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Outlaws and Traitors: Justifying Rebellion in the Old French Epic of Revolt

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Outlaws and Traitors: Justifying Rebellion in the Old French Epic of Revolt

A Dissertation Presented for the

Doctor of Philosophy

Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Klayton Amos Tietjen

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Abstract

This study seeks to explain the phenomenon of the twelfth-century rise of rebellious narratives within the medieval literature tradition of the *chansons de geste* through an analysis of the character behaviors, narrative structures, and poetic justifications for acts of revolt. Among other texts of medieval epic, *Girart de Vienne* features as a case study for its early contribution of elements to the corpus, such as a plot centered on rebellion and the important concept of three *gestes*. In this study, acts and behaviors committed by characters are compared to medieval customary law to illustrate their often-treasonous nature. Those acts are then revealed to be embedded within a "noble robber narrative," a Robin Hood-like story structure that justifies treasonous behavior. It is also shown that the characters themselves are sorted into the hierarchy of the three *gestes* of kings, heroes, and traitors. As an early form of racial thinking, the rebellious behavior of characters who belong to the *geste* of heroes is equally justified. The study concludes with an analysis of the original primary audience for the poem, young knights of late twelfth-century France for whom the generations-old path to social stability was changing drastically. Depictions of rebellion in the *chansons de geste* thus served as a catharsis for the resultant pressures and anxieties on this caste, a call for the return to the expectations of former times.

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Introduction

In the epic world of the *chansons de geste*, some characters who commit acts of treason are severely punished, while others curiously escape such poetic justice. Especially in certain poems, treasonous behavior is depicted as justified, even laudable. Take, for example, an episode from *Girart de Vienne*, where a loyal knight of Charlemagne accuses the brothers Girart and Renier of treason:

> *« Ou iés alez, dant Girart le marchis ?*
>
> *Renier de Genvres, envers toi m'aatis*
>
> *que tu es lerres et vers Deu ennemis,*
>
> *et vers Charlon, lou roi de Seint Denis ! »*

> "Why are you fleeing, 'milord marquis*'* Girart?
>
> Renier of Geneva, I'm calling you out!
>
> Because you are a traitor and an enemy
>
> to God and to Charles, the king of Saint Denis!" [1]

At this early point in the narrative, the rebellious brothers have knowingly broken their fealty to Charlemagne in several ways, as we will see in great detail further on in this study, and thus this accusation of treachery seems appropriate. However, the accused, who also happen to be the main characters, heartily disagree:

> *Renier l'entant, a pou n'enraje vis.*
>
> *Il li escrie : « Tu menz, cuiverz failliz !*

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[1] Bertrand de Bar-sur-Aube, *Girart de Vienne*, ed. Wolfgang Van Emden (Paris: Société des anciens textes français, 1977), vv. 2336-2339. This and all other translations in this study are mine.

Et envers toi en sui prez et garniz

que traïson envers Charle ne fis !

Renier hears this and becomes enraged in no small measure.

He yells back: "You are lying, you deceiving scoundrel!

I am armed and ready—come at me!

I have never committed treason against Charles!"[2]

This reaction to the taunting accusation is puzzling in that the characters are already in open revolt against the king and the audience is keenly aware of that fact. They are indeed enemies of Charlemagne; they have indeed betrayed the king. Denial alone would hardly be interesting, for it could be motivated simply by self-preservation; what is intriguing is that Renier's rebuttal is supported by the overall narrative arc of the story. The poem seems to aim at convincing the audience to agree with Renier. Despite consistently treasonous and rebellious behavior, Girart and his family evade punishment, even as other traitors in the poem receive a comeuppance commensurate to their acts. Many other medieval French epic poems have a similarly ambiguous relationship with rebellion and treachery.

From the refusal to render feudal service, to public sedition, to open revolt against royal authority and attempted regicide, poets of medieval epic spin tales rife with the defiance of rebellious knights. These acts would have been considered treasonable by medieval legal custom if committed in the real world. Yet despite conspicuously treasonous behavior, rebel characters

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[2] Bertrand de Bar-sur-Aube, *Girart de Vienne,* vv.2340-2343.

remain the heroes of the tale. *Girart de Vienne* in particular even begins with a reassurance of their inherent goodness:

> *Bone chançon plest vos que ge vos die,*
>
> *de haute estoire et de grant baronnie ?*
>
> *Meilleur ne puet estre dite n'oïe.*
>
> *Ceste n'est pas d'orgueil ne de folie,*
>
> *de traïson ne de losengerie,*
>
> *mes d'un barnaje qui Jhesu beneïe,*
>
> *del plus très fier qui onques fust en vie.*

> Would it please you if I sang a good song,
>
> about proud history and great qualities of nobility?
>
> A better one cannot be sung or heard.
>
> It is not about arrogance, nor disgraceful conduct,
>
> nor treason, nor deceit,
>
> but rather about a noble clan, blessed by Jesus,
>
> of the very greatest knights who ever lived.[3]

Hyperbolic introductions like this precede many *chansons de geste* and serve to frame audience expectations for the story. In this case, the insistence that the poem is not about arrogance, disgraceful conduct, treason, or deceit seems incongruous with the rebellious plot of *Girart de Vienne*; however, it is clearly not due to any sort of carelessness or insincerity on the part of the poet—indeed, narratorial reassurances of this kind resound throughout the song like a refrain,

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[3] Ibid, vv. 1-7.

near-constant reminders about the good nature of the poem and its characters: "No one could hold forth examples of better princes; they could never be reproached for evil deeds;" "Listen, barons…I speak no lie or madness to you, but rather a good story and one about great qualities of nobility."[4] The insistence on the inherent goodness of the main characters suggests that a distinguishing line exists between the rebellious activities of noble knights and the treachery of traitors. To modern readers, that difference seems inscrutable, for often an act committed by one character is treasonable while for another, the same act is justifiable.

This study offers explanations for this seeming paradox. The late twelfth and early thirteenth century saw the rise of *chansons de geste* featuring rebellious barons. These have come to be called the "epic of revolt." I will argue that there was a special relationship between these songs and their initial audiences. When placed within a certain style of narrative structure and when committed by the right characters for the right reasons, treasonous acts become an acceptable form of rebellion. Stories of this kind of rebellion offered a catharsis for the anxieties of a class of young knights who were perhaps most affected by the rapid changes taking place in the world around them. Paradoxically conservative, revolt in the *chansons de geste* was a call for a return to the social order of former times, a return to the expectations of yore. The young barons of the tales undertake actions, even treasonous actions, to obtain those necessary components of social stability: lands, honor, and justice. In this way, rebellion is justifiable, and heroes who commit it remain unstained by otherwise treasonable acts. Living in a changing world with far more limited social prospects than prior generations, the young nobles who formed the audience for these poems could take optimistic pleasure in stories about knights who

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[4] *De meillors princes ne puet nus hom pledier; de mauvestié n'orent jor reprovier,* vv.68-69; *Oïez, baron…ne vos di pas mençonge ne folie, mes bone estoire et de grant baronnie,* vv. 3039-3040.

possessed the necessary prowess and recklessness to impose their will upon kings, enemies, and the world.

This study will engage with several medieval French epics in order to reveal the special relationship between fictitious revolt and chivalric audiences, but it places a special emphasis on the poem *Girart de Vienne* because this poem is key to understanding the rise of the epic of revolt. As the twelfth century gave way to the thirteenth, *Girart de Vienne* was among the first rays of this rising new style of *chanson de geste* to cross the literary horizon. Like most *chansons de geste,* the exact date of composition is unknown, but the broadly accepted vintage of the poem is as early as 1170 and no later than 1224; Wolfgang Van Emden suggested a more specific date of 1181-1183.[5] *Girart de Vienne* strayed from the established themes and motifs of the epic tradition. Instead of a reinforcement of the feudal values of loyalty, self-sacrifice, and just war against the Saracen enemy found in poems like *The Song of Roland* and *La Chanson de Guillaume*, *Girart de Vienne* introduced new subject matter centered on rebellion against royal authority. Whether as the leader or just a precocious part of the overall wave, *Girart de Vienne* was followed shortly by other poems that took up the same themes. Thus, as an "Ur-text," *Girart de Vienne* provides very useful clues about the beginnings of this new subgenre.

This study also focuses on *Girart de Vienne* for the unique features it possesses which elucidate the role of rebellion within the broader tradition of the *chansons de geste*. Each epic of revolt portrays rebellion somewhat differently, but usually within the pattern of a narrative structure that justifies rebellious behavior committed by intrinsically good barons. I show that the particular narrative structure of rebellion in *Girart de Vienne* forms a "noble robber narrative," a

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[5] Ibid, xxxiv.

Robin Hood-like story where the hero, as a victim of injustice, becomes an outlaw who rights

wrongs and robs the rich to give to the poor. This story type creates a paradigm within which

rebellion is justifiable, even desirable. The presence of this narrative structure in *Girart de

Vienne* has not been identified or analyzed previously.

Furthermore, the heroes of *Girart de Vienne* are portrayed as good in essence, for they

belong to a lineage of heroes. This is accomplished through the organization of epic lineages into

three *gestes,* an important concept introduced to the epic tradition by *Girart de Vienne.* Through

this idea, the corpus of *chansons de geste* quickly came to be organized into three broad cycles:

the *geste* of Charlemagne and his heirs, the *geste* of traitors and rebels, and the *geste* of

Guillaume d'Orange. According to Van Emden, a lot of ink has been spilled concerning the word

geste.[6] Scholars have been debating its meaning since the nineteenth century.[7] This word can be

particularly difficult to define, given its polyvalent nature and changing usage throughout the

Middle Ages. Surprisingly, despite its clear provenance from Latin *gesta,* the use of *geste* in its

"primitive meaning" (acts or deeds) in Old French texts is quite rare.[8] This renders the term

chanson de geste ("song of deeds") problematic. This term is a more recent invention; the epics

refer to themselves only as songs [*chançons*]. Dependent on the mostly unattested primitive

meaning, *chanson de geste* is apparently tantamount to a misnomer. Another definition is "group

of epic songs" or "cycle". Specialists of medieval literature often use *geste* and cycle

interchangeably, which speaks to how influential (and possibly misunderstood) Bertrand's

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[6] Wolfgang Van Emden, "Contribution à l'étude de l'évolution sémantique du mot « *geste »* en ancien français*," Romania* 96, no. 381 (1975): 105.

[7] See, for example, Gaston Paris, *La Littérature française au moyen âge*; Joseph Bédier, *La Chanson de Roland* (Paris: L'édition H. Piazza, 1928); and Italo Siciliano, *Les Origines des chansons de geste* (Paris, A. et J. Picard, 1951).

[8] Van Emden, "Contribution à l'étude de l'évolution sémantique," 107.

schema has been. In *Old French Narrative Cycles,* Luke Sunderland wondered if a general trend toward cyclicity in the literature of Bertrand's day was "part of the inspiration for the classification found in *Girart de Vienne* which may in turn have been a model for cyclical production."[9] Although the idea of cyclicity is almost implicit in the genre of epic poetry, *geste* as a synonym for cycle was only just developing at the time of *Girart de Vienne,* and unlikely appropriate to Bertrand's use of the word.[10] Neither "deeds" nor "cycle" captures what late twelfth-century audiences would have understood by *geste.*

Even though this schema is proposed in the very text, *Girart de Vienne* resists classification in this way. As I will show in greater depth, fully analyzing how the three *gestes* work within *Girart de Vienne* reveals it as a hierarchical system of organizing characters, not songs. Based on essential characteristics typical of their lineage, individual characters receive differential treatment accordingly, regardless of behavior. This is evidence of racializing discourse in medieval thinking, and it sheds great light on the question of rebellion in the epic tradition, for it shows that the acceptability of rebellious acts depends more on *who* commits the act than the nature of the act itself. The implications of the three *gestes* have not been analyzed in this way previously.

Girart de Vienne is a tale of starburst youth in violent conflict with royal authority that centers on the exploits of the eponymous hero and his family. It begins in southern France in the war-torn lands of Monglane. Reduced to poverty by occupying Saracens and unable to provide a future for his four sons, the patriarch Garin allows them to set out into the world to seek knighthood and lands of their own. The plot primarily follows the journey of the younger two

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[9] Luke Sunderland, *The Old French Narrative Cycles.* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2010), 26.
[10] Van Emden, "Contribution à l'étude de l'évolution sémantique," 106.

sons, Renier and Girart, who seek to join the court of Charlemagne, the emperor/king[11] of France. After several years of faithful service, the youths are eventually dubbed knights and rewarded with fiefs. But there is a problem in this for Girart. He is offered the duchy of Burgundy but must also obtain the hand of the recently widowed duchesse in marriage. However, Charlemagne also desires to take the beautiful young duchesse to wife. In her eagerness to avoid marriage to the elderly king, the duchesse approaches Girart and offers herself directly, but, offended, Girart refuses the proposal. Heartbroken, the duchesse begrudgingly becomes the queen, and Charlemagne gives Girart the city of Vienne instead.

Some years later, Girart and his clan learn how the queen secretly insulted Girart by tricking him into planting his kiss of gratitude on her foot instead of Charles's. Infuriated, the clan assembles to ride against Paris, only to discover that the king's forces are already outside of Vienne's walls. Charlemagne accuses Girart of failing to render the required feudal service for Vienne and lays siege to the castle. Seven years of negotiations, skirmishes, and open battles result in a stalemate, so a contest of champions is proposed to end the war. Charlemagne's nephew, Roland, faces Oliver, Girart's nephew, in single combat. When neither is able to defeat the other, the duel is ended by a descending angel who declares it a tie. The famous friendship of Roland and Oliver from *the Song of Roland* thus begins. Yet even this does not result in peace, as Charlemagne still refuses to lift the siege of Vienne. By stratagem, the rebels ultimately gain the upper hand when they capture Charlemagne hunting alone in the forest. It is only from this vulnerable position that the emperor finally agrees to peace. During the celebratory feast of reconciliation, messengers come reporting new aggression in the south by Saracens from Spain.

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[11] The poem refers to Charlemagne (Charles) variously as emperor and king. Consequently, these terms will be used interchangeably throughout this study.

The poem ends with Charlemagne and his bishop declaring war and departing with all of the young knights to begin the very military campaign told in *the Song of Roland*.

The poem was quite popular in the Middle Ages and circulated widely, evidenced today by seven extant manuscripts: two located in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, three in the British Library in London, one in the Saint Andrews University Library, and one in the Bibliothèque municipal Louis Garret in Vesoul.[12] Its themes and characters were influential on the content of other poems, especially the concept of three *gestes* and the poem's role as a prequel to *The Song of Roland*. The characters and events in *Girart de Vienne* precede that earliest and most influential medieval epic. By establishing new characters and providing backstories for many classic characters, *Girart de Vienne* effectively challenged audience perceptions of established personalities and roles as they were recast within a context of rebellion. As the tradition continued to develop, other poets built on these new possibilities, composing *enfance* backstories and furthering the adventures of established characters as well as adding new heroes to the pantheon.

Girart de Vienne offers much potential for this study because it is understudied in modern scholarship. Like many other medieval epics, it is overshadowed by a handful of texts like *Raoul de Cambrai* and especially *The Song of Roland*.[13] In the study of Old French epic, one cannot escape the force of gravity of *The Song of Roland*. It is the most well-known of episodes in the French epic tradition and is typically the only epic poem taught in undergraduate courses on medieval French literature. Its tragic heroes, Roland and Oliver, are well-known figures in the

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[12] The copies found in the Bibliothèque Nationale were consulted in person as part of this study.
[13] *Raoul de Cambrai*, ed. William Kibler (Paris: Lettres Gothiques, 1996); *La Chanson de Roland*, ed. Jean Dufournet (Paris: Flammarion, 1993).

canon of Western literature. Being one of the earliest French texts in existence, *The Song of Roland* has earned a status among modern audiences as the French epic *par excellence*. According to Bernard Cerquiglini, "*The Song of Roland* plays a foundational role for medieval studies both as a discipline and as an institution. To be a medievalist is, truly, to take a position on *the Song of Roland*."[14] The poem was instrumentalized during the nationalizing period of the nineteenth century in order to draw a direct line from the present to a legendary national French past. However, this overtly central role of the *Song of Roland* created a distorted level of importance that endures even today, especially compared with its actual place among the "canon" of epics during the Middle Ages. There have been efforts in recent years to dislodge *The Song of Roland* from its overly prestigious position;[15] nevertheless the vast majority of Old French epics still tend to live in its shadow, receiving lower levels of discussion and analysis. *Girart de Vienne* is no exception to this. Besides Van Emden's 1977 critical edition and a 2006 translation into modern French by Bernard Guidot, *Girart de Vienne* only makes occasional and brief appearances in work mostly focused on other texts. Therefore, this study intends to take advantage of the many interesting elements of the poem that have yet to be engaged with in modern scholarship, like the problem of three *gestes* and the Robin Hood-like form of rebellion.

Although a major part, this study does not focus solely on *Girart de Vienne*. I draw from other epics of revolt like *Doon de Maience* (mid 13th century)*, Raoul de Cambrai* (c. 1200)*, the

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[14] *La* Chanson de Roland *joue pour les études médiévales en tant que discipline, en tant qu'institution, un rôle fondateur. Être médiéviste c'est, au plus vrai, prendre position sur la* Chanson de Roland. Bernard Cerquiglini, "Roland à Roncevaux, ou la trahison des clercs," *Littérature* 42, 2 (1982): 42.

[15] See, for example, Simon Gaunt, *Gender and Genre in Medieval French Literature* (Cambridge University Press, 1995) or Andrew Taylor, "Was There a Song of Roland?" *Speculum* 76, (2001): 28-65.

fragmentary *Doon de Nanteuil* (late 12th century), and *La Chevalerie Ogier le Danois* (c. 1220)[16] to highlight similarities and contrasting features. I also compare with earlier, more traditional epics like *La Chanson de Guillaume* (c. 1100)*, La Prise d'Orange* (c. 1150) and *the Song of Roland* (c. 1100)*,* as well as non-rebellious epics more contemporary to *Girart de Vienne* such as *Jehan de Lanson* (early 13th century) and *La Chanson d'Aspremont* (c. 1190).[17] I incorporate other medieval texts beyond the epic genre, such as chronicles, legal documents, fabliaux, and poetry, to provide context and additional contrast.

Epic poetry is one of the oldest literary genres. Oral or written, the epic aims at tying the present time of its audience to a fantastic past, thereby creating a foundation or an origin for a society. Epics are found among nearly all cultures in the world. The earliest surviving epic is the ancient Sumerian *Epic of Gilgamesh*, which finds its place alongside Homer's *Iliad*, Virgil's *Aeneid*, the Anglo-Saxon *Beowulf*, the ancient Indian *Ramayana*, and the German *Nibelungenlied*, to name a few famous examples. Epic poems typically take place in a time before living memory where heroic men and women accomplish phenomenal (and usually violent) deeds as they navigate a world of superhuman forces and other mortals. The heroes shape a moral universe for their descendants, the audience, through their words and deeds; riches and glory reward force and cunning, bravery and skill overcome terrifying adversaries and larger-than-life obstacles.

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[16] *Doon de Maience,* ed. M. Guessard (Paris: Chez F. Vieweg, 1859); Paul Meyer, "*La Chanson de Doon de Nanteuil*, fragments inédits*," Romania* 13, (1884): 1-26; Raimbert de Paris, *La Chevalerie Ogier le Danois* (Paris: Techener, 1842).

[17] *La Chanson de Guillaume,* ed. François Suard (Paris: Lettres Gothiques, 2008); *La Prise d'Orange,* ed. Blanche Katz (New York: King's Crown Press, 1947); *Jehan de Lanson*, ed. John Myers, *Studies in the Romance Languages and Literatures* 53 (University of North Carolina Press, 1965); *La Chanson d'Aspremont*, ed. Louis Brandin (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1923).

The medieval French-speaking community of Western Europe was built on a rich tradition of epic poetry: the *chansons de geste*. A hundred or so survive in manuscripts dating from the eleventh through the fourteenth century and represent some of the earliest examples of French literature. The *chansons de geste* relate the legendary and often semi-historical adventures of one or several heroes—Roland, Oliver, Charlemagne, Guillaume d'Orange, Louis the Pious, Ogier the Dane, etc. The origins of the *chansons de geste* are unclear. They were not inspired by the epic poetry of classical antiquity, but rather appeared in the ripening conditions of a warrior civilization coming to stabilize itself within the context of a hero cult and seeking to define itself by commemorating battles and heroes that were decisive in establishing its place in the world.[18] The tales exist in a strange dual time: the events and characters are drawn from the Carolingian period of the eighth and ninth centuries, but they are recounted anachronistically in twelfth- and thirteenth-century settings. They were written in the vernacular language, the various dialects of Old French, of that period as well.

Epic poetry is sung by a community, seeking cohesion as it becomes progressively more conscious of its place in history. As theorist of medieval literature Paul Zumthor described in *Essai de poétique médiévale*:

> The epic...is permeated with history, and at the same time completely lacking in contemporaneity with it. The receiving community seeks there the reflection of the consciousness that it has of itself and expects that it should provide ways of bonding to a fictitious past, absorbed in the intensity of a longing present.[19]

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[18] Georges Bafaro, *L'Épopée* (Paris: Ellipses, 1997), 3.
[19] *L'épopée…est à la fois imprégné de l'histoire, et dépourvu de toute contemporanéité avec elle. La communauté qui le reçoit y recherche le reflet de la conscience qu'elle a d'elle-même, en attend qu'il lui*

Accordingly, the *chansons de geste* were built up of the "sediments of memory" [*sédimentations mémorielles*] where no dividing line was traced between history and legend. High Medieval chronicles often had epic material integrated into their pages of historical documentation, with even the most imaginative of poems assimilated in ways that seemed perfectly harmonious to their authors but appear fanciful and incompatible by modern standards.[20] For medieval audiences, epic songs *were* history, inasmuch as they connected the present to a collectively remembered past.

The *chansons de geste* come down to us as literature that still contains evidence of its oral origins. Alan Hindley, modern scholar of Old French epic, called this a "particularly striking paradox," for the everchanging nature of the oral performance finds itself preserved in a more permanent literary state.[21] The roughly three-hundred-year gap between source material and composition poses the perennial unanswerable question of whether these epics existed in an organic oral chain stemming from the Early Middle Ages, or whether they were the purely creative works of poets of the High Middle Ages. The clear story arc, conscious presentation of themes, and confrontation of characters of the written version in no way put a stop to the evolution of the oral tradition, as evidenced by the variations found in later written iterations. Both halves of the paradox are equally valuable in the study of epic. The power and emotion in epic poetry comes from its oral nature, while the careful storytelling elements come from its

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fournisse les moyens d'une adhésion à un passé fictif, résorbé dans l'intensité d'un présent désidéral. Paul Zumthor, *Essai de Poétique Médiévale* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1972), 29.

[20] Zumthor, *Essai de Poétique Médiévale,* 21-22.

[21] Alan Hindley, *The Old French Epic* (Louvain, Belgium: Peeters, 1983), 21-22.

literary reworking. One aim in this study is to imagine the static text as a close stand-in for the oral song so as to better understand its relationship with its initial audience.

The title *chansons de geste* refers to the performative traits of the poetry (*chanson:* song) and the content of the poetry (*geste:* heroic deeds). The titles of individual epics are typically eponymous of the main character (*The Song of Roland, Girart de Vienne, Huon de Bordeaux*) whose dramatic deeds are related following a particular sequencing of action that is perhaps their most important single literary quality: parallelism.

