right: “In a bicentric situation, nobody can be in a position to make decisions [. . .] the ‘judges’ must make compromises, and their compromises must be enforced from two power centers” (Bohannan, “The Differing Realms of the Law,” p. 39).

But here Pinabel and Thierry are simultaneously acting out another drama, the archetypal one between good and evil, the David and Goliath myth as it seems clearly to have influenced this text which is imbued with Old Testament values. Charlemagne is the appropriate model for the defender of “God’s chosen people,” and he himself chose to be addressed as David, according to Suger’s account (Nelson, The Frankish World, p. xxii; Halphen, Charlemagne and the Carolingian Empire, p. 89).

Finally, the Oxford Roland is too French to be Norman, as Bédier said long ago, but the little voices of early twelfth-century Anglo-Norman legal practice—writs; narratores who record cases; oral defenses; and negotiations to balance claims of co-equal parties as custom would have it—are outshouted by a militant Christianity that brooks no
opposition. Custom is pre-ethical because it is not jurisprudence; there is no provision for a debate on what is “right.” But medieval justice also is imbued with another spirit when the judicial duel, a fight by any other name, comes to be used as an indication of God’s will. It is not at all clear that it started that way, and we know that Carolingian dispute settlement was based on rational proofs: the thirty year rule, survey documents, and sworn oral testimony (Nelson, The Frankish World, p. 57). But later when ordeals and judicial duels become entwined with revealed truth, traditional law becomes the counter-memory. The preacher of the first crusade, Pope Urban said, “Thy Creator hath said: My name is Truth. He hath not said: My name is Custom” (M. Bloch, Feudal Society, p. 113).

The truth the Roland poem tells us repeatedly is “paens unt tort et chrestïens unt dreit.” This is not an ideology as we would use the word in contemporary criticism, because it is not a cultural assumption all but invisible to the members of the society; this is propaganda. The supposed trial—full of inconsistencies and time warps—seems there just to serve as a prelude to Ganelon’s specular, spectacular dismembering, which is part of the propaganda for the monarchy and for holy war. As Richard Green writing on trial by ordeal in A Crisis of Truth notes, “the trial was less an inflexible quest for factual certainty, than a public spectacle of self-exoneration where real judgment lay neither with God nor brute force, but with the willingness of the community to accept expiation” (p. 111). We can only wonder today as Americans what public spectacle of self-exoneration, as opposed to negotiations toward peace, we will have to witness.
Works Cited


Officers of the
Société Internationale Rencesvals

President:
Alberto Varvaro, Università di Napoli
Vice Presidents:
Carlos Alvar, Universidad de Alcalá
Philip E. Bennett, University of Edinburgh
Joseph Duggan, University of California, Berkeley
Secretary-Treasurer:
Nadine Henrard, Université de Liège

Officers of the
Société Rencesvals
American-Canadian Branch

President:
William W. Kibler, University of Texas at Austin
Vice President:
Leslie Zarker Morgan, Loyola College in Maryland
Secretary-Treasurer:
Françoise Denis, Macalester College
Bibliographer:
Matthew Bailey, University of Texas at Austin
The Société Rencesvals

The Société Internationale Rencesvals is devoted to the study of medieval epic literature in the various Romance languages and of materials in other languages/literatures derived from Romance epic.

Membership in the Société Rencesvals is open to all persons interested in the medieval Romance epic, its cognates, and derivatives. The society is organized into twelve national or regional branches located in Belgium, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Japan, The Netherlands, Scandinavia, Spain, Switzerland, Brazil/Portugal, and the United States/Canada. The organization’s main activities are international congresses, branch meetings, sponsoring sessions in the areas of its interests at major conferences throughout its membership areas, and the publication of bibliographical materials. Since 1958, the society has met triennially at various European locales for the purposes of hearing papers on epic subjects and facilitating discussion among medievalists. The American-Canadian branch meets regularly each May in conjunction with the International Medieval Conference at Western Michigan State University in Kalamazoo, Michigan. Sessions are also held each December in conjunction with the annual convention of the Modern Language Association of America.

The Société publishes an annual Bulletin bibliographique, edited at the Université de Liège with contributions from the various regional and national branches. The Bulletin provides a critical bibliography of Romance and related epic literatures, including notices of book reviews in learned journals. Olifant, published semiannually by the American-Canadian Branch of the Société, contains articles and reviews concerning the Romance epic and connected topics.

For more detailed information concerning Olifant (subscriptions, submission guidelines, book review procedures, back issues) or the Société Rencesvals (membership, upcoming conferences, current activities, Bulletin bibliographique), please visit the American-Canadian Branch website:

http://www.noctrl.edu/societerencesvals

Comments and queries are welcome.