> As one action-sequence is matched by another, as one character portrayal succeeds another, so a dramatic harmony is set up, akin to the rhythm of point and counterpoint. Episodes are constructed in terms of opposition and confrontation; the action swings from one side to another; and detailed repetition increases the tension towards breaking-point.[22]

It is precisely the parallelistic nature of episodes of rebellion in the *chansons de geste* under analysis here that offers such rich insight into the expectations of the initial audience for these poems, young knights of the turn of the thirteenth century.

The written form of the earliest epics appeared in the late eleventh century and gained in popularity during the following few centuries. These early epics centered around the figure of Charlemagne and his most formidable warriors as they fought threatening enemies beyond the borders of the kingdom of France. The personality, rhythm of life, happiness, and losses of the warrior class that largely formed the audience for the *chansons de geste* were reflected there, reinforced and embellished with tradition and idealism, shaped in ever greater detail. This

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[22] Hindley, *Old French Epic,* xi.

fictional outlining helped to define the identity and hierarchical role of that class. As the genre grew in popularity, *jongleurs* and poets introduced new songs to satisfy the demand for epic tales in the courts and town squares and along the pilgrimage routes of medieval France and beyond.

The diversification of the epic tradition brought about efforts to sub-categorize the burgeoning corpus. Based on the idea of three *gestes* found in *Girart de Vienne*, the songs have traditionally been classified into three main "cycles." First, the *geste* of the king groups together poems where Charlemagne features as the protagonist (or sometimes his grandfather, Charles Martel, or his son, Louis the Pious). Good examples of this cycle are the well-known *Song of Roland* (c. 1100) and the *Pèlerinage de Charlemagne* (1140). These mostly deal with the struggle against the Saracen threat in the South. The second group is the *geste* of Guillaume d'Orange. Guillaume was a very popular hero and this cycle of twenty or so poems documenting his exploits as well as those of his heroic family is usually seen as having more unity than the other cycles. Examples of this cycle include *La Chanson de Guillaume* (1130)*, La Prise d'Orange* (c. 1150)*,* and *Le Charroi de Nîmes* (c. 1140).[23] *Girart de Vienne* is also often grouped into this cycle since Guillaume d'Orange is a descendent of Girart. The problematic inclusion of the highly rebellious *Girart de Vienne* in a cycle about intrinsically loyal heroes will be fully addressed in chapter three of this dissertation. The third cycle is referred to as the *geste* of Doon de Mayence*.* It includes epics relating the deeds of traitors and rebel barons: *Raoul de Cambrai* (c. 1200) is the example *par excellence* of this cycle, but others worth mentioning are *Gormont et Isembart* (early 12th century) and *Doon de Maience* (c. 1350)*.* There also exist a cycle of epic poems that deals with the events of Holy War in the East, referred to as the Crusades cycle (late 12th to mid-14th centuries), and a vein of epics written in languages other than Old French, such

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[23] *Le Charroi de Nîmes,* ed. Claude Lachet (Paris*:* Gallimard, 1999).

as the Old Occitan *Canso of Antioch,* or *Roland a Saragossa* (both 12th century), the Old High German *Rolandslied* (c. 1170), or the Old Norse *Karlamagnússaga* (late 13th century).

The period of the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries saw the rise of the epic genre which, after an extended popularity, eventually began to give way to other forms of literature. Its influence could still be detected in works like Froissart's fourteenth-century *Chroniques*, but by the sixteenth century, epic elements were only parodied if present at all, as in Rabelais' *Gargantua*, Cervantes' *Don Quixote,* or Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*. The age of the *chanson de geste* was past, along with the period that had spawned it. Thus, the appearance of the epic of revolt at the apogee of medieval French epic poetry presents an important moment in the development of medieval literature and its influence on medieval thought and culture.

The historical context surrounding the rise of the epic of revolt was one of transition and change in the French-speaking regions of Western Europe. After its height during the Carolingian era (8th and 9th centuries), the power of French kings went into decline. Rivalries with powerful vassals were common, including the kings of England whose large swaths of territories on the continent were held, nominally at least, of the French king. Henry II increased the size of the burgeoning "Angevin Empire" yet further when he married Eleanor, the duchess of Aquitaine, in 1154, much to the further detriment of French royal power. However, the energetic rule of Philip Augustus reversed the fortunes of the French crown. By the end of his reign (1180-1223), Philip had reorganized government through a bureaucracy that placed checks on the power of the nobility, strengthened the financial position of the kingdom of France, and effectively put an end to the Angevin Empire by conquering much of the French-speaking

territories controlled by the king of England.[24] This culminated at the Battle of Bouvines in 1214, when the defeated King John surrendered the county of Anjou, one of the last regions controlled by the English crown on the continent, to Philip.

These changes in the broad political sphere were punctuated by the crusading movement. The First Crusade, called by pope Urban II in 1095, conquered regions within the Seljuk Turk-controlled Levant that were then set up as Christian states. Additional crusades were called throughout the twelfth century, becoming rhythmic as generation after generation of European knights experienced the violence of the Second Crusade in 1145, the Third Crusade after the fall of the Christian Kingdom of Jerusalem in 1187, and the Fourth Crusade in 1198. Crusading continued into the thirteenth century, both in the East and broadening into new geographic spheres, such as the Baltic crusades and the *Reconquista* on the Iberian Peninsula. A twenty-year war against Christian heretics begun in 1209 was also deemed a crusade. Although motivated religiously, this "Albigensian Crusade" had the political consequence of definitively bringing the largely autonomous regions of southern France more firmly under the control of the French crown.

In addition to successful conquest and consolidation of territory, much of the effectiveness of Philip Augustus's reign was due to innovations in written culture. The twelfth century saw the production and retention of records on an unprecedented scale. According to Michael Clanchy's study on the development of medieval literacy *From Memory to Written Record,* the rise of record keeping and the literate public which accompanied it was as impactful

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[24] See John Baldwin, *The Government of Philip Augustus* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986).

on twelfth-century Europe as the printing press was a few centuries later.[25] Not only did Philip

Augustus' government become more efficient through better record keeping, but many regional

magnates also embraced written culture in their local administrations. For example, one of the

most enduring legacies of Count Henry the Liberal was the *Feoda Campanie*, a survey of the

fiefs of Champagne. In 1178, Henry decided to revisit the Holy Land and had an inquest

undertaken for the benefit of his wife Marie and their thirteen-year-old son (who would become

Henry II of Champagne). Just in case he didn't return, the *Feoda Campanie* would allow Marie

to effectively govern the county of Champagne without him. This register of the count's fief

holders was so useful that it was repeated multiple times, becoming the largest documentation of

holdings produced by any principality in medieval France.[26] The counts and their officials soon

came to view their lands and fief holders as a clear grid embodied in the register, as opposed to

the nebulous relationships maintained in oral memory between count and vassals that

characterized the administration of the county before. Other regions like Flanders and Normandy

instituted similar surveys as their administrative structures developed in the twelfth century.

Registers like these were only one part of a general trend in writing things down in the

twelfth century. The "vast enterprise" of recording the relationships and obligations that were

formerly left to oral memory was part of a general flowering of literature of all types.[27] The

Feoda Campania is both an excellent and necessary example of this, for the county of

Champagne is the geographic origin of *Girart de Vienne*. With its vast and fertile lands of gently

rolling hills and sparse forest cut through by the rivers Aube and Seine, the medieval county of

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[25] Michael Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2012).
[26] Theodore Evergates, *The Aristocracy in the County of Champagne, 1100-1300* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 16.
[27] Evergates, *Aristocracy,* 17.

Champagne was important for its vibrant fairs and strategic location on the frontier with the German-speaking Holy Roman Empire. As it played a significant role in the lives of poet and audience, the history of Champagne will often inform our analysis of *Girart de Vienne* and our discussion of its audience throughout this study.

Girart de Vienne was part of what may be termed a literary explosion in the county of Champagne. According to historian John Benton:

> "The remarkable literary flowering of twelfth-century France grew from the fruitful meeting of representatives of different intellectual traditions, the collaboration of the laymen of the feudal courts and of those trained in monastic and cathedral schools. This mixing occurred most often at the courts of great lords, either because authors met personally with that varied and changing society or because they wrote for an audience which they knew had sophisticated and eclectic tastes. Among these centers the court of Henry the Liberal and Marie of Champagne was one of the most important, notable for the education and patronage of its count and countess, for the prominence of the many scholars and authors associated with it in one way or another, and for the quality of its literary remains."[28]

For Dom Jean Leclercq, the court of Champagne was one of the most active literary centers of France in the twelfth century.[29] The tremendous number of high-caliber writers associated with the county, and especially the court centered on the city of Troyes, reads almost like a "Who's Who" of High Medieval authors. Perhaps most famous is Chrétien de Troyes (c. 1160-1191), the writer of Arthurian Romance who, although often employed at other courts, hailed from

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[28] John Benton, "The Court of Champagne as a Literary Center," *Speculum* 36, no. 4 (1961): 551).
[29] Jean Leclercq, *L'Amour vu par les moines au XIIe siècle* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1983), 128.

Champagne and whose writings betray a *champenois* dialect.[30] Saint Bernard (1090-1153) founded Clairvaux abbey some twenty miles southeast of Troyes and was a regular figure on the Champagne literary scene. His *Sermones super Cantica Canticorum* (Sermons on the Song of Songs) was highly influential both on religious writings and the poetry of courtly love.[31] Another monastic known for her writings was Heloise who finished her life as the abbess of the Paraclete, an abbey in the neighborhood of Troyes. It is unknown how widely read her now-famous letters to Abelard were in the twelfth century, but it is clear that she actively participated in the flowering of the literary "garden of love" of Champagne.[32] Gace Brulé, one of the most prolific poets from around the turn of the thirteenth century, also hailed from Champagne.[33] He was a literate knight who wrote songs for many courts around the kingdom of France and beyond, but he never seems to have lost affection for his homeland, *la douce Champaigne*.[34] He even explained the origins of his literary career as an express command from the countess of Champagne: "For the Countess of Brie[35] ordered me to sing."[36]

Literary culture in Champagne witnessed an increased and innovative use of the vernacular alongside the traditional Latin. Upon his return from the Fourth Crusade, Geoffroi de Villehardouin, Marshal of Champagne, wrote *De la conquête de Constantinople*, a chronicle

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[30] William Kibler, *An Introduction to Old French* (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1984), 293.

[31] Leclercq, *L'Amour vu par les moines,* 136.

[32] Ibid, 135.

[33] Benton, "The Court of Champagne," 567.

[34] Gace Brulé, *Chansons de Gace Brulé,* ed. Gédéon Huet (Paris: Librairie de Firmin Didot et Cie, 1892), song XVII, 40.

[35] Marie of Champagne held Brie as her dower. She has been identified as the *contesse* in this poem, with the poet selecting Brie over Champagne or Troyes to maintain the rhyme scheme. See Benton, "The Court of Champagne," 567, and Holgar Peterson Dyggve, *Gace Brulé* (Mémoires de la Société Néophilologique de Helsinki, 1951), 18-23.

[36] *mais la contesse de Brie m'a commandé a chanter,* Gace Brulé, *Chansons*, song XXXIX, 92.

written in Old French and prose, both of which were significant literary departures from established norms.[37] Another crusade chronicler, Jean de Joinville, was from Champagne, as well, although his significant *Life of Saint Louis* was written in a slightly later period than that under discussion here. Jean de Joinville was born around 1224 and grew up reaping the fruit of the literary explosion of the prior generation. Rutebeuf (c. 1245-1285), a burgher of Troyes, and Count Thibaut IV of Champagne (1201-1253) were later writers who also benefitted from the literary culture of Champagne developed in the twelfth century.

There were lesser-known authors, as well. Nicolas de Clairvaux (d. 1178) was a rebellious monk who gained favor as a writer at the court of Champagne despite having been expelled from his monastery for theft and forging letters using Saint Bernard's personal seal. Guiot de Provins wrote love songs and an acerbic critique of the deterioration of courtly largesse called *La Bible* around the turn of the thirteenth century. Guiot's ties within Champagne are clear, as his sobriquet reveals: Provins is an important fair town not far from Troyes and he spent part of his career as a Cistercian monk at the abbey of Clairvaux before joining the lay world as a writer.

The poet behind *Girart de Vienne* was another *champenois* writer. He is rather significant, for alongside a few other enigmatic names like Turold, Taillefer, and Raimbert de Paris, he is one of the only authors of *chansons de geste* whose name is known. The works within the genre are almost always anonymous, but in the opening *laisses* of the song, he identifies himself:

> *Ce fu en mai, qu'il fait chaut et seri,*

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[37] Caroline Smith, ed. *Joinville and Villehardouin: Chronicles of the Crusades* (London: Penguin, 2008), xxiv-xxvi.

que l'erbe est verte et rosier sont flori;

a Bar sor Aube, .I. chastel seignori,

la sist Bertrans en un vergier flori,

uns gentis clers qui ceste chançon fist.

It was in May, when it is warm and peaceful,

The grass is green and the roses are in full bloom;

There, at Bar-sur-Aube, a noble castle,

In a blossoming garden, sat Bertrand,

The noble cleric who wrote this song down.[38]

From this esoteric vignette, we only know that the poet was a cleric named Bertrand who lived at Bar-sur-Aube (a town just a few miles south-east of Troyes). He may have authored another epic song, *Aymeri de Narbonne*, but this is disputed.[39] He seems to have even been somewhat famous in his day, as a contemporary poet makes a reference to his brilliance in *La Chanson de Doon de Nanteuil*.[40] But Bertrand of Bar-sur-Aube's biography is otherwise completely obscure. Or it is *almost* completely obscure, for he belongs to a group of participants in the literary flowering of Champagne who are lost to time, but about whom there is much that we can know. That group are the now-nameless crowds of *trouvères*, jongleurs, and clerics that were the entertainers of medieval society. These performers and composers are important to this study for their role in the development of the epic of revolt. This role was dual, for they represent not only poet but audience as well. In Maurice Keen's study of knighthood in the Middle Ages,

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[38] Bertrand de Bar-sur-Aube, *Girart de Vienne,* vv. 97-109.

[39] For a detailed summary of the scholarly controversy stretching all the way back to the nineteenth century, see the introduction to *Aymeri de Narbonne*, ed. Hélène Gallé (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2007), 179-186.

[40] Ed. Paul Meyer, v. 99.

he showed that knights and clerics "sprang from the same stock and understood each other's worlds, better than is often allowed for."[41] In an early but seminal study on jongleurs, Edmond Faral wrote that the medieval performer was *un être multiple*: a multifaceted individual who could come from a noble, educated background just as likely as any other.[42] Martin Aurell showed that many *trouvères* and *troubadours* were knights themselves.[43] For Richard Kaeuper, chivalric literature like the *chansons de geste* were works that knights read, patronized, and often wrote themselves.[44] The same pressures and aspirations of the knightly caste thus also weighed on the poets who composed the epic songs of the late twelfth century.

There is evidence for this in the songs themselves. To give just a few, brief examples: a jongleur character in *La Chanson de Guillaume d'Orange* is reported as being the best singer as well as the fiercest fighter in all of France.[45] The plot of *Daurel et Beton* centers on the protection of Beton, a young nephew of Charelmagne, from the murderous traitor Gui by the castellan-jongleur Daurel.[46] Performance skills play an important role in the *dénouement*; posing as minstrels, Daurel and Beton infiltrate Gui's military camp and sing their vengeance before a captured Gui.[47] And in *Girart de Vienne*, Girart mistakes his nephew Aymeri's hot-headed aggression for the manners of a traveling performer on their first meeting. When Aymeri begins to rough up Girart's men, Girart exclaims: "Play us music on the viol instead! Aren't you a

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[41] Maurice Keen, *Chivalry* (Yale University Press, 1990), 32.

[42] Edmond Faral, *Les Jongleurs en France au moyen âge* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1910), 2.

[43] Martin Aurell, *La Vielle et L'Épée* (Éditions Aubier Montaigne, 1989), 101.

[44] Richard Kaeuper, "Vengeance and Mercy in Chivalric *Mentalité*," in *Kings, Knights, and Bankers: the collected articles of Richard Kaeuper*, ed. Christopher Guyal (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 379.

[45] V. 1260.

[46] *Daurel et Beton*, ed. Paul Meyer (Paris: Librairie de Firmin Didot et Cie, 1880; Reprinted New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1966).

[47] Laisses XLVII-XLVIII.

jongleur? Sing us a song!"[48] This only enrages Aymeri further, to Girart's continued confusion. Through these examples, we see that the jongleurs who appear in the *chansons de geste* are typically knights themselves, as well, an accurate reflection of a real-world dynamic.

The *chansons de geste,* and the epic of revolt more specifically, are a medieval literature that was, perhaps more than any other genre, written for *and by* its audience. Charles Altman identified "the oral performance and rough syntax of vernacular epic" as participating in the culture of folk art.[49] As such. it was unmediated art, produced by artists who had regular contact with and belonged to the same class as their audience. It was not only for the people, but also of and by the people. Although working within a closely defined tradition, jongleurs and clerics could apply their creativity in treating various themes, "combin[ing] increments" according to their own personalities, life experiences, and the times in which they lived.[50] In this way, they were much like the songwriting crusaders of Rachel Golden's study, transforming the impressions of their experiences into song: "Singing, after all, was their customary manner of encountering the world."[51] In the milieu of a changing social environment and a blossoming literary culture, the knights, clerics, and/or jongleurs who composed, performed, and enjoyed the *chansons de geste* infused the new style of rebellious epic of the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries with their own anxieties and expectations, the traces of which this study seeks to reveal.

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[48] *Car nos vïele un son! Es tu jugleurs? Di nos une chançon !,* vv. 1621-1622.
[49] Charles Altman, "The Medieval Marquee: Church Portal Sculpture as Publicity," in *Popular Culture in the Middle Ages*, ed. Josie P. Campbell (Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1986), 7-8.
[50] William Calin, *Old French Epic of Revolt* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1962), 228.
[51] Rachel Golden, *Mapping Medieval Identities in Occitanian Crusade Song* (Oxford University Press, 2020), 9.

Applying those traces enables us to come to an understanding of the esoteric way that medieval poets and their audiences would have perceived the difference between treachery and rebellion in the *chansons de geste*. Through an investigation of the narrative logic of *Girart de Vienne* and other *chansons de geste*, the divergence between treachery and rebellion can be shown to reside more in *who* commits the act, rather than the act itself. Although they often engage in questionable behavior, Girart and his clan remain heroes on an essential level, so all of their actions have to be viewed through that lens. Therefore, this study shows that it is not so much about a difference between rebellion and treachery, but a difference between rebels and traitors. This difference depends highly on narrative situations, the essential nature of characters, and audience sympathies.

Many scholars see the epic of revolt as a contemporary mirror for the wide political atmosphere of late twelfth- and early thirteenth-century France, a time when power was coalescing in the hands of regional magnates, and especially in those of Philip Augustus. In her edition and translation of *Raoul de Cambrai,* Sarah Kay showed evidence that the bloody rebellion of Raoul against King Louis reflects the political maneuverings of the count of Flanders and Philip Augustus.[52] William Kibler agreed and went further, pointing out that *Raoul de Cambrai* and other *chansons de geste* concerning rebel barons depict cruel and bloody wars of revolt that exploit the "feudal crisis" of the reign of Philip Augustus.[53] It is in this same vein that Wolfgang van Emden read the conflict between Charlemagne and Girart, positing that the genesis of *Girart de Vienne* would be "explained perfectly" by the political atmosphere of the late twelfth century.[54] In *Rebel Barons,* Luke Sunderland continued to build on these ideas,

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[52] See Introduction*, Raoul de Cambrai.* Sarah Kay, ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).
[53] *Raoul de Cambrai,* ed. Kibler, 7.
[54] *Girart de Vienne,* XXXIV.

suggesting that rebellious narratives in the *chansons de geste* provided literary space for ideas about rebellion to be worked out in the rapidly changing political world of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.[55]

In this study, I agree with many of the assumptions of these scholars; however, I narrow the historical lens significantly to focus on the more immediate and contemporary world of the poet and audience. Although historically significant in the *longue durée*, the broader political maneuverings of kings and regional magnates had much less impact on the daily concerns of young knights and wandering *trouvères* than other concerns. This analysis will expose the important narrative elements that enable the modern reader to glimpse the world of the late twelfth century through the eyes of the audiences and the composers of poems like *Girart de Vienne*. Identifying these narrative elements will show that epics of revolt reflect the contemporary expectations and anxieties of a chivalric culture confronted on all sides by a life cycle of errancy, violence, crusades, and shrinking opportunities for social advancement.

In an effort to maintain the perspective of the initial medieval audience, this study places special emphasis on a close reading of the target texts. Medieval audiences were tuned-in to certain narrative signals, some overt and others encoded, that transmitted information about how the characters of their stories were to be perceived and their actions understood. Without a very close reading, the reception of those signals is much less accessible to a modern reader. In addition, traditions of interpretation of medieval texts can also impede clarity. As the scholarly genealogy of ideas seems to be wont to do, one generation develops techniques for describing the

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[55] Luke Sunderland, *Rebel Barons: Resisting Royal Power in Medieval Culture* (Oxford University Press, 2017).

esoteric phenomena of the past, techniques which later generations then problematize, often to the point of dissolution, calling into question both the technique and the existence of the underlying phenomena. This process of deconstruction can be helpful in removing generalizations that obscure nuance and impede understanding of the past on its own terms; however, as it is not necessarily interested in creating replacement terminology, post-modern analytical techniques can also ravage the landscape of expression, leaving scholars stymied as they observe phenomena that they are no longer able to name. Therefore, to achieve maximum clarity, I follow Paul Zumthor's exhortation for a return to the *reading* of medieval texts. As opposed to the "aggressive conquest and appropriation" of a historicizing interpretation or a deconstruction, reading is the "indulgent acceptance akin to initial discovery" that brings us closest to experiencing the original sense: "The ideal end of such a study would be to allow a reader of our time to decode the medieval text according to their own system yet without introducing anachronism."[56] Paula Leverage agrees, suggesting that approaching the medieval epic from the perspective of the audience is "an intrinsically medieval approach" which "can be anchored in what we know, rather than tangentially hypothesizing what we do not know or have evidence for."[57] In her study of the role of memory in medieval culture, Mary Carruthers also concluded that the relationship between a medieval scholar and their texts is significantly different from modern "objectivity" and is grounded in close reading: "Reading is to be digested, to be ruminated, like a cow chewing her cud, or like a bee making honey from the nectar of

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[56] *La finalité idéale d'une telle étude serait de permettre à un lecteur de notre siècle de décoder le texte médiéval, à la fois selon son propre système et pourtant sans anachronism.* Zumthor, *Essai,* 12.

[57] Paula Leverage, *Reception and Memory: A Cognitive Approach to the* Chansons de Geste (New York: Editions Rodopi, 2010), 108.

flowers."[58] In order to come as near as possible to understanding the text in a way that remains true to the original medieval experience, then, this study relies heavily on parsing the individual word choices and narrative context of key passages of the texts under analysis.

Along with close reading, this study relies on a structuralist approach supported by various techniques of discourse analysis. The key textual features relevant to the ideas under analysis here are often scattered throughout the poems. I collect and reassemble these paratactic assertions into the cultural constructs that medieval audiences would have recognized and then analyze them in relation to their broader narrative, historical, and ideological contexts. These become useful models for demonstrating how values, beliefs, and assumptions were communicated through cultural rules and conventions inherent in the poetic language of the songs. The language used, as it relates to the social and historical context, reveals cultural ideologies at work in the texts and shows how poetic discourse actually creates what it sets out to merely describe.

The translations that appear in this study are all mine. The sources that inform my analyses are primarily Old French texts, but there are also medieval Latin texts and a smattering of Old Occitan, as well. In addition, I engage with modern scholarship in both English and French, and occasionally German and Italian. When quoting source texts, I have taken a literal approach to translation. To such an end, I have made no attempt to recreate in English the rhyme, meter, or alliteration of the many poetic medieval texts that I use, choosing instead renderings that highlight the closest *meaning* to what medieval audiences would have understood.

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[58] Mary J.Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture.* (Cambridge University Press, 1990), 164.

I would also like to make a special note about gendered language used throughout this study. Because the majority of characters in the *chansons de geste* are male, the poems reflect the outlook of a masculine audience of knights and barons. In addition, the poet behind *Girart de Vienne* was a male cleric. The pronouns used in this study are therefore overwhelmingly masculine: "he, him, his" are used extensively throughout. I take care to use these in a way that is clearly related to the subjects to which they refer, and I avoid using them in a universal or general way. There are female characters in the *chansons de geste* and some studies have begun to focus on the roles they play in the otherwise patriarchal world of medieval epic.[59] I do specifically address female characters and the role of women in "Chapter One: Treason and Medieval Customary Law," and there are further interesting ideas in this vein, but they, unfortunately, lie beyond the scope of this study.

By uncovering the embedded narrative features that shaped medieval perceptions, we can understand how, after the poet's proclamation that *Girart de Vienne* is a song about great heroes and not about traitors, the audience was not shocked by the ensuing treachery and violent rebellion that dominates the plot but was instead able to identify with the tale and its characters. These features form the basis for the chapters of this dissertation.

We begin with a detailed enumeration of the more egregious episodes of rebellion that form the crucial plot points of *Girart de Vienne* in "Chapter One: Treason and Medieval Customary Law." This gives the reader a sober understanding of the gravity of these episodes from the point of view of medieval legal custom, i.e., from the point of view of royal authority, a

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[59] See, for example, Sarah Kay, "Investing the Wild: Women's Beliefs in the *Chansons de Geste*," *Paragraph* 13, no. 2 (July 1990), 147-163; Gaunt, *Gender and Genre;* Michael Newth, *Heroines of the French Epic* (D.S. Brewer, 2014).

perspective that also marks the medieval epic tradition anterior to *Girart de Vienne* and the epic of revolt. Contextualizing the treasonable behavior is necessary in order to subsequently place in high relief the innovative narrative structures, discourses, and features that the poet introduces to justify these acts and redeem the characters who commit them.

In "Chapter Two: Rebel Barons and the Noble Robber Narrative," the plot structure of *Girart de Vienne* is shown to participate in the "noble-robber" narrative tradition, making the poem an early Robin Hood-like tale. The creation of an outlaw hero offered a counter-theory to medieval ideas about authority and justice where rebellion could be for a noble cause and rebel characters could avoid becoming traitors as they agitate for the redress of wrongs and eventually become reconciled to authority, a luxury not afforded the traitor characters in the *chansons de geste.*

In "Chapter Three: The Three *Gestes* as Early Racial Discourse," I show that by introducing the important concept of the three *gestes* to the epic tradition, *Girart de Vienne* uses essentializing discourse to differentiate between rebels and traitors. Rather than a cyclic organizational scheme for the corpus of *chansons de geste* that it has been and continues to be largely interpreted as, the three *gestes* are shown to organize the characters of the poem into groups. Traits that are considered essential and based on lineage, heredity, and the personality of a representative individual are imputed to those groups. In this way, the moral qualities of characters are revealed through essence and not through actions. This is evidence for medieval thinking about legitimacy and identity that closely parallels definitions of essentialism offered by scholars of racial discourse: demarcating people into a hierarchical set of groups which supposedly share certain traits and tendencies selectively essentialized as absolute and fundamental. I then show how the narrative treatment of the characters belonging to the structure

of the three *gestes* is differential; outcomes are determined more by group affiliation than by direct result of actions. The essence of characters influences the result of disputes and hand-to-hand duels, with God showing his divine favor for the first *geste* (that of the king), while the second *geste* (that of traitors) is condemned to a horrible death and the third *gestes* (that of the rebel heroes) escapes consequences for their actions.

In "Chapter Four: Young Knights and the Imperative to Rebel Symbolically," I show how the young heroes of *Girart de Vienne* are a reflection of the real-world knights who made up the audience for the poem, and therefore the struggles portrayed in the poem correspond symbolically to realities of the audience as well. The young knights of the poem set out into the wider world to seek service in the court of a powerful lord in order to be rewarded with lands. This journey reflects what had been the real-world life cycle of non-inheriting sons of the noble class for generations but was changing rapidly around the time of the composition of *Girart de Vienne*. Long-established patterns of landholding, power-sharing, and social relations were transforming, even as the violent rhythm of crusading in the East drastically increased the already-high mortality rate of the young men who formed the backbone of military power both domestically and abroad. Political power began to coalesce in the hands of the king and large regional magnates leaving smaller nobles, who had heretofore exercised largely autonomous authority over their castellanies and fiefdoms, with less influence both regionally and locally. These same also found fewer opportunities to hold and control lands, as more and more vacant fiefdoms were being absorbed into the holdings of those regional magnates rather than granted as compensation for the feudal service that had formerly represented the primary method of upward social mobility and stability for young knights. These changes reached their advanced stages during the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, coinciding with the rise of the epic of

revolt. The effects of these changes, many on a systemic level, created an atmosphere of existential anxiety for the caste of young warrior-nobles who largely made up the audience for the *chansons de geste*. The deeply felt anxieties found life and shape in narratives of rebellion, creating demand for stories like *Girart de Vienne* and other rebel baron narratives. The rebellion in the poem can thus be understood as a literary reaction, a celebration of youth and its imperative to rebel, a call for a return to old ways, and a catharsis for the anxieties and shrinking opportunities brought on by a changing world.

These chapters each represent key narrative features that answer an aspect of the central question of this study: how the *chansons de geste,* and *Girart de Vienne* more specifically as a case study, differentiate between rebels and traitors and how this plays into the rise of the epic of rebellion. When Girart and his clan commit treason, they do so within the justifying context of a Robin Hood-like narrative. They are noble outlaws who belong to the lineage of the third *geste* and therefore cannot be traitors because they are good on an essential level. Their story of rebellion is a literary reaction to the anxieties and injustices brought on by a changing social world. It is a call for young knights to embrace the imperative to bring the world back into the just order of yesteryear through rebellion.

Chapter One: Treason and Medieval Customary Law

> "Thus treason works ere traitors be espied."
>
> Shakespeare, *The Rape of Lucrece*, v. 361

This chapter is a comparison of some of the more shocking acts committed in *Girart de Vienne* with contemporary medieval legal thinking. In the *chansons de geste* anterior to epics of revolt, acts like these would have been reserved solely for traitor characters. They would also have been met, narratively speaking, with swift and violent punishment. By examining them through the lens of medieval legal custom, this comparison will establish a sober understanding of the gravity of these acts. Contextualizing this treasonable behavior in this way is necessary for a complete understanding of the novelty in thematic material that the epic of revolt introduced into the canon of the *chansons de geste*. It establishes one of the important pressures on the lives of members of the audience of the poem—legal custom that inhibited real-world acts but did not necessarily apply to epic heroes. In this way, the narrative structures, discourses, and features that are analyzed in subsequent chapters will more clearly show how poets of the new style of epic offered innovative and cathartic solutions to their audiences. In a genre where actions reveal narrative truths far more than speech, episodes of oath-breaking, revolt, and treason have much to tell us about how medieval audiences understood themselves and their world.

Medieval vassalage contained an inherent paradox. The aristocratic arrangement where a less powerful noble swore fidelity and pledged his service (military support) to a more powerful overlord in exchange for a grant of land (a fief) generated an interconnected web of dependence that spanned the social echelon from king to squire. The subordination of vassal to lord through

an oath of fidelity was a relationship strong enough to require the ultimate sacrifice; yet those same oaths were frequently violated. Thus, what scholar Robert Boutruche termed the "paradox of vassalage": where a vassal was *willing to die* in the service of his lord but might also just as easily rebel if certain pressures so demanded.[60] Instances of broken oaths seem to have increased significantly during the European High Middle Ages (ca. 1000 to 1250 CE). In the latter part of that same period, a remarkable new type of song appeared within the tradition of Old French *chansons de geste* and began to proliferate. Guillaume d'Orange, Roland, the twelve peers of Charlemagne, popular heroes famous for their unwavering fidelity to the king were now joined by Ogier the Dane, Raoul, Girart, rebellious characters who broke faith and fought against royal power. These new *chansons de geste* of the late twelfth century celebrated rebellion. Epic poetry now seemed to mirror the paradox of vassalage in versified fiction.

Real-world rebellion carried real risks, as the main recourse for oath-breaking was social shame and bloody violence. In *Rebel Barons,* Luke Sunderland wrote: "Can a baron ever legitimately take up arms against his king? The general consensus—medieval and modern—is that the answer is no."[61] Theories of sovereignty inherited from the Roman past influenced political theorists of the time who insisted on orderly deference to lord and king. There was a strong social stigma against traitors, as well, which was, among other places, codified in the *Summa de legibus Normanniae*: "and whoever may be found (in violation of oaths) …should be reputed notorious traitors of the prince."[62] Betrayed lords had the right to deprive vassals of their land, which invariably required violent force in order to dislodge rebels from the entrenched

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[60] Robert Boutruche, *Seigneurie et Féodalité, v.2 : l'apogée (XIᵉ-XIIIᵉ siècles)* (Paris: Aubier, 1970), 207.
[61] Sunderland, *Rebel Barons,* 54.
[62] *et qui ex hoc inventi fuerint…notabiles traditores principis reputantur*. *Summa de Legibus Normanniae.* Ed. Ernest-Joseph Tardif. (Paris: A. Picard et fils, 1881), 39.

protection of thick castle walls. A captured traitor faced the noose, or even worse punishments such as drawing and quartering. The threat of legal violence from a stronger overlord and the social shame attached to treachery formed a potent cocktail of consequences for would-be oath breakers.

This makes the rise of the rebel baron in epic poetry all the more remarkable, for he seems to run counter to social expectations and legal obligations as he flouts the rules and often escapes the consequences entirely. Girart, the main character of our primary object of study, *Girart de Vienne*, is possibly the best example of this kind of rebel hero. Starting as a poor, unlanded squire from the Auvergne, Girart's journey is characterized by open rebellion and anarchistic actions that beg to be classified as treason. Yet Girart consistently eludes punishment and shame, to eventually become the undisputed lord of a rich fief, the walled city of Vienne, and a reconciled ally to the king, Charlemagne. If contemporary legal theory required retribution for rebellion, then the poet of *Girart de Vienne* might have provided a type of counter-theory, a literary tolerance for oath-breaking.

As we have seen in the general introduction to this study, the medieval period, and especially the eleventh through the fourteenth centuries, was a unique moment where the confluence of certain conditions brought about French epic poetry. The *chansons de geste* seemed to respond to the contemporary needs of their audience, first as it coalesced into a self-aware community of shared background, language, and values, and then as it continued to develop and change with time. The distinctive traits, behaviors, and moral codes extolled in medieval epics simultaneously reflected and influenced the self-perception of an audience eager to understand itself. It was always a question of origins, real or imaginary, that established a shared identity in order to resituate the present within a larger, communal perspective that could

encompass both the past and the future. If this sense of community building inherent to the *chansons de geste* is kept in focus, the rise of the rebellious baron within the tradition suddenly appears counter-intuitive, perhaps even counter-productive to the *raison d'être* of epic poetry. Real-world rebellion and treachery were aberrations that threatened the social order and political structure thought to mirror the heavenly kingdom and dominion of God; however, literary depictions of rebellious and treasonous acts became so ubiquitous to the plots of new *chansons de geste* of the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries as to nearly come to characterize the genre.

This seeming paradox is evidence of different types of communities coming into conflict, overlapping and competing for sway over the hearts and minds of medieval aristocratic audiences. These communities were "textual communities," a term that Brian Stock coined to describe how individuals and groups conceptualized their interdependent relationships through literate forms in the Middle Ages.[63] A textual community was based not necessarily on an authoritative written version of a text, but on individuals who had mastered the text and utilized it for reforming the thought and action of a group.[64] Charismatic Saint Bernard and the proliferation of the Cistercian order under his leadership based on the *Regula Sancti Benedicti* is one example of such a textual community. The influence of a textual community depends on the degree to which a society acknowledges written principles of operation in relationships between the individual and the wider community.

An important textual community that impinged on the thoughts and behaviors of the chivalric caste was medieval legal custom. In the Middle Ages, there was not a unitary law code

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[63] Brian Stock, *The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Princeton University Press, 1983).
[64] Stock, *Implication of Literacy,* 90.

that applied in all places evenly. Medieval France was a patchwork of different traditions and attitudes in regard to legality. Legal variations existed geographically to such a degree that traveling individuals who fell afoul of local law could demand to be tried under the rules of their own home region. There was also variation across time, with some very old laws still holding sway centuries after their original inception while others quickly faded away. There is also the problem of the uneven survival of legal texts into the modern era. Thus, engaging with medieval legal custom requires a similar patchwork approach.

With this study's central question of how to interpret treasonous behavior in the *chansons de geste*, I take Adalbert Dessau's thesis as a starting point for considering the impact of the legal textual community on chivalric thinking and behavior:

> The ideas that feudal society formed for itself about treason are not identical to ours, because the Middle Ages especially saw in treason a crime against the mutual bonds of dependance and obligation between lord and vassal that constituted the central element of all of feudal legality.[65]

The role of the lord and vassal relationship as the key element to the medieval legal thinking that most interests us here points toward a number of legal texts that will inform our analysis of the behaviors depicted in the *chansons de geste*. I focus especially on the *Summa de Legibus Normanniae,* a legal treatise written in Latin around 1200. This code of customary laws

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[65] *Les idées que la société féodale s'était formées sur la trahison ne sont pas identiques aux nôtres, parce que le moyen âge voit dans la trahison surtout un crime contre les liens de dépendance et d'obligations mutuelles entre seigneur et vassal qui constituent l'élément central de tout le droit féodal,* Adalbert Dessau, "L'idée de la trahison au moyen âge et son rôle dans la motivation de quelques *chansons de geste*," *Cahiers de Civilisation Médiévale* III, no. 1 (1960), 23.

is contemporary to our epic poems of revolt and representative of contemporary legal thinking in general, but, like most medieval law codes, it is informed by older traditions. I also draw from the Old French *Coutumes de Beauvaisis* and Thomas Aquinas' *De Regimine Principium*.[66] Although written later than our target period (ca. 1300 and 1266, respectively), they detail customary laws and currents of legal thought that stretch much deeper back into time, reflecting ideas that were current in the time around the composition of *Girart de Vienne* and other late twelfth-century epic poems. I also look to the *Lex Salica*, the very old (ca. 500) but very influential Frankish law code.[67] It remained the basis of law throughout the early Medieval period, and although falling out of direct use for a time, its influence on High Medieval legal thinking was still heavy. Analogous events and public reaction to treasonous acts are drawn from sources both contemporary and somewhat less contemporary to *Girart de Vienne* for similar reasoning as the above legal texts.

These texts represent the legal textual community in which the members of the audience for the *chansons de geste* participated. This textual community competed for influence on the thinking and actions of this group with another textual community, that of the composer of rebellious epics and his audience. In this chapter, we focus on the way medieval legal thinking attempted to produce, restructure, or reinforce the behavioral patterns of this community. In the following chapters, we examine the alternative influence of the textual community of rebellion in the *chansons de geste*.

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[66] Philippe de Beaumanoir, *Coutumes de Beauvaisis: Tome I*, ed. Amfédée Salmon, (Paris: Picard et fils, 1899); Thomas Aquinas, *De Regimine Principum,* ed. Roberto Busa, *S. Thomae Aquinatis Opera Omnia*, vol. 3. (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 1980).
[67] *Lex Salica: 100 Titel-Text*, ed. Karl August Eckhardt, (Weimar: Verlag Hermann Böhlaus Nachfolger, 1953).

In *Girart de Vienne,* the insolence displayed by Girart and his clan toward Charlemagne, the king to whom they have sworn ties of fealty, is at times rather shocking. These episodes are never merely narrative minutiae ancillary to the main story either, for most of the major plot points hinge on acts of perfidy. Indeed, Girart's failure to render military service for Vienne, a breach of his duty as a vassal, is the spark that ignites the conflict with Charlemagne that burns for the rest of the story. Other important narrative points turn on rebellious acts such as the attempted murder of the queen and seditious threats to dethrone and kill Charlemagne. A modern audience, especially one steeped in nationalistic paradigms of law and order, can find these plot points paradoxical to the poet's claim that *Girart de Vienne* is a "good song…about the great values of a baron" and "not about treachery" [*bone chançon…de grant baronnie…n'est pas…de traïson,* vv. 1-5]; without some sort of justification, twelfth-century audiences would have found the behaviors depicted no less troubling. Medieval legal thinking condemned acts such as the breaking of oaths of fealty, sedition, and regicide, punishing them with severity and violence, while social customs assured that any barons who committed treasonous acts would be stigmatized. When the code of fealty has been transgressed in the *chansons de geste*, Claude Galley showed that "it is difficult to determine exactly when the crime of treachery, a crime subject to the death penalty, begins."[68] Without the presence of some kind of justification, the acts of rebels and the acts of traitors in epic poetry appear identical.

This apparent incongruity is furthered by the preoccupation for right and wrong behavior that is part of the general flavor of the *chansons de geste*. What is possibly the most surprising element found in the epic of revolt is "the high concern for justice that stirs the narrator, the

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[68] *Il est difficile de déterminer à quel moment commence le crime de félonie, crime passible du châtiment supreme*, Claude Galley, "Dieu, le droit, et la guerre dans diverses chansons de geste," in *La Justice au Moyen Âge*, (Aix-en-Provence: Publications du CUER MA, 1986), 154.

intensity of his sense of right and wrong, and his respect for the rights of each."[69] For example,

in *Girart de Vienne*, one baron looks to the wisdom of his community in order to assure that

proper justice will be observed:

> *.XX. chevaliers ensemble o nos menron*
>
> *toz les plus sages que nos trouver porron,*
>
> *por le jugement dire !*

> We will bring 20 knights together with us
>
> All of the wisest that we can find,
>
> to judge the right and wrong. (vv. 2160-2163)

Wise vassals, capable of good judgment and fully aware of their duties, populate the epic

landscape of the *chansons de geste*. Renowned for his wisdom in the famous axiom "Roland is

courageous, and Oliver is wise" [*Rollant est proz e Oliver est sage*, *The Song of Roland*, v.1093],

Oliver recites the correct behavior of a good vassal to the family council as they decide the fate

of a baron captured in battle:

> *car son seignor doit en par tot aidier ;*
>
> *puis que il tient de lui terres et fiez,*
>
> *as cleres armes, au bon tranchanz espiez,*
>
> *le doit servir qant il en a mestier*

> For one must help his lord in everything;
>
> Since it is from him that he holds lands and fiefs,

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[69] *Le haut souci de justice qui anime le narrateur, l'acuité de son sens du juste et de l'injuste, et son respect du droit de chacun*, Galley, "Dieu, le droit, et la guerre,"149.

With shining weapons, with a good, sharp lance

He must serve him whenever he has need. (vv. 3803-3806)

The captive even recognizes and applauds Oliver's acquisition of wisdom: "you are no fool; whoever has taught you must have been very wise" [*N'estes mie lanier ; molt par fu sages qui vos dut enseignier,* v. 3812]. Even among rebels it is recognized that the ideal vassal should be ever ready to serve his lord through military support, with his very livelihood—his landholdings—as collateral. With such concern for justice and correct behavior, then, one would perhaps expect the poet to consider the bad faith of Girart wrongful behavior.

For instance, after having received Vienne in fief, messengers from Charlemagne come to make Girart aware that he has been delinquent in his duties as a vassal. "It has been 5 years and more…that he gave you Vienne and its fortress; since then you have not rendered so much as one spur in service" [*Bien a .V. anz et plus…qu'il te dona Vïenne et le donjon ; puis n'an randis vaillant .I. esperon*, vv.2150-2152]. In his foundational study on lord-vassal relations, François-Louis Ganshof showed that military support was the "*raison d'être essentielle*" of the lord-vassal relationship; a lord only took on vassals in order to have a retinue of knights at his disposal.[70] Girart's blatant neglect of his duties to Charlemagne upset the balance of the mutual benefits of the relationship. In medieval legal thinking, it was illegal for a vassal to unilaterally break faith with his overlord, especially if he tried to keep control of his lands, which was viewed as *de facto* rebellion. The significance of situations like these marked the French language itself: the modern word *défier* (to defy, provoke, challenge) came from Old French *demission de fief* (disavowal of

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[70] François-Louis Ganshof, *Qu'est-ce que la Féodalité?* 3rd edition, (Brussels: Office de Publicité S.A., 1957),117. For a discussion of how some of Ganshof's conclusions were problematized in the latter part of the twentieth century and then largely reestablished in the twenty-first, see Chapter Four: Young Knights and the Imperative to Rebel Symbolically.

feudal duties).[71] In *Girart de Vienne*, *demission de fief* is something of a familial habit, as Charlemagne reveals that Renier, Girart's brother, has also been completely delinquent in his obligations:

> *Puis que Girart ot Vïenne sessie,*
>
> *et Renier Genvres, la fort cité garnie,*
>
> *ne me servirent vaillisant une alie.*

> Ever since Girart received Vienne,
>
> And Renier received Geneva, the strong and well-supplied city,
>
> Neither has rendered me service worth a crabapple. (vv. 2224-2228)

Charlemagne expects that his lordly obligation, the granting of a fief, is a good deed that should be repaid by his vassals with military support, and the failure to do so is a veritable slap-in-the-face: "but it is true…that tremendous treachery comes from doing good [*Mes il est voirs…que de bien fere vient molt grant felonnie,* v.2224-2225]. Girart had sworn both faith and loyalty to him [*cui il plevi et foi et loiautez,* v. 4099] but now has lied against his promise [*sa foi mentie,* v. 4082], and has committed perjury [*est il parjurez,* v. 4097]. From the perspective of the emperor, at least, Girart has become a traitor.

In later centuries, more peaceful avenues of redress were created to mediate between discordant lords and vassals, but in the late twelfth century, the only recourse the lord had was to confiscate the fief, which almost invariably required armed violence.[72] If the vassal refused to submit, the future of the fief was wholly dependent upon the outcome of combat between the

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[71] Ganshof, *Féodalité,* 131.
[72] Ibid., 131-132.

adversaries. In the poem, the messengers warn Girart that unless he corrects the breach of faith right away, Charlemagne will come with his whole army to immerse the land "in fire and ash" [*en feu et en charbon*, vv. 2153-2157]. Vienne must be surrendered and Girart "must not hold any lands or riches, keeps or towns, castles or fortresses" [*ne doit tenir marches ne richetez, donjons ne viles, chastiaus ne fermetez*, vv. 4100-4101]. If Charlemagne has to take Vienne from Girart's clan by force, "then they will meet a bad end: there will not be one who escapes dismemberment!" [*mal lor ert encontré : n'i avra .I. qui ne soit desmembrez !*, vv. 6105-6106]. For Charlemagne, it is better for a vassal to lose his life [*mieuz veil perdre la vie,* v.6185] than to be unfaithful, and dismemberment is the typical punishment for treachery.

Historian Robert Boutruche found that medieval altercations between lord and vassal often took on the color of God's judgment.[73] Before laying siege to confiscate Vienne, Charlemagne has the reliquary of Saint Simon brought forth, upon which he and his loyal barons swear an oath to take the stronghold by force, even if it should take fourteen years (vv. 2528-2533). The representational details here are significant. The medieval innovation of portable relics introduced flexible new ways to use the power of the cult of the saints beyond the confines of a church building.[74] Audiences of *Girart de Vienne* likely imagined the reliquary of Saint Simon as an ornate chasse of goldwork and *opus lemovicense,* the colorful enameling technique perfected in twelfth-century Limoges that rapidly came to characterize medieval European reliquary design.[75] The inclusion of a gleaming reliquary in Charlemagne's arsenal thus makes a

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[73] Boutruche, *Seigneurie et Féodalité,* 211.

[74] Charles Freeman, *Holy Bones, Holy Dust: how relics shaped the history of medieval Europe.* (Yale University Press, 2011), 88.

[75] Barbara Drake Boehm, "'A Brilliant Resurrection': Enamel Shrines for Relics in Limoges and Cologne, 1100-1230," in *Treasures of Heaven: Saints, Relics, and Devotion in Medieval Europe,* eds. Martina Bagnoli, et al. (Yale University Press, 2010), 149-151.

show of the spiritual power he wields. That the reliquary contains the remains of Saint Simon is also an encoded message for the audience. Drawing on the general corpus of the hagiographical tradition of the preceding centuries, thirteenth-century Jacobus de Voragine's *Legenda aurea* (*The Golden Legend*) typifies Simon as an obedient, zealous adherent to the commandments, the opposite of a faithless vassal.[76] Voragine captures the popular image of Simon that was current throughout the High Middle Ages. Swearing an oath on the relics of that zealot saint sends a powerful message about the gravity with which Charlemagne takes Girart's broken fidelity, showing that the violent force he is about to unleash is a commensurate response.

Dissension threatened the political and social order so dependent on the cooperation inherent in ties of fealty with discord and dysfunction, such that anything leading to or even suggesting a break-down of order was to be taken very seriously. Thinkers of the time grappled with the problem of dissension, creating a discussion that continued into the following century. In *De Regimine Principum* (1266)*,* Thomas Aquinas drew on legal traditions and ideas that stretched back to Antiquity. He addressed *dissensio* as "contrary to the good of peace, which is a matter of special importance to society" [*Dissensio…contrariatur bono pacis, quod est praecipuum in multitudine sociali,* 038 ORP lb 1 cp 7]. Due to their penchant for dissension, aristocracies are more dangerous to the public good than even tyrant kings: "moreover, lesser evil follows from a king, if turned to tyranny, than from the rule of a corrupted aristocracy" [*Ex monarchia autem, si in tyrannidem convertatur, minus malum sequitur quam ex regimine plurium optimatum, quando corrumpitur*, 038 ORP lb 1 cp 6]. In response to the contemporary

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[76] *Symon interpretatur obediens vel ponens tristitiam…Habuit igitur obedientiam praeceptorum per exsecutionem, tristitiam afflictorum per compassionem, zelum animarum per constantem fervorem.* Jacobus de Voragine, *Legenda Aurea: Vulgo Historia Lombardica Dicta,* ed. Th. Graesse (Lipsiaei: Librarie Arnoldianae, 1850), Caput CLIX, 705.

question about whether revolt against the injustice of a tyrannical king was justifiable, Aquinas wrote:

> *Et quidem si non fuerit excessus tyrannidis, utilius est remissam tyrannidem tolerare ad tempus, quam contra tyrannum agendo multis implicari periculis, quae sunt graviora ipsa tyrannide.*

> And indeed, as long as there is not an excess of tyranny, it is better to tolerate for a time the lesser tyranny than, by acting against the tyrant (i.e., rebelling), to be entangled in many perils which are worse than the tyranny itself. [(038 ORP lb 1 cp 7)

For Aquinas, an "excess of tyranny" is when a tyrant "rages against the entire society" [*in totam communitatem desaeviat,* 038 ORP lb 1 cp 6]; therefore, some trampling of the rights of the aristocracy by the king does not qualify as an excess of tyranny. In fact, Aquinas insists that uprisings tend to only result in more tyranny, whether from the drastic measures taken by the incumbent tyrant to suppress revolt or from the greater tyranny required to crush the dissensions and factions formed to oppose its successful replacement. It was therefore better to bear tyrannical oppression in silent patience.

It was a vassal's duty to uphold every aspect of the interests of his lord, in deed and in word. This was articulated in the *Summa de Legibus Normanniae*:

> *Fidelitatem autem tenentur omnes residentes in provincia duci facere et servare. Unde tenentur se ei innocuos in omnibus et fideles exhibere, nec aliquid contra ipsum incommodi procurare, nec ejus inimicis manifestis prebere consilium vel juvamen.*

> But all those dwelling in the province are held to have and preserve faithfulness to the duke. For which they are held to show themselves as harmless to him in all things, and

not to participate in anything troublesome against him, and not to offer council or help to his manifest enemies. (Capitulum XIII)

Acts and speech that harm the interests of the overlord are clearly in direct opposition to the duties of a vassal. In the Middle Ages, rulers could respond to dissenting words with terrible retribution. Although somewhat later in the Middle Ages, an event reported in the fourteenth-century chronicle *Les grandes chroniques de France* is representative of the reaction by authorities to dissension that characterizes the entire medieval period.[77] A certain Symon Poulliet was stretched out and tied to a wooden rack "just like the meat in a butcher's shop" in the *halles* of Paris [*aussi comme la char en la boucherie*]. After being quartered and decapitated, his body was hung on the gallows like a common thief. This was punishment for the crime of simply stating his opinion about the legitimacy of royal claimants to the throne of France: "and all of this just because he had said…that the right to the kingdom of France belonged more to Edward, king of England, than to Philip of Valois" [*et tout pour ce qu'il avoit dit…que le droit du royaume de France apartenoit miex à Edouart roy d'Angleterre que à Phelippe de Valois*]. Expressing dissent carried dangerous possibilities for authority, for it could have the indirect effect of inciting people to revolt. Even more dangerous was speech that directly motivates rebellion: sedition.

It may come as no surprise that Girart and his clan not only break faith through omission of their vassalage, but they also come to betray Charlemagne through seditious speech, as well. In the oral world of the *chansons de geste,* words have power. More important details about intentions and feelings are communicated to the audience through the speech of characters than

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[77] *Les grandes chroniques de France,* vol. 9. Ed. Jules Viard. Paris, Honoré Champion, 1937, 270.

through narration. It is thus never lightly that an individual might threaten to remove the king from his position on the throne. As hostilities intensify, Renier makes a serious oath to depose Charles and replace him with his nephew:

> *Sire, par la foi que doi Dé,*
>
> *jamés li roi, ce sachiez de verté,*
>
> *ne renterra en France le reinné,*
>
> *si l'avra ainz chierement conparé.*
>
> *Par cel apostre q'an quiert en Noiron pré,*
>
> *se l'avions ocis ou afolé,*
>
> *d'Aimerïet ferons roi coronné.*

> Sire, by the faith that I owe God,
>
> Know this is true: never shall the king
>
> Return to France his royal domain,
>
> Until he has paid dearly.
>
> By that apostle sought in Nero's Field,[78]
>
> Once we have killed or vanquished him,
>
> We will crown young Aymeri king. (vv. 2447-2453)

In another *chanson de geste, Le Charroi de Nîmes* (c.1140)*,* the protagonist Guillaume d'Orange makes a similarly threatening speech against his suzerain:

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[78] *Noiron pré* (Latin *Pratum Neronis*) or Nero's field, the supposed site of the martyrdom of St. Peter; see Robert Auty, *Traditions of Heroic and Epic Poetry,* (London: Modern Humanities Research Association, 1980), 132.

Mes, par l'apostre qu'en a Rome requiert,

Cuit li abatre la corone del chief :

Ge li ai mis, si la vorrai oster. »

So, by the apostle sought in Rome,

I intend to knock the crown from his head:

I put it there, now I want to remove it. (vv. 434-436)

Guillaume and Renier's threats both include the language of a solemn oath sworn on Saint Peter. In comparison with the procedural enactment of the oath between lord and vassal, the swearing in these seditious speeches is a direct aberration of the sacred vow vassals make. When a vassal swore an oath of *fidelitas* (faith, or faithfulness; hence the modern legal notion of "good faith") to his suzerain, it was solemnized by a vow, often upon *res sacra*: holy relics or a gospel book. Ganshof proposed that the combination of oath and sacred vow came about to ensure strict observance of the duties of a vassal: "To violate a vow was to become guilty of perjury, in other words a mortal sin. In a society where the faith was general, that was a considerable something."[79] From this point of view, to swear sedition upon the apostle Peter must have seemed downright blasphemous to medieval audiences.

There are contrasts between Guillaume's speech and those made in *Girart de Vienne* that highlight the fundamental differences between the two stories. Guillaume makes his in private to his nephew alone, but Renier's is made publicly. Another aspect of Guillaume's speech corresponds with the observation of Wolfgang Van Emden about many seemingly seditious speeches in the *chanson de geste*: "Nor is his threat to kill the king necessarily a grave blemish:

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[79] *Violer un serment, c'était se rendre coupable d'un parjure, c'est-à-dire un péché mortel. Dans une société où la foi était générale, voilà quelque chose de fort important*, Ganshof, *Féodalité,* 45.

such threats are often, in the highly dramatic technique used by the *trouvère*s, given to one member of a clan to allow other members to show their essential loyalty by rebuking the speaker."[80] Thus, when Guillaume's sole interlocutor, Bertran, says "Sire, speak only as a true baron. You must not threaten, but rather help and aid your rightful lord against all men" [*Sire, ne dites pas que ber. Vo droit seignor ne devez menacier, contre toz homes secorre et aïdier*, vv. 437-439], he displays his intrinsic fidelity and reproves Guillaume for his lapse in judgment. To which Guillaume assents: "You speak true, good nephew; one must always love loyalty" [*Vos dites voir, beau niés ; La leauté doit l'en toz jorz amer*, vv. 440-441]. Guillaume may disagree with his king, but he is no rebel.

Another seditious speech, this one by Oliver, then, sits in high contrast to Guillaume's, for no clan member contradicts his words with a call back to loyalty; nor is his speech private, but rather delivered directly to Charles himself. Oliver accuses the emperor of "great error" and "sin" in trying to confiscate Vienne from Girart [*gran tort; pechiez*, vv.4046, 4048]. Oliver swears "by the apostle sought in Nero's field, there in Rome where he is adored" [*Par cel apostre c'on quiert en Noiron prez, la dedanz Rome, ou il est aorez,* vv. 4049-4050] to come with his four redoubtable uncles [*toz catre…qui tant sont redoté*, vv.4059-4060] and forty thousand knights into the heart of France where they will leave no castle, town, tower of stone, nor rich stronghold standing (vv.4062-4067). Oliver's seditious threats to depose Charlemagne, sealed by a vow to Saint Peter, are the very antithesis of the oaths of vassalage.

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[80] Wolfgang Van Emden, "What Constitutes a *Bon Larron*?" in *Guillaume d'Orange and the* Chansons de Geste*: essays presented to Duncan McMillan.* Eds. Wolfgang Van Emden and Philip E. Bennett. (Reading: Société Rencesvals, 1984), 203.

The reckless clan of Girart are rebels in both words and deeds, but the most severe of their trespasses extends beyond the expectations of the lord-vassal relationship to one with the power to undermine the entire social fabric: regicide. In laisse XLVIII, Aymeri, Girart's nephew preparing to become a knight and vassal of the emperor, is at dinner with the court. The queen, "seeking to offend" the newcomer [*a desrenier se prist*, v.182], tells a story about the secret mockery she once made of his uncle that she has been keeping to herself for some time: "Now listen, courageous knight, I will tell you something that I have never told before" [*Ore entandez, franc chevalier gentil, si vos dirai ce c'onques mes ne dis*, v. 1828]. Years earlier, Girart and the queen, who was then merely the widowed duchesse of Burgundy, had a failed betrothal, due mostly to misogynistic pride on the part of Girart. The jilted duchesse was quickly snatched up and married by Charlemagne, who gave Vienne to Girart as consolation for his lost chance at holding the duchy of Burgundy. In Girart's enthusiasm to take possession of his new fief, he readied to depart that very night, nearly leaving without showing proper gratitude to his lord, until other knights stopped him: "Go to his feet, Girart, noble knight; when the gift is great, one should show real appreciation" [*Va l'an au pié, Girart, franc chevalier; granz est li dons, bien l'an doiz mercïer*, vv. 1460-61]. So, slinking into the sumptuous bedroom [*la chanbre pave,*[81] v. 1483] where the fire had been allowed to die down to embers, Girart approached the sleeping emperor to kiss his foot, the customary ritual of gratitude between vassal and lord. But the new queen lay awake and seething. Much like the vengeful queen Zara, who in *The Mourning Bride* said "heav'n has no rage, like love to hatred turn'd, nor hell a fury, like a woman scorn'd," this

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[81] *Pavee* is a useful adjective for creating assonance that means "paved, finished (floor)." It also functions as a *topos,* indicating a well-appointed, comfortable room [*sale pavee*] or even the finer battlefield tent of a king: *paveillon* vs. the simple *tref* of the rank and file; cf. vv. 1483, 1960, 1392, 2588, 2656-7, 6169.

powerful woman was ready for vengeance.[82] She quickly slipped her own foot out of the bed

before the kneeling Girart. In the low light, he mistook it for Charlemagne's and planted a kiss

upon it. "Naked skin on naked skin," the narrator exclaims in horror, "such malice this was!"

[*Tout nu a nu*, *ce fu grant enconbrier!*, v. 1470]. Never the wiser, Girart departed for Vienne,

fully believing that his kiss had been legitimate (Laisses XXXV-XLI).

"And I am very well avenged by it!" the queen declares [*Molt en sui bien venchiee!*,

v.1856]. To which, a horrified Aymeri replies:

> *« Dame…par le cors seint Richier,*
>
> *se ce feïtes dont je vos oi pledier,*
>
> *ce fu putage, a celer nel vos quier !*
>
> *Molt est preudom dant Girart le guerrier :*
>
> *de duel morrai se ne le puis vengier ! »*

> "Lady, by the body of Saint Richier,
>
> If you truly did this thing which I just heard you tell,
>
> Then it was a whoredom, to put it plainly!
>
> Lord Girart is a very honorable warrior:
>
> I will die from agony if I cannot avenge him!" (vv. 1864-1868)

Then, in front of the entire court, hot-headed Aymeri flings a sharp dagger at the queen. The

knife would have pierced her heart had she not fallen backwards in panic. Instead, it embeds

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itself deep into the post behind her. As the room explodes in a furor, Aymeri fights his way through the angry crowd to reach his horse and escape into the night.

In the Middle Ages, threatening the life of a royal was a serious crime, whether successful or merely attempted. According to S.H. Cuttler's study on medieval laws about treason, "regicide was obviously the gravest of all treasons," carrying with it tremendous social stigma borne of reverence for the divine election of royalty.[83] In "Regicide and Revolution," Michael Walzer wrote:

> [Medieval] monarchy depends upon an ideology of personal rule. While it acquires over time a great variety of justifications…it remains fundamentally dependent upon a set of beliefs about the person of the king. Subjects must feel some awe in the royal presence; they must sustain some faith in the king's sanctity, power, and wisdom; they must believe in his inviolability. The murderers of kings presumably do not share these feelings and beliefs, though we may doubt that they escape them entirely…most royal assassins…must have died fully expecting to suffer in hell forever.[84]

To illustrate the level of social approbation that regicide carried, we may look to the example of Guichard, a medieval bishop of Troyes, who was accused of poisoning a number of important individuals. Garnering the most public ire were the scandalous whisperings that the bishop had been behind the death of Queen Jeanne of France.[85] Jeanne came from the same

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[83] S.H Cuttler, *The Law of Treason and Treason Trials in Later Medieval France*, (Cambridge University Press, 1981), 28.

[84] Walzer, Michael. "Regicide and Revolution," *Social Research* 40, no. 4 (Winter 1973), 617-642; 617.

[85] See Melina Rokai, "Constructing a Traitor: The Case of Guichard of Troyes," *Anali Pravnog fakulteta u Beogradu* 68, no. 1 (2020), 68-87; 73-75.

County of Champagne as Bertrand de Bar-sur-Aube, the poet behind *Girart de Vienne*, and she was beloved by the citizens of Troyes:

> *Jhenne de France couronnée*
>
> *Et qui fu de Champaigne née…*
>
> *De sa mort ne fu pas revel*
>
> *Quant honneur deust Champaigne avoir*
>
> *Quant elle perdi ung tel hoir.*
>
> *Champegnoise et Champaigne ama.*
>
> *Male semence cil sema*
>
> *Qui celle dame a la mort mist.*

> Jeanne of France crowned queen
>
> Who was also born in Champagne…
>
> No revelry was had from her death.
>
> How much honor Champagne was to have
>
> At the time when we lost such an heiress.
>
> Of Champagne she was, and it was Champagne she loved.
>
> Bad seeds were planted
>
> by he who put this lady to death. (Rigault, 232)

This anonymous poem by a local cleric showed that the public placed the blame squarely on Guichard. "More than a thousand" enraged *champenois* were ready to testify against the bishop [*tesmoingz y ot plus d'un millier*]; "each one became his persecutor, each one ran forth to maul

him" [*chascun fu ses persecuteurs…chascun courroit pour lui pillier*].[86] The official order of investigation reveals that it was this very public outcry that led to Guichard's arrest and trial. Word had "long been brought to the ears of His Holiness" of the "damnable acts" that "the venerable brother the bishop of Troyes (if he even still deserved to be called venerable)" had "shamefully" committed, "to the detriment of his own salvation and reputation."[87] This example shows that public opinion was stacked against anyone accused of murdering a beloved queen. Would the story of Aymeri's attempted "reginacide" have been any less heinous for contemporary audiences?

Within the world of the *chanson,* Girart's family found Aymeri's reaction completely appropriate. When asked to accept humiliating penance on the part of the queen for her affront against Girart, one member of the clan responds "You're talking about forgiveness. We'll never agree to peace or truce until she is parted from her head!" [*Vos parlez en pardon…. trive n'acorde jamés jor n'en prandron tant qu'ele parde le chief soz le menton*, vv. 2262-2265]. This defiant family was ready to wade ever deeper into the waters of rebellion. In a later raid on Charlemagne's war camp, the rebels flush the queen from her tent. Catching her around the waist, Aymeri carries her to a gleeful Girart who immediately draws his sword to strike her down "with immense wrath" [*par grant aïroison*, vv.2658-2663]. But Aymeri stops him, shouting:

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[86] Abel Rigault, *Le Procès de Guichard, évêque de Troyes* (Paris: A. Picard et Fils, 1896), 233.

[87] *Pridem ad auditum apostalatus nostri perducto quod venerabilis frater noster Trecensis episcopus, si dici venerabilis mereatur, ad inconsulta dilapsus et ad execranda quelibet convertens dampnabiliter actus suos, sortilegiorum perversis operibus se immerserat turpiter, in fame ac salutis proprie detrimentum, et, eo illa nequiter exercente ac intervenientibus ipsis, clare memorie Johanna, regina Francie, dire mortis sustinuerat passionem. Rigault, Le Procès de Guichard,* 269.

Oncle Girart, por Deu, ne l'ocion !

Einz la menrons a Vïenne el donjon;

a noz talenz en prendrons vengison.

Uncle Girart, for God's sake, don't kill her!

First let's take her to Vienne, into the keep

where we will take our vengeance with her however we want. (vv. 2665-2667)

The kind of violence Aymeri means by *a noz talenz* (literally, according to our desires) seems obvious, but just to rule out any other possible interpretation, compare this to situations in other parts of the *chanson* where similar wording is accompanied by specific details about ravaging a woman's body sexually. Roland captures Alda (*Aude*), Girart's niece, and plans to take her back to his tent where he might do to her all of his desires [*la en feïst totes ses volentez*, v. 3405]. Calling for help, Alda expresses what she knows is about to happen to her body:

Olivier frere, ou estes vos alez ?

Ja m'en veut ci li niés Charle porter

en l'ost le roi, por mon cors vergonder

moie ert la honte, vos sera reprové !

Mes ja ne place au roi de majesté

que de mon cors soit fete tel vité !

Oliver brother, where are you?

Truly Charles's nephew wants to carry me away

Into the camp of the king, in order to degrade my body,

The shame will be mine, the blame will be yours!

> Never again shall I be pleasing to the King of Majesty
>
> If such depravity is done to my body! (vv. 3407-3412)

Fortunately, in both instances the women are rescued before experiencing any harm, but the implications of these failed abductions are disquieting. These two episodes peer into the different societal attitudes towards rape that existed in the Middle Ages. In Albrecht Classen's estimation, the preoccupation with sexual violence in medieval literature and law codes "does not only confirm a literary tradition from antiquity to modern times, it also reflects serious social problems in [medieval] society…represent[ing] a concrete criminal problem at all echelons of society."[88] Although the image of medieval women as merely the chattel of men in the modern popular imagination is inaccurate, women were still quite limited in their social and political autonomy. Another persistent myth about the period is the ubiquity of rape: the belief that medieval society was so barbaric that rape was an everyday occurrence. As Kathryn Gravdal wrote illustrated*:*

> "Medieval discourse suggests that men were not only aware of the criminality of rape, they were also keenly conscious of its importance as a legal and social issue. As early as the tenth century, Hincmar of Reims cried out against the abusive practice and toleration of sexual violence. The great jurists of the twelfth century struggled to redefine rape and focused on the heated issue of just punishment as well as the difficult question of compensating the victim. In the thirteenth century, canonists were so attuned to the

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[88] Albrecht Classen, *Sexual Violence and Rape in the Middle Ages* (Berlin, De Gruyter, 2011), 231.

subtler forms of sexual abuse that they attempted to create laws against fraudulent seduction."[89]

The *Lex salica* specifically forbade rape (*rapio, raptum; traho; virtus micatus,* capitula XIV, XV) at all social levels. These early Frankish law codes were omnipresent during the Merovingian and Carolingian dynasties.[90] Although they fell out of direct use in the courts of the High Middle Ages (until the mid-fourteenth century, when interest in the laws was renewed to support the exclusion of female succession to the French throne), they were still the foundational tenets of Frankish law that contributed much to later medieval legal customs and thinking. Law codes more contemporary to *Girart de Vienne* also prohibited abduction and rape, imposing serious penal consequences. The *Coutumes de Beauvaisis,* for example, considered rape (*fame esforcier*) to be on the same level as murder and treason, for which the penalty was severe. "Anyone who is accused and convicted in a criminal case of either murder, treason, homicide, or rape, shall be dragged through the streets and hung" [*Quiconques est pris en cas de crime et atains du cas, si comme de murtre, ou de traïson, ou d'homicide, ou de fame esforcier, il doit estre trainés et pendus,* ch. XXX, 824].

The medieval legal system carried consequences for both women and men in cases of rape. The difficult burden of proving sexual assault lay with the woman[91] and the inability to prevent her rape could be seen as a serious moral failure on the part of husbands, fathers, or brothers, men who carried social responsibility for her. There were also extreme consequences for a woman who was unable to prove her accusations. Writing later than the twelfth century but

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[89] Kathryn Gravdal, *Ravishing Maidens: Writing Rape in Medieval French Literature and Law* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), 141-142.

[90] Katherine Fischer Drew, *The Laws of the Salian Franks* (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), 52-53.

[91] See *Coutumes,* ch. XXX, 928.

recording a custom that was current from the early to the late Middle Ages, Jean Froissart

reported the sensational court case over the rape of Marguerite de Carrouges in 1386.[92] Unable to

come to a verdict, the court allowed guilt to be determined by hand-to-hand combat between

Marguerite's husband, Jean de Carrouges, and her accused assailant, Jacques Le Gris, with her

own life as gage: "for, if the battle turned to defeat for her husband, it had been sentenced with

no possibility of appeal that she would be burned and her husband hung" [*Car, se la bataille

tournoit à desconfiture sur son mary, il estoit sentencié que sans remède nul on l'eust arse et son

mary pendu*].[93] Alda's cry for help to her brother Oliver reflects the same distressing stakes that

cases of rape entailed for both women and men: "The shame will be mine, the blame will be

yours!" [*moie ert la honte, vos sera reprové* !, v. 3410]. In this case of attempted rape, both Alda

and Oliver are exposed to serious risk.

Caroline Dunn showed how female experiences of ravishment were diverse—some cases

of abduction could even be a means of escaping an unwanted marriage in order to be with a

desired partner: "A female 'victim' in a ravishment prosecution may not have viewed herself as

such, and a father or husband complaining that his daughter or wife had been stolen away might

gloss over how she left with her so-called abductor willingly."[94] This may explain the surprising

shift in tone that Roland's attempted abduction takes on later in *Girart de Vienne*. Roland

expresses his regret, not for his missed carnal opportunity with Alda, but that it left her available

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[92] Jean Froissart, *Chroniques,* ed. J. Kervyn de Lettenhove (Brussels: Devaux, 1867-1877; reprinted Osnabrück: Biblio Verlag, 1967) vol. 12, 37.

[93] The case of Marguerite de Carrouges has been popularized in *The Last Duel* by Eric Jager (New York: Broadway Books, 2004) and in the recent film by director Ridley Scott (2021), of the same name and based on Jager's book. Both paint a harrowing picture of the situation, highlighting the suffering cases like this produced for men and women alike.

[94] Caroline Dunn, *Stolen Women in Medieval England: Rape, Abduction, and Adultery, 1100-1500* (Cambridge University Press, 2013), 5.

for competition from other men: "[Another knight] is making acquaintance with that beautiful Alda of alluring face, and thus he will estrange me from her love" [*acointiez s'est de bele Aude au vis fier, et si m'a fet de s'amor estrengier*, vv. 3938-3939]. Alda herself also comes to view her prior encounter with Roland differently. Having heard rumors that Roland was in love with her ("because some consider you want to be my beloved, as I have heard from many people" [*por ce que l'en vos tient por mon ami, si com ge l'ai de plusors genz oï*, vv. 4690-91]), Alda begins flirting with Roland across the walls of Vienne (laisses CXXVII-CXXIX). This flirtation leads to betrothal and ultimately to their familiar story as the star-crossed lovers of *La Chanson de Roland.* Aymeri's seizure of the queen, on the other hand, remains an unambiguous abduction attempt. The silence of the poet towards the moral acceptability of the episode should not be read as tacit approval.

There are few historical precedents for the successful abduction and rape of a queen; to my knowledge no medieval cases exist that could be used to gage what an audience's reaction might have been to the narrative portrayal of such. Renaissance era Mary Queen of Scots is perhaps the closest proxy. The public received the news of Mary's marriage to the earl of Bothwell with consternation, for there were widely believed rumors that her new husband had abducted, raped, and forced her into the marriage.[95] In the aftermath of the suspicious death of her 2nd husband, Bothwell and a contingent of armed men ambushed Mary and led her to Dunbar castle, under the pretense of keeping her "out of harm's way." The alarm was sounded by some to urge other citizens to attempt a rescue, but to no avail. Shortly after, a wedding of Mary to Bothwell was announced, but the strange circumstances prompted wide-spread speculation of impropriety, fueled by the words of eyewitnesses such as James Melville, one of Mary's men

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[95] Jane Dunn, *Elizabeth and Mary: Cousins, Rivals, Queens* (London: Harper Collins, 2003), 63.

who was present at Dunbar: "The Queen could not but marry him, seeing he had ravished her and laid with her against her will."[96] The level of public outrage at Mary's abduction gives an idea of how audiences of *Girart de Vienne* a few centuries earlier may have reacted. Could Aymeri's actions toward the queen have been viewed with any less horror? For Kathryn Gravdal, "medieval poets seem highly cognizant of the complexities of discussing sexual violence. Their representations of rape are neither simplistic, undifferentiated, nor thoughtless."[97] It is clear that Aymeri's attempted rape was a complicated, yet nevertheless shocking, moment for the contemporary audience.

The attack on the queen's life and the attempted abduction add to those other acts of rebellion: broken fealty and sedition. Near the end of the *chanson,* Girart and his clan commit yet one more highly treasonous act. One morning deep into the siege of Vienne, the king and his entourage go hunting in the nearby forest (laisses CLXXIX-CLXXX). When the dogs flush a monstrous boar out of a thicket, Charles rides after it with such vigor and haste that his men cannot keep up. Unaware that he is now alone, Charlemagne pursues the boar until the dogs finally bring it to bay under a tree beside a flowing stream. Charles slays the beast with his sword and blows on his horn in celebration. It is only when he comes down from his elation and finds himself suddenly surrounded by enemies that he realizes the danger he has placed himself in. Girart, Renier, Aymeri, Oliver, and a few other family members had stealthily tracked Charles through the forest and now had the emperor alone and at their mercy. "Kill him, good uncle!" exclaims Aymeri. "Cut his head off right here and now! Then this war and conflict will finally end" [*Biaus oncle, car l'oci! Pran en la teste tot meintenant ici ! Si remendra la guerre et li*

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[96] Antonia Fraser, *Mary Queen of Scots* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1978), 316.
[97] Gravdal, *Ravishing Maidens,* 142.

estris, vv. 6418-6420]. Thus, the final rebellious act of Girart and his kin is the ambush and capture of Charlemagne, the emperor himself.

Now, despite all of these treasonable acts, *Girart de Vienne* is not a villain's origin story. As we have seen, the characters consistently reject the accusations of treachery hurled at them by other characters loyal to the emperor Charlemagne. It will be remembered that the poet introduces the poem as a good song [*bone chançon*], one not at all about arrogance [*orgueil*] or treason [*traïson*, vv. 1-5]. The knights featured are hardly shameful oath-breakers, but rather they are "barons blessed by Jesus" (*barnaje qui Jhesu beneïe*, v. 6). The dénouement of the narrative ultimately brings positive consequences to Girart's clan. How, then, are we to interpret these rebellious episodes when the characters committing the treasonous actions are the protagonists of the story, the "good guys"? In the following chapters, we turn to analyzing specific narrative structures, discourses, and features of the poem that together influenced audience perceptions, justifying these treasonable acts and redeeming the characters who commit them.

Chapter Two: Rebel Barons and the Noble Robber Narrative

> La révolte ne va pas sans le sentiment d'avoir soi-même,
>
> en quelque façon, et quelque part, raison.
>
> Albert Camus [98]

In the preceding chapter, I compared medieval legal tradition with some of the more heinous acts of rebellion in *Girart de Vienne*. I suggested that laws and legal custom represented one textual community that competed for sway over the thoughts and behavior of the knights and barons who formed much of the audience for the *chansons de geste.* In this chapter, I propose that the epic of revolt represents another textual community, one where performer and audience establish a different perspective on treason and rebellion. Luke Sunderland argues that "the *chansons de geste* provide a literary space for thinking through the difficult yet vital task of revolt," contributing a rival discourse to medieval political thinking.[99] Opposition between barons and king in medieval epic, under certain circumstances that lead to reconciliation, functions as a fail-safe mechanism against tyranny, teaching nobles their moral imperative. I build on this idea of a rival moral discourse by positing that the epic of revolt approaches this problem primarily through strategic narrative structures. The type of structure may vary from poem to poem, but it is always aimed at placing rebellion within a justifying context. This chapter focuses primarily on an analysis of the rebellious episodes in *Girart de Vienne*, revealing that the narrative justifications for treasonous behavior are embedded within the structure of a

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[98] *Rebellion does not happen without the feeling that somehow, in some way, it is justified.* Albert Camus, *L'Homme révolté* (Paris: Gallimard, 1951), 25.
[99] Sunderland, *Rebel Barons,* 56.

"noble robber narrative," a Robin Hood-like outlaw tale where the hero turns to rebellion in response to injustice.

In western culture, and especially the anglophone world, Robin Hood is the definitive outlaw tale. Pushed into outlawry by injustice, Robin Hood robs from the rich to give to the poor and avenges wrong doings. He is a good rebel who opposes corrupt authority in order to restore justice. Quintessentially medieval, Robin Hood is the "only lasting myth to arise from the High Middle Ages and the last Western legend to achieve a sustained international appeal."[100] The five surviving ballads of known medieval origin date from the fifteenth century, but an earlier reference to the outlaw hero in *Piers Plowman* (c. 1378) suggests that the legend had already become part of English culture by the late fourteenth century. This is, of course, later than the twelfth-century rise of the epic of revolt, but the roots of the Robin Hood legends may actually stretch even further back so as to be contemporaneous with poems like *Girart de Vienne.*

One possible origin for the Robin Hood tales may come from the life of twelfth-century Eustace the Monk. As a young knight, Eustace entered a monastery for a time (hence the epithet of "the Monk") but renounced his vows in order to participate in an unsuccessful judicial duel over the wrongful death of his father. Then, after a time working as seneschal, Eustace fell afoul of his lord Renaud, the count of Boulogne, and thus began a career as an outlaw and, eventually, a pirate of the Channel. Stories about Eustace are found throughout chronicles of the thirteenth century, as well as in several fictionalized romances, like *Le Roman d'Eustache le Moine*.[101] Glyn Burgess noted that the exploits of Eustace became famous and legendary, even within his

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[100] Jeffrey Singman, *Robin Hood: the Shaping of a Legend* (London: Greenwood Press, 1998), 1.
[101] *Le Roman d'Eustache le Moine,* eds. A.J. Holden and J. Monfrin (Louvain: Peeters, 2005).

own lifetime, and were likely influential on other tales about outlaws.[102] The possibility of such

was suggested as early as 1834, when Francisque Michel called Eustace a "sort of Robin Hood

of the Boulonnais."[103] More recently, Robin Hood scholars like James Holt have pointed to

Eustace as being very likely one of the earliest influences on the actual Robin Hood legend.[104]

Stephen Knight and Thomas Ohlgren even showed evidence that the life of Eustace the Monk

had direct influence on the Robin Hood ballads.[105] In addition, it is highly likely that the tales

about Eustace influenced other continental stories about rebels as well. It is not hard to imagine

that the tale of Eustace the outlaw might have reached the county of Champagne and influenced

Bertrand de Bar-sur-Aube and *Girart de Vienne.* Such speculation aside, it is clear that the

popularity of Eustace the Monk is a testament to twelfth-century interest in stories about

rebellious knights and outlaws.

In addition to the work of Robin Hood scholars like Holt, Keen, Knight, and Ohlgren

mentioned above, I engage in this study with historians, anthropologists, and literary critics of

the "noble robber narrative," a broader theory about the outlaw hero story type in which the

Robin Hood legends participate. This theory was first articulated by Eric Hobsbawm in the

highly influential *Bandits.*[106] As Hobsbawm's most important work, *Bandits* has remained in

print since its first publication in 1969 and has received multiple revisions and updates as the

field of bandit studies evolved into the twenty-first century. *Bandits* investigates the structure of

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[102] Glyn Burgess, *Two Medieval Outlaws: Eustace the Monk and Fouke Fitz Waryn* (Rochester, NY: Boydell and Brewer, 1997), 4-6.

[103] "*Espèce de Robin Hood boulonnois*," Francisque Michel, *Roman d'Eustache le Moine* (Paris: Silvestre, 1834), iv.

[104] James C. Holt, *Robin Hood* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1982), 62.

[105] Stephen Knight and Thomas Ohlgren, eds. *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales* (Kalamazoo: Western Michigan University Press, 2000), 672-673.

[106] Eric Hobsbawm, *Bandits* (New York: New Press, 2000).

banditry as a social phenomenon. An important aspect of that structure which concerns this present study is the songs, stories, and myths that turn some bandit outlaws into heroes. Hobsbawm reveals that the ballads and songs about Robin Hood, and many other remarkably similar bandit heroes from varied cultures and time-periods, do not necessarily represent historical realities, but they are "sources for what people believed about, or wanted from, or read into" bandit heroes: "His role is that of the champion, the righter of wrongs, the bringer of justice and social equity."[107] Although Hobsbawm's research scope is on the modern period and largely restricted to pre-capitalist peasant societies, his open invitation for medievalists to join the scholarly discussion has been answered by scholars of Robin Hood and medieval folklore. Some examples of which I engage with in this study are: Nicholas Curott and Alexander Fink, who argued that by acting solely in self-interest, bandits unintentionally provide value to oppressed societies; folklorist Graham Seal who showed that stories about outlaw heroes are compelling human expressions with the ability to influence, shape, and impel actions by outlaws themselves, their supporting and sympathizing communities, and their antagonists; Timothy Jones, who suggested that outlaw narratives develop in a wide range of social milieux, not just the oppressed lower classes; and John Chandler, who applied Hobsbawm's noble robber narrative template to reveal parallels between the modern outlaw stories of Batman and the classic medieval figure of Robin Hood.[108]

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[107] Hobsbawm, *Bandits,* 182; 47.

[108] Nicholas Curott, and Alexander Fink, "Bandit Heroes: Social, Mythical, or Rational?" *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 72, no. 2 (April, 2012); Graham Seal, "The Robin Hood Principle: Folklore, History, and the Social Bandit," *Journal of Folklore Research* 46, no. 1, (2009), 67-89; Timothy Jones, "Tristan, Malory, and the outlaw-knight," in *Robin Hood: Medieval and Post-Medieval*. ed. Helen Phillips. (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2005); John Chandler, "Batman and Robin Hood: Hobsbawm's Outlaw Heroes Past and Present," in *Robin Hood in Greenwood Studies* (Brepols Publishers, 2011).

The theory of the noble robber narrative posits that the ubiquitous Robin Hood figures in fiction and in real-life, which appear in cultures around the world and throughout time and are created by specific cultural processes particular to their time and place. The rebellious episodes in *Girart de Vienne* share striking commonalities with tales of this kind. The outlaws are considered oath-breaking criminals by royal authority, yet the poet presents them to the audience as heroes through a narrative that corresponds to the structure of most noble robber stories. The noble robber is typically a victim of injustice or persecution by authorities for an act considered criminal by those in power, but not by his own people, thereby becoming an outlaw. The noble robber rights wrongs, only kills in self-defense or for just revenge, and takes from the rich to give to the poor. He has ways of remaining invulnerable and invisible. Being admired, helped, and supported by his own people, he eventually returns as an honorable citizen and member of the community. He is never the enemy of the fount of justice (king, emperor, or god), only other oppressors. And he dies invariably and only through betrayal.

These elements describe events in the plot of *Girart de Vienne* in too significant a number of ways as to be coincidental. Righting wrongs, seeking just revenge, invulnerability, even robbing the rich to give to the poor, I show that Girart and members of his family correspond to the image of the noble robber in an almost uncanny way. The image of the rebel baron in the *chansons de geste* is a familiar one, but the rebel baron as a noble robber is largely unexplored. Its similarities to Robin Hood or other outlaw tales have been overlooked in scholarship. Only two articles concerning the *chansons de geste* have touched on similar themes, Wolfgang Van Emden's "What Constitutes a *Bon Larron*" and Phillipe Verelst's "L'enchanteur

d'épopée: Prolégomènes à une étude de Maugis."[109] These explore the character of the *bon larron*, a good-natured but thieving side character with magical powers in some later epics, the most familiar being Maugis from *Renault de Montauban*. Some aspects of the *bon larron* are very much like a noble outlaw, but in the end, the character is more like a faerie than a thief. Van Emden and Verelst touch briefly on some of the themes of, but without direct comparison to, noble robber narratives, as their focus is more on the magical aspects of the *bon larron.* This chapter thus represents the first analysis of *Girart de Vienne,* or any *chansons de geste* for that matter, as a bandit hero tale.

Among the various epics of revolt, *Girart de Vienne* is probably the only one that can be read in this way. Different rebellious narratives rely on structures unique to their particular narrative aims. For example, *Raoul de Cambrai* is a vendetta story that follows the retribution cycle of feuding families. *La Chevalerie Ogier le Danois* is the story of one man's rebellion against the world. The form of rebellious narrative structure shapes the audience perception of the acts portrayed in a specific way. As *Girart de Vienne* was possibly the first epic of revolt, the noble robber narrative may have paved the way for more extreme forms of rebellion in the *chansons de geste.* Despite the adventures in anarchy, the noble robber narrative contains a surprisingly serious concern for legitimate justice. If *Girart de Vienne* participates in a counter-theory of medieval justice, it is one which goes beyond revolt merely as a check on tyranny to include the creation of an outlaw hero, layering this social phenomenon onto other justifications for rebellion explored elsewhere in this study. In this way, I argue that this specific narrative

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[109] Wolfgang Van Emden, "What Constitutes a *Bon Larron*?" in *Guillaume d'Orange and the* Chansons de Geste*:essays presented to Duncan McMillan,* eds. Wolfgang Van Emden and Philip E. Bennett (Reading: Société Rencesvals, 1984); Phillipe Verelst, "L'enchanteur d'épopée. Prolégomènes à une étude de Maugis." *Romanica Gandensia* 16 (1976), 123-161.

structure presents the rebellious actions and characters of the poem to the audience as justifiable and desirable; episodes of rebellion and reckless behavior, therefore, functioned as entertaining literary devices that delighted audiences while satisfying the desire for an alternative discourse about justice to rival the legal discourse that only served higher figures of authority.

Outrajes*: the Recklessness of Outlaws*

During a tense negotiation between Girart's clan and Charlemagne's entourage, Doon de Monloon humiliates Garin de Monglane, Girart's father. Like a scoundrel [*a guise de felon*], Doon snatches Garin by the beard and tears out "more than one hundred hairs" [*plus de .C. peus arracha*]. What would have already been a serious insult, Doon made worse by doing it in front of the entire court [*voient tout le barnaje*]. Girart reacts by drawing his sword, but his nephew Aymeri is quicker, bashing Doon's head in with a mace and spilling his brains on the floor [*la cervele en a jus reversee*]. The court immediately devolves into chaos and bloodshed. Outnumbered, the knights from Vienne swashbuckle their way through the crush of enraged but unprepared courtiers and light out to the place where the "good warhorses" [*li bon destriers*] of Charlemagne are kept. They dash away on the stolen steeds before Charlemagne's men can regroup, because everything that they had just done was *grant outraje* (laisses LXIII-LXVI).

The use of *outraje* here is telling. Clearly, "outrage" derives from *outraje* and as a definition, the modern English meaning (*an action causing anger, shock, or indignation* or *an extremely strong reaction of such*) could fit the situation, as could the modern French *outrage* (an affront or insult). However, the precise meaning of the Old French noun is more consequential

for understanding the essence of this episode. *Outraje* carries the sense of recklessness or temerity.

The word appears in the *vers orphelin* concluding the episode. A v*ers orphelin*, or "orphan verse," is a poetic feature peculiar to many *chansons de geste.* It is a final line of verse that differs from the preceding group of verses in both assonance and meter (hence, orphan). It reads as a jarring juxtaposition that significantly breaks the otherwise uniform rhythm of the poetry, thereby calling attention to itself. For example, all of the verses recounting the episode of aborted negotiations and daring escape above end with the same vowel sound in the final syllable (assonance), except the very last verse, as follows:

> *…Outre s'en pasent li chevalier baron,*
>
> *juqu'en la place ou li bon destrier sont ;*
>
> *il i monterent sanz plus d'arestoison.*
>
> *François s'adoubent entor et environ ;*
>
> *s'or les atandent, i seront fol bricon,*
>
> > *qu'il ont fet grant outraje.* (vv.2305-2310)

Following the semantic principle of placing the essential at the end, Peter Dembrowski showed that the *vers orphelin* has the effect of highlighting an important idea, a dominant thought; it can summarize the situation while relating its psychological atmosphere.[110] Especially in the context of a *chanson de geste*, it can be the poetic equivalent of a knock-out punch. Here, the *vers*

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[110] Peter Dembrowski, "Le vers orphelin dans les chansons de geste et son emploi dans la *Geste de Blaye*," *Kentucky Romance Quarterly* XVII, 2 (1970), 139-148; 144-145.

orphelin condenses the atmosphere of the previous events into one important word: *outraje.* This adventure was thus sheer recklessness, a display of excessive boldness, an exciting act of temerity.

Other uses of *outraje* in *Girart de Vienne* are in close relationship with similar words. Right before the climactic duel between Roland and Oliver begins, the poet warns the audience that "today you are about to hear more *outrajes* and *fiertez*" (v. 4074). The one-on-one combat between the two well-known epic characters is full of feats of arms, bold words, supernatural weapons, and surprising twists (laisses CXXXIII-CLXX). As is often the case with modern descendants of Old French vocabulary, the modern French *fierté* is almost a false cognate, as "pride" is only one of the possible meanings of this word. More often, *fierte* means "bravery, audacity, boldness, strength," or even "ferocity." Therefore, building anticipation, the poet is announcing that the audience is about to be delighted with feats of temerity and bravery, or recklessness and ferocity. *Outraje* appears again later in this episode when some of Charlemagne's knights plot to interfere with the contest. The emperor, however, stops the plan, threatening to hang from a leafy tree [*pandist a une arbre ramee*, v. 5825] anyone who should do such *outraje* or *posnee* (*boldness, arrogance, bravado,* v.5823-5825].

Outraje, fierte, posnee, these words are important truth-revealing "*clichés*." A *cliché* in the *chansons de geste* is a word or phrase that surpasses the contents of the immediate laisse or even group of laisses to something that exists outside of the poem. In addition to and often in conjunction with the *vers orphelin*, the *chansons de geste* make frequent use of *clichés* to highlight important details, emphasize a psychological setting, or otherwise draw the audience's attention to a poetic truth: "The *cliché* refers to universally recognized 'truths,' to 'truths' whose acceptance does not necessarily depend upon any of the specific contents of the laisse or the

poem."[111] In *Girart de Vienne,* the *cliché* of the *outraje* is key, an important narrative signal informing the medieval audience how to interpret certain events and characters.

I propose to borrow *outraje* as a label to categorize a specific kind of adventure that runs rampant throughout the plot of *Girart de Vienne*. Scholars of the *chansons de geste* will be familiar with the concept of *desmesure*, proposed by many as Roland's fatal flaw in *La Chanson de Roland*. As a categorizing concept, *desmesure* (excessiveness, immoderate behavior) humanizes Roland's zealous errors. *Desmesure* is an "expression of egocentric obstinacy" that ultimately brings about Roland's tragic end when he refuses to call for help by sounding his horn.[112] In reference to *desmesure,* Pierre Le Gentil suggested that "[Roland] is, in reality, a victim of an excess of his own virtues and his intentions are good."[113] As a *cliché*, *desmesure* has provided a shorthand for discussing zealous, well-intentioned excess often exhibited by, not just Roland, but many characters of the *chansons de geste*. *Traïson* is another such *cliché,* characterizing certain acts in medieval epic. It was the famous *traïson* of Ganelon, the Ur-traitor who, because of pride and jealousy, deceitfully brought about the destruction of the rear-guard at Roncevaux in *The Song of Roland*. Like *traïson* and *desmesure,* I suggest in this study that *outraje* functions as a catchword for an analytical category, describing the recklessness of roguish knights who suffer neither from treacherous jealousy nor excessive zeal, but rather an impulse to rebel.

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[111] *Le cliché se réfère à des vérités universellement reconnues, à des vérités dont l'acceptation ne dépend pas nécessairement du contenu spécifique de la laisse ou du poème.* Dembrowski, "Le vers orphelin*,"* 146.

[112] *l'expression d'une obstination égocentrique*, Jean-Claude Vallecalle, *Messages et ambassades dans l'épopée française médiévale: l'illusion du dialogue* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2006), 561.

[113] (*Roland) est en réalité victime de l'excès de ses vertus et ses intentions sont bonnes,* Pierre Le Gentil, *La Chanson de Roland* (Paris: Hatier, 1967), 127.

What, then, impels Girart to rebel? *Girart de Vienne* navigates lord-vassal relationships, and so far, we have largely examined this from the point of view of Girart's lord, Charlemagne.[114] This is the point of view of written and customary law, and perhaps also the perspective that the modern reader finds easiest to adopt, but not all would have been inclined to hear the poem this way. The culture of the Middle Ages was complex, as were its audiences, but we can know who the target audience for *chansons de geste* like *Girart de Vienne* was. Among other clues and historical evidence, the poets themselves often revealed with whom they were communicating. Bertrand de Bar-sur-Aube calls upon his audience frequently and it is always "Listen, barons!" [*Oïez, baron*, v. 3037]; "Lord barons," [*seignor barons*, v. 553]. The audience seems, then, to be largely made up of members of the chivalric class, i.e., young knights, middling vassals, and small regional magnates.[115] In a discussion of the role of the mediator in medieval art and culture, Bruce Rosenberg explained that "the artist performs what he perceives his audience wants to experience, and this communication is direct."[116] It is therefore likely that the knights who made up the audience for this *chanson* would have wanted a relatable experience, which would have meant being able to identify with Girart and adopt his point of view. So, they would have also understood his rebellious acts not as acts of treason, but as *outrajes*.

Claude Galley observed that each medieval French epic is about, first and foremost, the difficult resolution and dazzling demonstration of a certain extremely delicate point of justice.[117]

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[114] See *Chapter One: Treason and Medieval Customary Law.*

[115] For a full discussion of the interaction between audience and poet, see "Chapter 4: Young Knights and the Symbolic Imperative to Rebel."

[116] Bruce Rosenberg, "Was There a Popular Culture in the Middle Ages?" in *Popular Culture in the Middle Ages,* ed. Josie Campbell (Ohio: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1986), 155.

[117] Galley, "Dieu, le droit," 150.

The delicate point of justice explored in *Girart de Vienne* plays out through the various exploits and adventures of Girart's clan as they navigate their tumultuous relationship with structures of authority. Perceived persecution and injustices drive them to acts of resistance and retaliation that perturb the established order. Through reckless behavior, *outrajes*, they become outlaws: "representatives of alienation, conflict in value systems, and criticism of structures of authority."[118] The tales about their struggle to resolve injustice form a specific type of narrative, the outlaw narrative of "the noble robber."

Noble Robber as a Victim of Injustice

A bandit hero is born when, faced with an act of injustice or persecution, instead of yielding to force or social superiority, they choose the path of resistance and outlawry. This results in acts considered criminal by those in power, but not by the hero's own people. "Bandits, by definition, resist obedience, are outside the range of power, are potential exercisers of power themselves, and therefore potential rebels."[119] For Girart, a major step down the path of outlawry was taken in reaction to the injustice of Charlemagne's attempt to confiscate Vienne. We have already examined this hostility-inciting incident in the first chapter, albeit from the perspective of the authority structures that would view it as a criminal act. From Girart's perspective, as well as that of his clan, however, the arrival of an army at the walls of Vienne is certainly an act of injustice, for Girart is never allowed a chance to repair the broken oath. Girart offers peace, pledging to make up for the unrendered service by following Charlemagne back to Reims with a

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[118] Jones, *Robin Hood: Medieval and Post-Medieval,* 90.
[119] Hobsbawm, *Bandits,* 12.

thousand knights in tow where he will voluntarily serve him with pleasure [*de gré et volentiers,* v. 4018]. Charlemagne refuses, preferring instead to seek the ultimate humiliation of his vassal:

> *Par ce Seignor a cui l'an doit proier,*
>
> *einz que m'en parte…*
>
> *ert si acquis dant Girart le guerrier*
>
> *que devant moi vendra ajenoillier,*
>
> *nu piez, en lange, por la merci proier,*
>
> *la sele el col, qu'il tendra par l'estrier,*
>
> *d'un roncin gaste ou d'un povre somier*

> By that Lord to whom we must pray,
>
> Before I leave this place…
>
> "Sir warrior"[120] Girart will be captured
>
> And made to come before me on his knees,
>
> Bare feet, in rags, to plead for mercy,
>
> Around his neck, held by the stirrups, a saddle
>
> From an emaciated nag or some weak mule. (vv. 4025-4031)

The rules that regulated the relationship between authority and subordinates was contractual and personal, which placed the vassal completely at the mercy of the lord who established the laws

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[120] The term *dant* means "lord, sir, master," but Charlemagne uses it mockingly here, as part of setting up a scenario of humiliation.

and could potentially violate contracts unilaterally.[121] As a victim of such injustice, faced with an intransigent overlord bent on his abasement and destruction, Girart's only choice is outlawry.

The impunity of rebellious barons that characterize so many *chansons de geste* of the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries is a theme that provides much of their entertainment value, replacing the gory battle scenes and long, valorous speeches of earlier epics with swashbuckling, reckless adventures. In one such episode, Girart and his clan are even emphatically compared to "crazy rogues" [*fol bricons,* v. 2309]. However, the rebellion against Charlemagne is not the first time these roguish knights turned to outlawry in the face of persecution.

Before becoming landed lords in their own right, the four sons of Garin de Monglane lived in destitution:

> *Mes de tant fu la chose mal partie*
>
> *que de pain n'orent entr'eus toz une mie,*
>
> *ne char salee ne de nul vin sor lie,*
>
> *fors trois gastiaus qu'il orent en baillie,*
>
> *et .II. poons en la sale votie...*
>
> *N'ont plus vitaille en la cité entie,*
>
> *et un destrier et un mur de Sulie,*
>
> *et .III. escuz et trois lances forbies ;*
>
> *n'ont plus d'avoir ne d'autre menentie.*

> But it started out very bad in the beginning
>
> for they had not between them a single crumb of bread,

---

no salted meat, nor any clear wine,

they only had three pieces of flat bread within their walls,

and two peacocks in their vaulted chamber…

There was no more food in the entire town,

only one warhorse and one Syrian mule,

and three shields and three burnished spears;

they had no more wealth nor other property. (vv.118-127)

The plight of the Monglane family was due to the successful invasion of their land by Sinagon, "a hostile pagan" [*.i. paien aversier*, v. 73] and emir of Alexandria. Garin suffered from the sorry state in which he now saw his sons living, for, were it not for the occupation of his land, his sons would be very rich, well-provisioned, and powerful [*molt furent riche, asazé et menant*, v. 199]. The occupying armies of Sinagon had burned, devastated, and pillaged the land. As is often the case in situations of such oppression, the oppressed resort to outlawry. Curott and Fink proposed that "when those in power are bandits themselves, ordinary bandits become heroes."[122] The sons of Monglane become bandit heroes in the very same way.

On Easter, despite a pitiful celebration with a scant meal, the irrepressible brothers Hernaut, Miles, Renier, and Girart romp out into the countryside [*joer vont li enfant,* v. 189].

> *Girart regarde devers soleil levant,*
>
> *le droit chemin com il se vont joant,*
>
> *entre .II. tertes, vers .I. bois verdoiant,*

---

[122] "Bandit Heroes," 473.

et voit venir set païens mescreanz ;

.XX. murs trosez amenoient devant.

    Cist mar vindrent d'Espagne.

Girart looks toward the rising sun,

As they run along the straight road joyfully,

Between two hills, near a green wood,

He sees seven immoral pagans approaching;

They are leading twenty mules loaded full.

    Ill-timed is their arrival from Spain. (vv.200-205)

After a brief discussion, the brothers determine to rob this mule train. Hernaut reveals himself and calls out:

Fill a putain, gloton, estez arrier !

Ci vos covient le paiage lessier !

Le treüage vos covient a paier !

De cest avoir que portent li somer

veil la moitié, soit d'argent ou d'or mier,

voire tot l'autre, sanz autre parçonnier.

Tot nos leroiz, que que doie ennuier !

You sons of whores, scum, stop right there!

You have to pay a toll here!

You have to pay tribute!

Of all this wealth that the pack mules carry

No less than half, whether silver or pure gold,

In fact, all of the latter, without sharing the former.

You will leave all of it to us, damn whoever may care! (vv.244-250)

Unsurprisingly, the temerity of these young and unarmed men provokes the travelling merchants. The leader warns that anyone who dares to touch even a single coin of theirs [*nos ossoit touchier ne rien tolir vaillisant .I. denier*, v. 254] will find nowhere to hide from the wrath of the emir. "His very body…will be hung with no hope of escape" [*son cors meïsmes…seroit panduz sanz autre recovrier*, vv.257-258]. Enraged, Hernaut attacks him with his fists, while Miles, Renier, and Girart rush the other merchants, summarily killing all seven with their bare hands. In triumph, the brothers lead the stolen mule train back to their father's castle. To the occupiers, this act was criminal, but to the Monglane family, it was a wholly justifiable reaction to persecution. Even Thomas Aquinas might have agreed, as he allowed for revolt in cases of "excessive tyranny."[123] Thus, in correspondence with the structure of the noble robber narrative, Girart and his clan frequently find themselves becoming victims of authority structures and turn to outlawry in response to that injustice and persecution.

The Noble Robber Rights Wrongs

A revisiting of Aymeri's attempted "reginacide"[124] demonstrates this second point in the noble robber narrative. When the queen tricked Girart into kissing her foot instead of Charlemagne's, the narrator calls it a wrong "engineered by the devil" [*si com deables la voloit*

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[123] Robert Wyllie, "Reconsidering Tyranny and Tyrannicide in Aquinas's *De Regno*," *Perspectives on Political Science* 47, no. 3 (2018), 154-160; 157.
[124] See "Chapter One: Treason and Medieval Customary Law."

engingnier, v. 1469]. This harm is portrayed as categorically different from the reckless violence

of the protagonists, for the queen was *fole et desmesuree* [crazy and excessive, v. 1482]. To the

poet, the act was inexcusable because it was the cause of so much carnage:

> *Deus ! Puis en vint tel mortel enconbrier*
>
> *dont il fu mort meint gentil chevalier.*
>
>   *Ele en dut estre ocise.*

> God! From this such deadly tragedy will come
>
> It will be the death of so many noble knights.
>
>   She should be killed for it. (vv. 1474-1476)

That call for retribution is answered by Aymeri when he learns of the trick. His shocked

exclamation, "Lord Girart is a very honorable warrior: I will die from agony if I cannot avenge

him!" [*Molt est preudom dant Girart le guerrier : de duel morrai se ne le puis vengier !,* vv.

1864-1868], shows that the wrong troubles him so deeply that righting it is essential to his very

survival. The noble robber as avenger of injustice is embodied in Aymeri when he lets his dagger

fly toward the queen's heart.

Aymeri brings news of the secret wrong back to Girart who is no less aggravated by the

affront. Together, they travel to the lands of each of Girart's brothers, sharing the story of the

queen's slight. Repetition is used for a specific poetic effect in the *chansons de geste.* Sometimes

an action is described multiple times, or the content of an entire laisse is repeated with different

words and different assonance. Repetition can reveal new details about an important action,

series of events, or the psychological state of a character; it can also reinforce important narrative

moments by eliciting the audience's attention. In addition to the original description of Girart

kissing the queen's foot (laisse XL), the episode is recounted in detail by the queen to Aymeri (laisse XLVIII), then again by Aymeri to Girart (laisse LI), then Girart to Renier (laisse LII), and again by Girart to Hernaut (laisse LIV), and finally, to Garin de Monglane when he joins the rest of the outraged clan gathered in Vienne (laisse LVI). The insult is resurrected again and again, emphasizing the gravity of "the tremendous wrongdoing" [*la grant descovenue,* v.2022). Once assembled, the entire clan takes up Aymeri's avenging cause, swearing with a unified voice:

> *Qui me donroit tot l'or de Romenie,*
>
> *trive n'acorde n'en prendroie ge mie,*
>
> *tant que sera la roïne honnie.*
>
> Were someone to give me all of the gold in Romania,
>
> I would still not accept peace or treaty
>
> until the queen has been punished. (vv.2240-2242).

Thus, righting this wrong becomes a primary motivating factor for the rebellion of Girart's clan.

Killing Only in Self-Defense or Just Revenge

In the pursuit of righting wrongs, the outlaw often must kill, but there are unwritten rules about how that killing may occur. An equally important part of the Robin Hood image is moderation in violence; "there is just or legitimate killing and unjust, unnecessary and wanton murder; there are honorable and shameful acts…whatever the definition, the noble robber must seek to remain within it."[125] Often just revenge goes hand in hand with righting wrongs, as is the

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[125] Hobsbawm, *Bandits,* 51-52.

case in Aymeri's attempted regicide or in other killings on the battlefield during the war with Charlemagne. But just revenge also encompasses killing for another reason: in defense of honor and reputation.

Reputation is an important element in *Girart de Vienne*. When young Renier and Girart first arrive at Charlemagne's court, seeking to become his knights, they are unknown quantities, strangers of neither bad nor good reputation. F.R.P. Akehurst observed that, in medieval literature, reputation is something that must be won before it is lost.[126] The task of first priority for the young men is to establish a good reputation. When they finally succeed in meeting Charlemagne, he asks, not for their names, but for their familial origins. "From whom do you come… noble youths? From what lineage?" [*Dont estes vos…seignor enfant ? De quel lingnaje ?* vv.667-668) It appears as a given that the names of these young men are of no importance, since they have no reputation yet for attaching a name. Instead, Charlemagne is looking to their familial background for the beginnings of a reputation.

> *Et dit Renier : « Jeu dirai voirement,*
>
> *car molt est fous qui a riche home ment ;*
>
> *fiz sui Garin de Monglane, au vaillant,*
>
> *d'une cité de Gascongne la grant. »*

> Renier responds: "I will speak honestly,
>
> For he who lies to a powerful man is very foolish;

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[126] Akehurst, F.R.P. "Good Name, Reputation, and Notoriety in French Customary Law," in *Fama: the Politics of Talk and Reputation in Medieval Europe,* eds. Thelma Fenster and Daniel Lord Smail (Cornell University Press, 2003), 77.

I am the son of the valiant Garin de Monglane,

From a city in Gascony the great." (vv. 669-672)

Renier accomplishes several things here. In case the reputation of the name Monglane does not precede him, the adjective *vaillant* suggests that it should. As a way to support that suggestion, the importance of his homeland is included; this also provides some background for Renier should the name of his father fail to impress. And lastly, Renier reveals both his honesty and his intelligence when he begins by speaking *voirement* and reciting a practical dictum. It is important to note that this self-introduction is nearly word for word the same as that given to the abbot of Cluny earlier in laisse XI, with the replacement of *riche home* (powerful or rich man) with *preudome* (honorable or valiant man). As we have seen, repetition plays a powerful narrative role. Introductions establish relationships between characters within the world of the poem, of course, but also, and perhaps more importantly, they establish a relationship with the audience, who sees here that Renier is intelligent enough to modify his proverb depending on his interlocutor. The audience fully understood the stakes of establishing and maintaining a good reputation, for they lived in the same shame culture reflected in the *chansons de geste*.

Much of medieval society participated in a type of culture "in which what matters is a person's reputation, what others think of him."[127] George Jones identified this culture as "shame culture," an "other-directed" morality based on outward social esteem (as opposed to "guilt culture" which relies only on the inner directives of conscience in upholding an absolute standard of morality).[128] Evidence of shame culture exists throughout *Girart de Vienne*. The most salient instances are the frequent refrain of "with all of the barons watching" [*voient tout le barnaje*].

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[127] Akehurst, "Good Name, Reputation," 77.
[128] George Jones, *The Ethos of the Song of Roland* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1963), 97.

Like other *clichés* discussed above, it reveals a cultural truth that exists beyond the poem. Further emphasizing its importance, this expression is also often found in a *vers orphelin* immediately following a moment of embarrassment or damage to the reputation of a character.[129] The characters remain aware of the state of their reputation throughout the poem through feedback from others. Charlemagne affirms that Renier's first effort to establish a reputation is successful: "You speak well, young man…you come from great people, from great barons, indeed, you have many good relatives" [*Vos dites bien, enfant…vos estes de grant gent*, *de grant barnage, s'avez meint bon parent*, vv. 682-684]. Other knights confirm this, as well: "How courteous and wise these young men are!" [*com sont cortois et sage cist enfant !,* v. 710].

However, the more gifted a man was, the more likely he was to become a victim of envy and rumors.[130] As Girart and Renier are accepted into Charlemagne's service, many barons welcome them, but not all: "Avidly, the valiant men praise and hold them dear, but the malicious ones get bothered" [[*Forment le loent li preudom et ont chier*, *mes corrocié en sont li losangier*, v. 766). One such malicious baron immediately tries to turn Charlemagne against the newcomers through a rumor intended to destroy their nascent reputation.

> *Trop fetes ja ces danziaus sorhaucier...*
>
> *Garin lor père, qui les fist envoier,*
>
> *n'ot a repos onques .I. seul mengier…*
>
> *lors ert Garin bacheler prinsautier,*
>
> *Jeu vi a l'ague par mi la mer nagier ;*
>
> *molt savoit bien pelerins espïer,*

---

[129] See laisses LXIII, LXXXIX, CXII, CXV.

[130] David Crouch, *The Chivalric Turn: Conduct and Hegemony in Europe before 1300* (Oxford University Press, 2019), 210.

et desrober et toz nuz despoillier

prestres et moines, iglises et mostiers.

Por ce l'en fist a grant honte chacier,

et fors de France foïr et essillier.

You are exalting these young men too hastily…

Garin, their father, who sent them,

Hasn't even a scrap of food for feast days…

When Garin was a rash young knight,

I saw him swimming in the waters of the sea;

He knew very well how to watch pilgrims closely,

and to rob and strip naked

priests and monks, churches and monasteries.

For this he was hunted down in great shame,

And put to flight out of France and banished. (vv. 771-783)

The shameful poverty and untoward behavior of which Garin de Monglane is accused is a serious threat to the credibility of Renier and Girart's promising reputation at court. Even before it is fully gained, it is already at risk of being lost. The loss of reputation could be very dangerous in the Middle Ages. In 1191, William Longchamp was a victim to his own loss of reputation when a "negative rumor about him" became "the instrument of a personal hatred dedicated to his downfall."[131] From the background of a very minor noble family in Normandy, Longchamp

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[131] *rumeur negative à son égard…l'instrument d'une haine personnelle vouée à sa ruine,* Egbert Türk, "La chute de Guillaume de Longchamp (1191) ou la rumeur instrumentalisée," in *La Rumeur au Moyen Âge: du mépris à la manipulation, V^e-XVe siècles*, eds. Myriam Soria and Maïté Billoré (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2011), 196.

rapidly rose to become the bishop of Ely and chancellor for Richard the Lionheart during his absence while participating in the Third Crusade. But Longchamp underestimated the power of the jealousies, flatteries, and intrigues of his entourage. These destroyed his reputation, and therefore his credibility as an administrator, and forced him into exile.[132]

What others believed, or could be led to believe, mattered in a very real way, so reputation had to be defended from the threat of shame. Rumors and wrongs carried the threat of shame, "a challenge to all-important honor" that disordered the world and stained the individual and his kin in the "imaginative chansons and romances" of chivalric literature.[133] Overhearing the challenge to his father's honor, Renier shouts "by this sword I will prove to this wicked scoundrel that without a doubt my father is an honest duke of noble birth" [*a ceste espee… Proverai bien vers le felon gangnart que mon père est frans dus de bone part,* vv. 812-814]. Renier does not follow through on this threat, at least not at this early stage, but common law might have supported his retribution if he had. The *Coutumes de Beauvaisis* contains a good example of plausible legal defense for violent reaction to slander, since it was considered *traïson* "to bear false witness in order to bring about someone's death, or cause to be disinherited, or cause to be banished, or to cause his liege-lord to hate him" [*pour porter faus tesmoing pour celi metre a mort, ou pour li deseriter, ou pour li fere bannir, ou pour li fere haïr de son seigneur lige…* ch.XXX, 827]. This is a testament to the prevalence of reputation-destroying rumors both in contemporary culture and in the *chansons de geste*.

In Akehurst's estimation, slander is the attempt to create a bad reputation, and "since reputation is so valuable, it must be guarded with care, and even violence used to protect it is

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[132] Türk, "La chute de Guillaume de Longchamp," 209.
[133] Kaeuper, "Vengeance," 379.

condoned."[134] The rumors against Renier and Girart continue to quietly circulate, rearing up

again after some time when they request that Charlemagne finally grant them their own land for

their years spent in his service. Exasperated, the emperor addresses the court:

> *Seignor…avez vos escouté*
>
> *le fier contraire que Renier a conté…*
>
> *ne lor savroie fere si grant bontez*
>
> *c'au derrïen en fuse ja loez.*
>
> *Oï l'ai dire, et si est veritez :*
>
> *puis que lierre est de forches rachetez,*
>
> *ja puis ses sires nen iert de lui amez.*
>
> *Por eus le di, que j'avoie alevez.*
>
> *Or si m'est vis que je ne ai mau grez ;*
>
>   *trop sont de pute orine.*

Lords…did you all hear

the prideful discontent that Renier just expressed?

I will never know how to give any goodness to them

that would actually be praised in the end.

I have heard it said, and thus it is true:

that even when a thief is saved from the gallows,

his lord will never be loved by him.

I say this for them whom I have fostered.

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[134] Akehurst, "Good Name, Reputation," 87.

> Now it seems to me that I receive only ingratitude;
>
>> they really were born of a whore. (vv. 958-959)

The good impression that Charlemagne had of Renier and Girart has reversed completely, but this did not happen simply as a result of clamoring for their own fief. Jealous barons have continued whispering rumors about the pair in Charlemagne's ear (vv.961-965). With boiling blood, Renier dashes at one of the gossipy nobles, and:

> *en la grant barbe li a ses poinz mellez,*
>
> *.XIIII. pas l'a aprés lui mené,*
>
> *corant, trotant, trestot estre son gré…*
>
> *Il vint au feu, si l'a dedanz bouté ;*
>
> *art li la barbe, le grenon est brullé,*
>
> *ja fust tot ars et a sa fin alé.*

> Into his long beard he sinks his fists,
>
> drags him along fourteen steps,
>
> running, trotting, completely by force…
>
> He comes and then shoves him into the fireplace;
>
> his beard is burnt, his mustache scorched,
>
> indeed, he would soon be burned and gone to his end. (vv. 1068-1075)

Slander calls for vengeance, and "vengeance wipes the slate clean and reorders a disordered world."[135] Killing for just revenge, the defense of honor and reputation, is wholly justified in the noble robber narrative, and in this way, *Girart de Vienne* corresponds perfectly.

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[135] Kaeuper, "Vengeance," 379.

Of course, the Robin Hood figure could also kill in self-defense, which is something that happens a number of times in *Girart de Vienne*. In fact, that first meeting of Charlemagne with Renier and Girart came as a result of a self-defense killing. After multiple unsuccessful attempts to gain access to the emperor's court, the brothers go to the church where Charlemagne and his barons are attending mass. The guard at the door not only refuses them entry but insults their humble appearance and strikes Renier violently in the head with his staff. In self-defense, Renier kicks the guard with such force that his eyeballs pop from their sockets [*q'an .II. les euz li sont vole del vis*, v.621] as he smashes backwards into the church door, breaking it in half and falling to the ground dead (laisses XV-XVI).

Another self-defense killing happens when the brothers first arrive in Reims. They had journeyed all the way to Paris seeking Charlemagne, only to learn that the king's court had just itinerated to the city of Reims away in the Champagne region. Now, after another long road, the tired, hungry, and thirsty young men seek to resupply at the royal storehouse. But, the well-dressed seneschal, upon seeing their appearance, unleashes an insulting tirade: "Get out of here, you sons of a whore, shepherds, foreigners, nasty bedoins" [*Estez en sus, fill a putain, bergier, nez d'autre terre, bedoïn losangier,* vv. 492-493]. Then, he raises his applewood staff [*baston de pomier,* v. 477] to strike Renier. But Renier reacts too quickly:

> *Il passe avant a guise d'omme fier,*
>
> *si l'a sessi, tout le fist enbronchier ;*
>
> *hauça le pong, el col li vait paier,*
>
> *que en la gueule li a fet l'os brisier,*
>
> *encontre terre le fist jus trebuchier.*

Par un des piez le commence a hercier,

puis le gita d'une part del grenier.

In the manner of a fierce man, he moves forward,

grabs a hold of him, bends him down;

raises his fist, into his neck he lands such a blow,

that he breaks his jawbone,

and lets him collapse to the ground.

He starts to drag him by one foot,

then crams his body into a corner of the storehouse. (vv. 508-514)

Thus, Renier killed the seneschal, and on the face of it honorably, because it was in self-defense, maintaining his status as an outlaw hero. However, what the brothers do next is even more intriguing for the way that it corresponds to a Robin Hood-like narrative.

Robbing the Rich to Give to the Poor

With the disposal of the seneschal's body, Renier and Girart waste no time retrieving the much-needed supplies. But they also share the windfall with others:

Lor prant la mine, si comence a huchier :

« Or viengne avant qui d'aveinne a mestier,

qui veut .I. res si en prengne .I. setier ;

Deus me confonde se ja en preng denier ! »

Qui qu'en ait pou, Girart s'en fist poier ;

ore en avront li mulet a menger :

a son ostel en porta .I. setier.

Now he takes a barrel of grain, then starts to yell:

"Come forward now, anyone who needs oats,

If you want one small measure, you will get a whole bushel;

God confound me indeed if I accept a single coin!"

Those who have little, receive from Girart in quantity;

Now even their mules will have enough to eat,

For they bring home whole barrels. (vv. 517-523)

Girart and Renier not only steal from the royal storehouse, but they redistribute the abundance to the less fortunate of Reims. In other words, they rob from the rich and give to the poor.

This feature above all the others is perhaps the most well-known aspect of a Robin Hood tale. By transforming an act of thievery into one of benevolence, the act endears the noble robber to the audience. Stealing resources only to give them away "simultaneously challenges economic, social, and political order by challenging those who hold or lay claim to power, law, and control of resources."[136] This is the noble robber at his most heroic. The episode of the theft of the merchants from Spain is equally benevolent in its presentation. It is not a desire for plunder, revenge, or wanton violence that prompts the brothers to waylay the mule train, but concern for the poor.

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[136] Hobsbawm, *Bandits,* 7.

Girart li mendres en apela…

« Frere, » fet il…

moi est avis ci vienent li somier,

qui sont chargiez et d'argent et d'or mier.

Garin mon pere en avroit grant mestier,

il et ma dame, qui n'ont mes que mengier.

Hui vi mon pere plorer et lermoier :

desoresmés li devons nos aidier,

et cest avoir conquerre et gaengnier. »

Girart the youngest calls out…

"Brothers," he says…

"It seems to me that the coming mule train

Is loaded up with silver and pure gold.

Garin my father is in great need,

He and my lady have no more to eat.

Today I saw my father crying and weeping:

From now on we must help him,

And this is by conquering and winning that wealth." (vv. 208-216)

The poor in this case are the brothers' own father and mother, but this makes the theft in no way any less selfless. Keeping none for themselves, the four brothers give all of the silver and gold to Garin, thus enabling their father to continue to resist the forces occupying his land. The four brothers are able to then strike out into the wider world to seek their own fortune. This episode of *outraje* demonstrates how the noble robber "refuses to accept the normal roles of poverty and

establishes his freedom by means of the only resources within reach of the poor—strength, bravery, cunning and determination."[137] As we saw above, the Monglane brothers robbed the mule train with only their wits and their bare hands.

One reason the "rob from the rich to give to the poor" trope resonates so powerfully with audiences is that it draws the hero closer to the audience, erasing any would-be social or economic differences. The chivalric audience of *Girart de Vienne* did not need to be peasants to understand the precarity of their own socio-economic position. As lesser nobles and unlanded knights, the humble-yet-noble origins of Girart and his brothers would have felt relatable to many audience members. The appeal of the Robin Hood story is not necessarily in the dream that a noble robber might bestow stolen riches upon you, but in the dream that you might have the necessary temerity to emulate the act, to oppose exclusive hierarchies of power, wealth, and influence. The noble robber is one with the audience; he is not one of the powerful. In both instances where Girart robs the rich for the sake of the poor, the social and economic difference between the brothers and the wealthy targets is distinct. As the brothers run down the road toward the approaching mule train, the poet highlights their economically adverse situation.

> *Defors les murs cort le Rosne bruiant,*
> *ce est une eve mirabileuse et grant,*
> *qui lor amoine les nes et les chalanz ;*
> *ne fust la guerre Sinagon l'amirant,*
> *molt fusent riche, asazé et menant.*

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[137] Ibid., 95.

Beyond the walls runs the noisy Rhône,

It is a marvelous and mighty river,

That brings ships and barges to their land;

Were it not for the war of Sinagon the emir,

They would be very rich, powerful, and wealthy. (vv. 195-199)

The robbery of the storehouse is framed by social and economic discrimination, as well. The seneschal is described as wearing a sumptuous ermine-trimmed coat over an expensively tailored tunic [*un fres hermine chier, un bliaut q'an ot fet entaillier*, vv.473-474], making him even more arrogant and prideful [s*i s'en fist plus et orgueilleus et fier,* v.476]. Upon seeing Girart and Renier, he judges them to be foreigners, "not worth a cent" [*D'autre païs les vit…ne les prisa la monte d'un denier,* vv.489-490]. He makes his loathing clear to the brothers with the insults that ultimately cause his death. *Girart de Vienne* takes a negative view of conspicuous wealth and arrogance, encapsulated in the wise words of Renier:

Li cuers n'est pas ne el vair ne el gris,

einz est el ventre, la ou Deus l'a assis.

Teus est molt riches, qui est de cuer failliz ;

et tieus est povres, qui est fiers et hardiz,

vasaus de cors et frans hom et gentis.

The heart is not in ermine and miniver cloaks,

But in the chest, there where God placed it.

Many who are very rich are weak at heart;

And many who are poor are brave and courageous,

Among vassals of the court and free men and nobles. (vv. 607-611)

The brothers are only poor in circumstances, possessing the true wealth that lies in bravery and determination, even as victims of structures of authority. Young knights who possessed nothing but strength and courage must have identified strongly with this aspect of *Girart de Vienne*.

Invulnerability and Invisibility

Most *chansons de geste* feature characters that are notoriously hard to kill. Invincible knights performing feats of arms and displays of prowess populate every epic battlefield, and the knights of *Girart de Vienne* are, of course, no exception. The young brothers of Monglane face superior numbers of armed foes with only their wits and bare hands. Girart and his allies return unscathed from sortie after sortie during the war for Vienne. The invulnerability of medieval epic heroes is truly a ubiquitous hallmark of the genre. However, there is another type of invulnerability featured in *Girart de Vienne* that corresponds more closely with the noble robber narrative. For Hobsbawm, the "complex phenomenon" of invulnerability reflects a certain amount of security which the noble robber has "among their people and on their own ground."[138] Girart's clan derives their invulnerability in large part from their own ground, that is, *Vienne, la mirable cité* (v. 3066).

When young Girart finally succeeds in obtaining a fief of his own, Charlemagne grants him Vienne and *l'annor a baillier*—that is the possession of the city and the surrounding countryside (v. 1453). The strength of this domain is foreshadowed when Charlemagne informs him that "the walls are high, the moats are wide, the town is rich in food and drink [*haut sont li*

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[138] Ibid., 57.

mur et li fossé plenier, la cité riche…a boivre et a mengier, vv. 1454-1456]. In the wake of open

hostilities, Charlemagne lays siege to Vienne, with devastating results as his marauding army

raids the nearby lands:

> *Tout environ ont la terre agastie,*
>
> *et meinte vile essilliee et broïe,*
>
> *les vingnes gastent, la proie ont acoillie,*
>
> *et bués et vaches et autre meantie.*
>
> *Les genz s'enfuient, n'osent demorer mie,*
>
> *lor mesons lessent et lor gaegnerie ;*
>
> *molt est la terre d'environ apovrie,*
>
> *tote l'a Charles a son oes sessie.*

> All around, [Charles' army] has ravaged the land,
>
> And pillaged and crushed many villages,
>
> Destroyed the vineyards, captured the game,
>
> And the oxen and cattle and other possessions.
>
> The people flee, they dare not at all to remain,
>
> Leaving their houses and their belongings.
>
> The land round about is very impoverished,
>
> Charles has seized everything for his purposes. (vv. 3050-3057)

There is a certain vraisemblance in Charlemagne's tactics. The twelfth-century Anglo-Norman

historian Jordan Fantosme chronicled local wars, recording an image similar to that portrayed in

Girart de Vienne.[139] He showed that pillaging was part of the received wisdom of warring

magnates during his day:

> *Destruice voz enemis e guaste lur cuntrée,*
>
> *Par fu e par enbrasement tute seit alumée ;*
>
> *Ne lur laist defors, n'en forest ne en prée,*
>
> *Dunt il puissent al matin aveir une disnée…*
>
> *Primes guaster la terre e puis ses enemis.*

> Destroy your foes and ravage their country,
>
> By fire and by burning set everything alight;
>
> Leave them nothing outside, neither in forest nor meadow,
>
> Which they could have in the morning for a meal…
>
> First destroy the land and then your enemies. (vv. 444-451)

The siege of a castle accompanied by ravaging the landscape was the primary mode of

warfare in the Middle Ages. Jim Bradbury showed how there was one pitched battle to every

ninety-nine sieges.[140] Siege warfare had broad consequences that went well beyond the

immediate fighting forces to encompass the whole of society, for causing destruction to the

countryside around castles was essential to denying provisions to the defenders. The effects on a

society so dependent on annual harvests were catastrophic, with starvation typically following

suite. The weakness of those inside the besieged castle was revealed quickly under such pressure.

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[139] Jordan Fantosme, *Chronique de la Guerre entre les anglois et les ecossois.* In *Rerum Britannicarum Medii Aevi Scriptores*, ed. Richard Howlett. (London: Longman and Co., 1886).
[140] Jim Bradbury, *The Medieval Siege* (Boydell press, 1992), 71-79.

In the tale, however, Vienne lasted seven full years of constant siege, for Charlemagne never lifted it, not even "for wind or for rain" [*ne por vent ne por pluie,* v. 3060]. Despite the scorched-earth tactics of the attacking army, impregnable Vienne somehow continued to resist. In frustrated bewilderment, Charlemagne compares the seven foreign kingdoms he conquered handily to this tenacious duke from poor nobility within his own land [*duc de povre seignorie dedans ma terre,* vv. 6182-6183]. Girart is truly invulnerable inside Vienne. He owes this invulnerability not only to the high and massive walls of the city, though, but also to other features it possesses: a secret tunnel and the nearby forest.

Lighting candles in fine candelabras, Girart and twenty knights ride stealthily through an ancient tunnel far beneath Vienne and steal out into the deep foliage of the forest on a mission of ambush (laisse CLXXVIII). Girart reveals that this tunnel has been the key to their invulnerability throughout the entire siege, enabling his clan to access the resources of the outside world, imperceptible to the besiegers:

> *car par ici seu ge chacier aller,*
>
> *prendre mes pors et mes cras cers amener,*
>
> *d'estrange terres mes avoirs amener,*
>
> *dont en Vïenne fesoie largetez,*
>
> *et estïens richement conreez.*

> For it is through here that I knew how to go hunting,
>
> to take my boars and to bring my plump deer,
>
> to bring back wealth from far-off lands,
>
> which I would give liberally in Vienne,
>
> so that all were sumptuously provided. (vv. 6520-6526)

The tunnel was kept secret from the enemy; indeed, when Charlemagne finally learns of its existence after hostilities cease, he marvels at the sheer novelty of it: "I have conquered so many castles and cities…but I have never seen such a cave" [*tant ai conquis et chastiaus et citez…ne vi tel cave*, vv.6513-6515]. Girart brags that, thanks to the tunnel, he could have endured the siege indefinitely: "in your entire life, you never would have taken our castle fortress [*en trestot voz aez n'eüsiez prises noz mestres fermetez,* vv. 6520-6521]. For Girart's clan, the tunnel creates the invisibility and invulnerability that is crucial for the continued defiance of the outlaw in the noble robber narrative structure.

The tunnel is also essential for the access it provides to the green foliage of the forest, a key facet of the noble robber's invisibility. The Middle Ages were "an age when thick forests clothed wide tracts of the country, their shade was the natural setting for all sorts of unexpected adventure."[141] Analyzing the role of the forest in medieval literature, Albrecht Classen concluded that "certain things happen in the forest that would not happen outside of it."[142] Medieval poets and storytellers had perspectives on the forest that corresponded to their own needs, fears, understanding, and perception.[143] For most characters of medieval literature, the forest was an unknown world, a preserve of danger and mystery that existed beyond the reach of law and order. But for outlaws, the forest was essential, a sanctuary—outlaws belonged to the forest in a special way. Such is the import of the forest to the noble robber narrative that Maurice Keen goes so far as to call the Robin Hood literature the "matter of the Greenwood," placing it alongside those three other important medieval corpora, the matters of France, Britain, and Rome.[144] Being

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[141] Maurice Keen, *The Outlaws of Medieval Legend* (New York: Routledge, 2000)*,* 1.
[142] Albrecht Classen, *The Forest in Medieval German Literature.* (London: Lexington Books, 2015), 19.
[143] Classen, *The Forest,* 13.
[144] Keen, *Outlaws,* 1-2.

completely at home in the forest, the noble robber there finds invisibility, reinforcing his invulnerability.

As both a hero of the *chansons de geste* and an outlaw, Girart has a special relationship with the greenwood. It is noteworthy that the very first episode of *outraje* in the tale, the robbery of the mule train, happens on the edge of a green forest [*.I. bois verdoiant*, v. 202]. The Monglane brothers emerge from the greenwood to ambush the merchants from Spain. In another reckless adventure, Oliver finds himself alone and surrounded by Charlemagne's men, but Girart and the fighters of Vienne suddenly emerge from the thick woods to protect him [*Cil de Vienne issent del bois ramé por lui secorre,* v.3317]. Vienne is closely associated with the forest, its description often including the woods adjacent to the city walls: "below Vienne, that strong and well-supplied city…there is an immense and ancient forest" [*Desoz Vïenne, la fort cité garnie…Un bois i ot de grant encesorie,* vv.4456-4458]; "below Vienne, beside the leafy woods…" [*Desoz Vïenne, lez le bosché foilli,* v.4502]. A knight calls the forest by name and emphasizes Girart's close relationship with it: "within Clermont, *your* great and vast forest" [*Dedanz Clermont, vostre grant bois plenier,* v. 6319]. Only the most important locations in the song have names—Reims, Cluny, Paris, Vienne—so this shows just how integral the forest of Clermont is to the plot.

The mouth of the secret tunnel opens within Clermont, at the home of Berart, the forester who keeps watch over the greenwood [*icil devoit le bois eschaugetier*, v. 6346]. Berart prowls the forest, gaining intelligence about the enemy, standing ever ready to guide the knights of Vienne through the trees. The capture of Charlemagne comes about through this man of the forest, for it is Berart who makes the key discovery of Charlemagne alone and defenseless in the forest and alerts Girart to the opportunity:

Et cil Berart, qui del bochage fu,

a tant le roi tote jor porseü

einz ne fist tor que il n'ait bien veü.

Juqu'a Girart n'i ot resne tenu,

ou qu'il le voit si li a menteü :

« Biau sire dus, ne soiez esperdu !

Le roi de France vos ai tant porseü

que je sai tot com li est avenu.

A la fontaine a le porc abatu,

la est toz seus desoz l'arbre foillu ;

n'a avec lui ne juenne ne chenu,

car tuit si home l'ont par le bois perdu,

ne set nus d'aus que il est devenu.

Girart, frans dus, por coi demores tu ?

Or le puez prendre sanz lance et sanz escu,

   s'en fera ta jotisse ! »

And this Berart, who was of the greenwood,

Has stalked the king all day, such that

He [the king] made not a single move that he [Berart] did not see.

He rode hard all the way to Girart without delay,

As soon as he sees him, thus he speaks to him:

"Good lord duke, do not be distraught!

I have stalked the king of France

Such that I know exactly where he is.

He has slain a boar at a spring,

He is there all alone beneath a leafy tree;

He has no knights, young or old, with him,

Because all of his men lost him in the woods,

None of them know what has happened to him.

Girart, noble duke, what are you waiting for?

Now you can take him, [as he is] without lance and without shield,

    and thus dispense your justice on him." (vv. 6380-6395)

Girart's partnership with Berart enables him to operate within both the courtly realm of the knight and the forest realm of the outlaw. Charlemagne and his entourage, on the other hand, are completely out of their element in the forest, quickly becoming lost and separated within the trees. In the search for their lost king, Charlemagne's men reveal how ill-suited to the forest environment they are:

> *iceste terre soit hui la confondue !*
>
> *Haut sont li pui et les roches agües,*
>
> *et les valees enhermies et drues.*

> May this land be cursed today!
>
> The hills are high, and the rocks are sharp,
>
> and the valleys are wild and overgrown. (vv. 6587-6589)

Unlike these last, the dual nature of knight and outlaw contribute to the invulnerability and invisibility of Girart, bringing about the climax and resolution of the story, the capture of Charlemagne.

Another element contributes to invisibility in *Girart de Vienne*: the disguise. Outlaw heroes are "always going about the countryside in impenetrable disguises…unrecognized by forces of authority until they reveal themselves…[they are] as good as invisible."[145] Disguises feature in a number of different *chansons de geste*. In a study of the use of disguises in medieval epic, Maurizio Mazzoni found that the most common use is as a "functional expedient."[146] The disguise essentially allows the hero to penetrate an otherwise closed off or inaccessible space in order for the plot to move forward. This is illustrated in *La Prise d'Orange,* where Guillaume's disguise allows him to enter the Saracen city, gain an audience with the emir, and meet his beautiful daughter (laisses XV-XXIII). The inevitable failure of Guillaume's disguise is the turning point for the next phase of the adventure (laisses XXIV-XXV). This is also the case for the pilgrim disguise that Basin dons in order to infiltrate the enemy camp in *Jehan de Lanson.* The disguise, however, fails to keep Basin's identity secret and his inevitable capture forms the next step in the plot (laisses XLV-XLVII).

However, the use of disguise in *Girart de Vienne* differs from Mazzoni's functional expedient, for, although it allows access into the enemy's midst, the disguise remains impenetrable; the hero is effectively invisible until he chooses to reveal himself. During the long siege, Charlemagne has a jousting quintain erected to keep his men entertained, offering a money

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[145] Hobsbawm, *Bandits,* 56-57.

[146] *espediente funzionale,* Mazzoni, Maurizio. "Il tema del travestimento nella *Chanson de Geste* Analisi di aspetti e motivi nell'epica francese dei secoli XII e XIII," *Neophilologus* 98, (2014), 369-384; 370.

prize to the winner (laisse XCII). From among the knights crowding to be the first, a young man in the finest of armor bursts forth on his horse and strikes the quintain with such ferocity that Charles exclaims "All-powerful Father, by your mercy, never have I seen with my own eyes so powerful a hit!" [*Pere puissant, par la teue merci, einz de mes euz si riche cop ne vi !,* vv. 3216-3217]. The men hurry out onto the field to find out who this mystery knight might be. Instead of welcoming their clamoring praise, the knight begins to cut the unsuspecting men to pieces with his sword. "Vienne!" he cries, "God's help and Saint Maurice! It is I, Oliver, the nephew of Girart, and I am not your friend!" [*« Vienne! » escrie, « Deus, aidiez, seint Moris ! C'est Olivier, qui n'est pas vostre amis ! Niés sui Girart »,* vv. 3232-3233]. Oliver's disguise kept him invisible among the enemy's camp until this, the moment of his choosing, to reveal himself.

A certain invisibility and invulnerability permeated the reputation of Eustace the Monk, the real-life twelfth-century outlaw. In *Le Roman d'Eustache le Moine,* Eustace is shown to derive a lot of his success against the count of Boulogne from his ability to disguise himself: "Eustace…knew much about ruses [*Wistaces…mout sot d'abés*, v. 432]. At home in the countryside and the thick forests of northern France, Eustace struck his victims with terror and seemed to be invulnerable.[147] Rebel barons complying to the mold of the noble outlaw mirror this invisibility and invulnerability through disguises and their relationship with the greenwood.

The Noble Robber is Admired, Helped, and Supported by His Own People

We have already seen how the clan comes together to right wrongs on each other's behalf. This is also a great example of another feature of the noble robber narrative, where the

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[147] Keene, *Outlaws,* 54-55.

outlaw hero receives support from his own people. There are several instances in the poem of this key narrative point. As errant young men, newly separated from their father's house, Renier and Girart seek food and shelter along the road to Charlemagne's court. Unlike the rude welcome they will receive in Reims, the brothers first encounter kindness and support. In a foreshadowing scene, on the first night of their journey they happen to stop in Vienne, *la fort cité vaillant* (v. 343), where they stay with a certain inhabitant named Hervi who kindly gives them food and lodging (laisse XI). Girart remarks to Renier:

> *Vez cité bien seant !*
>
> *Ne vi si noble en trestot mon vivant.*
>
> *Cil qui la tient doit estre molt poissant ;*
>
> *si n'avoit plus, s'est il riche menant*
>
> Look at this firmly established city!
>
> I have never seen so noble in all my life.
>
> Whoever holds it must be very powerful;
>
> Even if he owns nothing else, he is still powerfully wealthy. (vv. 346-349)

Although he does not yet know it, Vienne and its inhabitants are to become Girart's people (see laisse XLII), so it is only fitting that they should be among the first to help and support him.

Further down the wide-open road [*grant chemin errant*], the brothers reach Cluny Abbey where the good abbot [*bon abé*] Morant welcomes them with food and shelter (laisse XI-XII). Upon learning who their father is, Morant praises their lineage and asks why they have not yet been knighted.

« Nanin voir, sire, nel lessa povreté ;

par grant poverte somes nos desevré

de nostre pere qui nos a engendré. »

L'abes l'antant, molt en a grant pité ;

son seneschal a molt tost apelé :

« Amis, » fait il, « n'i ait plus demoré,

chemise et braies orendroit lor donez,

a ces danziaus, par bones amistez,

dont il seront vestuz et acesmez ;

plus en seront en toz leus ennorez. »

"Nay, sire, truly for poverty's sake;

Because of great poverty have we been separated

From our father who sired us."

The abbot hears this, is moved to such great compassion;

He quickly calls for his seneschal:

"Friend," he says, "do not delay,

Give shirts and trousers right away,

To these young men, for good friendship's sake,

They will be dressed and equipped,

And all the more honored wherever they go." (vv. 389-398)

After this, Girart travels on to join Charlemagne's court where he meets mostly rejection and adversity, but the act of kindness and support from the abbot Morant is not forgotten. A few years later, on his way back to Vienne to assume control of his new fief, Girart makes a point of

stopping at Cluny to repay the kindness of the abbot with mules, silks, and silver (laisse XLII). Girart recognizes the people who have accepted him and supported his cause and lives by the knightly adage: "But he should not violate monasteries nor rob or pillage poor people" [*Mes que ne soit a violer mostier n'a povre gent rober ne essillier*, vv. 3808-3809]. Throughout his adventures, Girart consistently finds admiration and support from his people and makes sure to repay those kindnesses in turn.

The Noble Robber is Never the Enemy of the Fount of Justice

At first brush, this point in the noble robber narrative may seem to run counter to this study's argument for viewing *Girart de Vienne* as an outlaw narrative, for Girart's rebellion is unequivocally against the emperor Charlemagne. Since the noble robber is just, he cannot be in real conflict with the fount of justice, whether divine or human.[148] However, a closer reading of the text reveals that Girart's rebellion is a carefully nuanced situation where revolt is only against the king insofar as his acts and the structure of his authority are unjust and oppressive. Girart seeks only to restore justice, not instill anarchy.

Girart's first rebellious act against Charlemagne is the murder of the seneschal and the theft of the storehouse. This act is, of course, not against Charlemagne per se, but rather in reaction to injustice at the hands of one within the structure of authority. The morning after the theft, Girart realizes the gravity of what they have done in murdering the abusive seneschal: "I am very afraid that we might be destroyed for it, because we have no friends in this land" [*Je me criem molt que n'en soions honni, q'an cest païs n'avomes nul ami*, vv.569-570]. Renier,

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[148] Hobsbawm, *Bandits,* 58.

however, justifies their act by pointing at the bureaucracy of sycophants surrounding

Charlemagne:

> *Ne te chaut, frere…*
>
> *trop a li rois teus garçons entor li.*
>
> *S'il an pert .I., bien le sachiez de fi,*
>
>   *qu'il an vendra .XIIII.*

> Don't worry, brother…
>
> The king has way too many lackeys around him.
>
> Know this for certain, if he loses one of them,
>
>   Fourteen more will take his place. (vv. 571-574)

Renier's explanation is an image that corresponds to the treatment of justice in many *chansons de geste.* It is not one of arbitrariness or brutality, but "on the contrary, the conflict of values, customary rules, and interests are scrupulously represented and analyzed" in that image of justice.[149] Thus, the heroes' physical needs clash against a multitude of toadies whose presence deforms the rightness that should emanate from the king, creating oppression for those on the outside of the structure of authority.

By articulating a nuanced image of justice, one of the seditious speeches in *Girart de Vienne*[150] surprisingly fulfill the noble robber narrative in the same way. When Renier proposes that they depose Charlemagne and place Aymeri on the throne, Miles is quick to rebuke his rash words:

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[149] *au contraire le conflit des valeurs, des règles coutumières, des intérêts y est scrupuleusement représenté et analysé*, Galley, "Dieu, le droit," 162.
[150] See "Chapter One: Treason and Medieval Customary Law."

Frere…ore avez mal parlé :

Deus si comende, le roi de majesté,

que l'en ne die orgueil ne foleté.

Preudom est Charles, ce savons de verté,

n'a meillor roi en la crestïenté.

Brother…you have spoken evil:

God, the king of majesty, so commands,

That one speak not in pride or madness.

Charles is an honorable man, we know this for truth,

There is not a better king in all of Christendom. (vv. 2454-2458)

Appealing to both God and Christendom, Miles reminds the clan that the divine fount of justice resides in Charlemagne. They are only opposing the injustices placed upon them, not the king himself. Authority, therefore, can become a structure of oppression quasi-independent from the person of the king, rendering the situation open to legitimate rebellion.

Along with words, actions also show that Girart is only opposed to oppression, not the figure of the emperor. During open battle below the walls of Vienne, Charlemagne mounts a horse and joins in the fray. Girart clashes with the newcomer, unaware of who this warrior actually is, and strikes the emperor with a nearly fatal blow. Saved only by "God and his holy name" [*Se Deus ne fust et son seintime* non, v. 4429], Charlemagne marvels at Girart's singular ferocity, revealing his identity in the process. Gripped with fear in his heart [*au cuer en ot friçon*, v. 4424], Girart dismounts straightaway and kneels before Charlemagne, taking and kissing his foot and spur [*li embrace le pié et l'esperon*, v. 4446], and crying out in the name of God for mercy and forgiveness for "this misdeed" [*icele mesprison*, v. 4447-4448]. Not only does it

finally right the previous wrong of kissing the queen's foot, but this scene also reinforces that, although an outlaw, Girart is *just*, unwilling to fight Charlemagne directly despite the latter's determination to confiscate Vienne and punish the rebels. The noble robber is never a *revolutionary*, in the sense of an agitator for the overthrow of society and the establishment of a new order.[151] Rebels like these "never imagined that the throne could just remain empty."[152] Girart's clan seeks only to right wrongs, to re-establish justice and the old ways, not revolution.

This is the very reason why, when Girart and his entourage have captured Charlemagne in the forest, instead of following Aymeri's urging to murder the emperor, they all kneel as Girart says:

> *Ne place Deu…*
>
> *que rois de France soit ja par moi honniz !*
>
> *Ses hom serai s'il a de moi merci,*
>
> *de lui tendrai ma terre et mon païs.*
>
> It would not please God…
>
> If the king of France were thus destroyed by me!
>
> I will be his man if he will have mercy on me,
>
> I will hold my lands and my territory from him. (vv. 6421-6424)

The noble robber may fight with the king, but neither ever vanquishes the other because ultimately the time comes that they meet and the ruler recognizes the outlaw's virtue.[153] Charlemagne hears Girart's words and is moved to look to the sky and declare:

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[151] Eric Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels,* (New York: Praeger Inc., 1959), 10-11.

[152] *Ils n'imaginaient pas que le trône pût rester toujours vide*, Camus, *L'homme révolté,* 143.

[153] Hobsbawm, *Bandits,* 59.

Et Deus…qui sor toz estes rois,

meinte miracle avez fete por moi !

Iceste guerre Girart le Viennois

doutoie plus que nule riens qui soit.

Deus me confonde se jamés le guerroi !

Venez avant, Girart le Viennois.

Oh God…you who are king over everything,

So many miracles you have done for me!

This war with Girart of Vienne

I have dreaded more than anything else.

God confound me if I ever fight him again!

Come forward, Girart of Vienne. (vv. 6433-6438)

And thus peace between the outlaw and the king is made. In the final laisse of the *chanson,* the poet summarily announces "Now you have heard how the baron Girart was reconciled to Charles" [*Oï avez de Girart le baron, coment il est acordez a Charlon,* vv. 6918-6919]. William Calin proposed that, despite the general sympathy for rebellious vassals in the *chansons de geste*, rebellion is never allowed to succeed "due to the never-diminished aura of the royal ideal, the official philosophy of the Church, and a very real desire for order among the people."[154] Yet, contrary to this assumption, Girart does indeed succeed in the aims of his rebellion (peace, reconciliation, and the retention of his fief), for as an outlaw hero, his goal was never revolution. Charlemagne is allowed to save face by appearing magnanimous, but Girart truly has him at his

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[154] William Calin, *The Old French Epic of Revolt* (Geneva: Librairie E. Droz, 1962), 227.

mercy. This reconciliation is, in effect, based on extortion. Sunderland pushes back against Calin's assumption, as well, arguing that it misunderstands the aims of baronial revolt: "the rebel baron *chansons de geste* teach the nobles not just to rebel, but how to rebel: they argue that particular types of rebellious action, under specific circumstances" are tolerable.[155] *Girart de Vienne*'s particular style of rebellion meets the specific criteria of an outlaw story, rendering his rebellion a welcome narrative device.

Returning as an Honorable Member of the Community

In the falling action of *Girart de Vienne,* the former rebels return to the community as honorable barons. When Girart's entourage escort Charlemagne back to Vienne through the secret tunnel, the news of reconciliation prompts celebration: "great joy was had the day of his coming, by all of the barons and the other common people" [*Grant joie firent le jor de sa venue, tuit li baron et l'autre gent menue*, vv. 6570-6571]. A feast, greater than any before seen by man [e*inz plus grant feste ne fu d'omme veüe,* v. 6574], is held in honor of Girart and Charlemagne, who attend mass together afterwards, a symbolic showing of Girart's return to the Christian community as an honorable member (laisse CLXXXIV). Then the barons of Vienne parade out of the city with Charlemagne, back to his besieging army who have been waiting apprehensively for annihilation by the defenders after the loss of their king. Charlemagne declares to them his reconciliation with Girart.

> *Seignor…ne soiez esperdu!*
> *Cest ost avez por neant esmeü.*

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[155] Sunderland, *Rebel Barons,* 57.

La merci Deu, bien nos est avenu :

ore avons ce c'avons tant atendu,

moi et Girart somes ami et dru,

   s'est remesse la guerre.

Lords…do not be distraught!

You have roused these forces for nothing.

By the mercy of God, good has come to us:

Now we have that which we have been waiting for,

Girart and I are friends and supporters,

   So the war is put aside. (vv. 6722-6727)

And, with that, Girart is welcomed back to courtly society, an outlaw no more. Since the noble robber is not a true criminal,[156] he has no difficulty in rejoining his community as a respected member when he ceases to be an outlaw.

Death of the Noble Robber Through Betrayal

The story of *Girart de Vienne* corresponds with the noble robber narrative in the manner of the death of the hero through betrayal. The deaths of the now-pardoned outlaws do not happen within the verses of *Girart de Vienne*, but they are foretold. The celebratory final laisses of *Girart de Vienne* give way to foreboding as messengers arrive from Spain with news of Saracen aggression in the south. Charlemagne and the Archbishop call the army to action and prepare to leave for war at once (laisses CLXXXVIII-CXCI). It is with a tone of sadness that the poet

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[156] Hobsbawm, *Bandits,* 53.

reminds the audience that this is the very start of the wars in Spain recounted in *La Chanson de Roland* where most of the barons present are destined to die through betrayal.[157] The poet expected the audience to be familiar already with the events of *La Chanson de Roland*:

> *bien en avez oïe la chançon,*
>
> *coment il furent trahi par Ganelon.*
>
> *Morz fu Rollans et li autre baron,*
>
> *et li .XX. mile.*

> You have certainly heard the song about it,
>
> How they were betrayed by Ganelon.
>
> Death came to Roland and the other barons,
>
> as well as twenty thousand knights. (vv. 6924-6927)

So, the noble robber narrative of *Girart de Vienne* comes to a close with the reminder that the death of Girart and the other heroes is forthcoming, but it will *only* come about through betrayal.

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The aim throughout this chapter has been to reveal the plot and characters of *Girart de Vienne* as corresponding to a strategic narrative structure aimed at justifying rebellious acts. The existence of a noble robber narrative within *Girart de Vienne* is certainly informative insofar as what it may indicate about the world of the poet and his audience. This story type gives us one

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[157] See *the Song of Roland,* laisse LXIV, where Girart is mentioned by name, along with others, as belonging to the ill-fated rearguard.

possible way to interpret *Girart de Vienne* and may perhaps provide a starting point for

analyzing the narrative of other *chansons de geste* about rebellious barons. This group of

medieval epics is not monolithic in form or substance and identifying the presence of other story

types like the noble robber narrative within those texts may prove a useful tool to broaden future

research into this fascinating corpus.

As I explore further in "Chapter 4: Young Knights and the Imperative to Rebel

Symbolically*,"* this was also a time when the social structures and expectations of yore were

rapidly changing, largely at the expense of young nobles who made up the audience for epic

songs. The chivalric culture of errancy and violence was now under additional new pressures and

instability as fiefdoms became harder to obtain and the bloodshed of crusading became cyclical

and inevitable. Hobsbawm showed that stories about noble robbers grow and "become epidemic"

in times of social tension and upheaval.[158] Sunderland pointed out that rebel heroes were more

numerous and popular than loyal ones in the *chansons de geste* of this time frame.[159] Seal posited

that outlaw heroes appear whenever there are significant numbers of victims of injustice.[160] It

seems, then, that audiences were developing an appetite for narratives that reflected their own

struggles in a changing world:

> "Poetry, song, story, all can offer men and women the words to circumscribe or describe
>
> and perhaps institutionalize experiences that are difficult to comprehend, whether painful
>
> or pleasurable…To this extent it is possible and even necessary to acknowledge that there
>
> is a direct relation between literary discourse and the world of deeds. Poetic figures,

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[158] Hobsbawm, *Bandits,* 73.
[159] Sunderland, *Rebel Barons*, 57.
[160] Seal, "The Robin Hood Principle," 83.

narrative paradigms and literary topoi can all be reworked in another discursive

sphere."[161]

In this same way, Bertrand de Bar-sur-Aube reworked the dissatisfaction of young knights into a

narrative about outlaw heroes that agitated through rebellion for a return to the ways of previous

generations who could expect to receive lands and stability in exchange for service to a more

powerful lord. *Girart de Vienne* was not necessarily a call to revolt, to commit *outrajes,* to

become an outlaw, but a cathartic expression of longing for the same freedom to act recklessly in

the pursuit of the future. The narrative of the noble robber provided one possible framework for

exploring and even celebrating the concept of rebellion, functioning as an entertaining literary

device that delighted audiences while satisfying the desire for an alternative discourse about

justice and social order.

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[161] Kathryn Gravdal, *Vilain et Courtois* (University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 193.

Chapter Three: The Three *Gestes* as Early Racial Discourse

"Race is the ultimate trope of difference because it is so very arbitrary in its application."

Henry Louis Gates, Jr.

In the previous chapters, I have shown how behaviors considered treasonous by medieval legal custom become laudable when committed by characters in the *chansons de geste* of revolt by portraying them within an appropriate narrative structure, that of the noble robber in the case of *Girart de Vienne*. In this chapter, I show that, in addition to a justifying narrative structure, it is the nature of the characters themselves that largely determines the acceptability of their actions. When committed by the right character, then, a treasonous act takes on a different aspect: traitors commit treason, but outlaw heroes merely commit *outrajes.*

In the *chansons de geste,* is a traitor made or is a traitor born? Renier and Renart are two knights from the same poem, but they are very different. The former is a young baron from Gascony, a newcomer to Charlemagne's court, and a hothead. The latter is an old member of the court, a Frank, and one who has Charlemagne's ear. Renier's constant recklessness leads to rebellion and no small ruin for the emperor, while Renart only provides wise words and faithful service to Charlemagne. Yet, paradoxically, it is Renier who is "valiant and a good knight" [*fiers et chevaliers gentis,* v. 848, *Girart de Vienne*], achieving lands, honor, and heroic distinction, and Renart who is described as "an evil traitor who should be damned by God" [*un mau traïtre, qui Deu doint enconbrier*, v. 768-769]; his fate is a violent and humiliating end. Apparently, actions can count for little in distinguishing heroes from traitors in the *chansons de geste* since both of these characters fulfill their roles *de jure*, but not *de facto.* It seems that Renart is a traitor

because he is a traitor. Although effectively circular reasoning or tautology, the premise seems to have worked for the audience of *Girart de Vienne,* perhaps because it was primed to believe the conclusion. Self-fulfilling archetypes and character tropes often populate the world of stories, so it should not be very surprising to find them here, except that a closer reading reveals that the roles of Renier and Renart are not governed by that kind of narrative mechanism. Instead, a complex and esoteric system based on criteria such as lineage and group identity appears to be at work in defining the roles of characters like Renier and Renart. That system is "the three *gestes,*" a schema long used for organizing epic poems into cycles, but I show in this chapter that, in their first inception, the three *gestes* were concerned with organizing individual characters into groups based on characteristics deemed inherent and essential. In this way, the three *gestes* are evidence of medieval racial thinking, creating a hierarchy of epic characters whose preferential narrative treatment was a consequence of the *geste* to which they belonged.

Medieval Race

But did race, racism, or racial thinking exist in the European Middle Ages? Most modern race theorists have understood racial formation as occurring only in modern time as a result of conditions specific to the modern era. The Enlightenment is often seen as the original locus of racial time, where enquiry into nature relied on pseudoscientific discussion centered on the human body. One of Rousseau's key interests, for example, was the effect of climate on the bodies of different groups of human "sub-species": "Everyone knows the differences…observed between hot regions and cold regions…This is one of the principle causes of the degeneration of

the races."[162] In the history of racial thinking, the grounding of human essence in biological features as put forth by Enlightenment thinkers was thus the origin of modern race theory. This particular articulation of race has been so tenacious, that it is routinely understood as the template for all racisms in everyday life and much of scholarship. Because they appear to lack racial reference to biology and the body, as well as a vocabulary of race, the Middle Ages have often been imagined as a pre-racial space. Discussions of difference as experienced by medieval people have largely been limited to the Other, proto-nationalism, and religion. To invoke race was initially criticized as "presentist" and unproductive, even by medievalists otherwise sympathetic to such a project.[163] The category of race was allegedly too fixed to include change over time and nonbiological markers.

However, in an analysis of modern racial theories, Ann Stoler found competing and contrary renderings of racisms from various times and places along the canonical race theory timeline.[164] Instead of attempting to reconcile these contradictory claims, she showed that they were actually a fundamental feature of how racial discourses work. Racial distinctions are built up from layers of familiar cultural representations of difference that feed the emergence of new ones, evolving over time.[165] This indicates that racial thinking finds its roots much deeper in human history.

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[162] *Tout le monde sait les distinctions observées…entre les pays chauds et les pays froids… C'est ici l'une des principales causes qui font dégénérer les races*. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile: ou de l'éducation* (Primento Digital Publishing, 2015), 192.

[163] In the prefatory article of an early collection of essays on medieval race, William C. Jordan expressed his doubts about the utility of the concept of race applied to the Middle Ages, believing that "the concept of race will confuse and obscure more than it illuminates" because readers will not "sufficiently shed their modern notions of race simply because scholars redefine the concept against the modern grain." See "Why 'Race'?" in *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies,* 31, no. 1 (2001), 165-173.

[164] Ann Laura Stoler, "Racial Histories and Their Regimes of Truth," *Political Power and Social Theory* 11 (1997), 183-206.

[165] Stoler, "Racial Histories," 190-191.

With new understandings like these, the application of race is becoming more apposite to other periods beyond the modern era and many scholars and race theorists are now willing to look deeper into the past for the genealogy of racial thinking. Recently among them are medievalists who are discovering that the Middle Ages are an important moment in the development of racial thinking. In *Black Legacies,* Lynn Ramey argued for the Middle Ages as a foundational moment in the development of the concept of race, showing that the coding of black as "bad" and white as "good" in western culture began as early as the twelfth century.[166] In *Black Metaphors: How Modern Racism Emerged from Medieval Race-Thinking*, Cord Whitaker explored the rhetorical and theological metaphors of medieval Christianity that produced a dichotomy where whiteness equals purity and blackness equals sin, revealing the medieval origins of modern racial tensions.[167] Victoria Turner problematized the ubiquitous "Saracen" of medieval texts in order to explore concepts and representations of racial identities in medieval thinking in *Theorizing Medieval Race: Saracen Representations in Old French Literature*.[168] Taking the idea that racial distinctions build upon previous representations of cultural difference in order to produce new ones, the broader scope of the features selected for essentializing in the past was recognized by Geraldine Heng in her influential *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages*:

> It stood to reason that the differences selected for essentialism would vary in the *longue durée*—perhaps battening on bodies, physiognomy, and somatic attributes such as skin

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[166] Lynn Ramey, *Black Legacies: Race and the European Middle Ages* (University Press of Florida, 2014).

[167] Cord J. Whitaker, *Black Metaphors: How Modern Racism Emerged from Medieval Race-Thinking* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019).

[168] Victoria Turner, *Theorizing Medieval Race: Saracen Representations in Old French Literature.* (Cambridge: Legenda, 2019).

color in one location; perhaps on social practices, religion, and culture in another; and with perhaps a multiplicity of interlocking discourses elsewhere.[169]

Through works like these, the Middle Ages has become a new locus for discussing the roots of racism and racial discourse.

The word *race* first appears in the fifteenth century, used in reference to the bloodlines of certain dogs as metaphorical stand-ins for French noble families. The idea of a biological, hereditary, or racial dimension to nobility also appeared in the late Middle Ages, embodied in the concept of "noble blood."[170] Concepts like aristocratic canine avatars and the hereditary nobility of blood are examples of essentializing discourse. However, a contemporary terminology of race does not have to exist in order for the concept of race to exist—there is often a gap between a practice and the linguistic utterance that names it.[171] For example, in a study of the highly multi-cultural eastern Mediterranean during the centuries of the crusades (1095-1291), which saw multiple influxes of European militants and migrants to the region, the establishment and subsequent dissolution of the Christian Kingdom of Jerusalem, the decline of the Byzantine and Abbasid empires, the rise of the Seljuk, Fatimid, and Mamluk dynasties, and the consolidation of Anatolia by the incoming Ottomans, Steven Epstein traced the development of a novel intercultural language that was completely lacking in expected racial terminology, yet closely

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[169] Geraldine Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages* (Cambridge University Press, 2018), 3.

[170] Maaike van der Lugt and Charles de Miramon, "Penser l'hérédité au Moyen Âge" in *L'hérédité entre Moyen Âge et Époque moderne,* eds. Maaike van der Lugt and Charles de Miramon (Firenze: Sismel Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2008), 4-5.

[171] Ramey, *Black Legacies,* 26.

resembled modern racial discourse.[172] Thus, the lack of an expected vocabulary does not necessarily indicate the absence of a phenomenon.

The observations of scholars like these show that many popular modern ideas about race and racism that seem to be fundamental to the workings of the concept are, in fact, unimportant. Race need not be based in biology. Race need not have anything to do with genetics. Race need not include physical traits, such as eye, hair, and skin color. These are part and parcel to modern racial thinking, but they are just one manifestation of the phenomenon. Other times and places have experienced racial ideas based on vastly different criteria. As Cord Whitaker explained, "the Middle Ages allows us to examine the social construct of race during its construction to see the foundation and frame without their obscuring façade of brick and siding."[173] As such, these are part of the long process of the codification of prejudices in Western culture that contributed to modern racial thinking.

Kwame Anthony Appiah defined racial discourse as that which divides people into a set of groups in such a way that all the members of one group supposedly share certain traits and tendencies with each other that they do not share with members of any other group for the purpose of differential treatment.[174] Geraldine Heng came to a similar conclusion: "'Race'…is a repeating tendency…to demarcate human beings through differences…that are selectively essentialized as absolute and fundamental, in order to distribute positions and powers differentially to human groups."[175] The conceptions of difference that form the dividing line

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[172] Steven Epstein, *Purity Lost: Transgressing Boundaries in the Eastern Mediterranean, 1000-1400* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007)*,* 201.

[173] Whitaker, *Black Metaphors*, 7.

[174] Kwame Anthony Appiah, "Racisms," in *Anatomy of Racism,* ed. David Theo Goldberg. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990)*,* 4-5.

[175] Heng, *Invention of Race,* 3.

between characters of the *chansons de geste* can, in fact, be shown to correspond to these ideas. This chapter demonstrates how the individual characters of *Girart de Vienne* are divided into groups based on differences considered intrinsic, absolute, and essential, and how the power that the groups are able to exercise, the hierarchical positions that they occupy, and their overall narrative outcomes thus depend on those differences. I argue that this is a type of racial discourse and its presence in poems like *Girart de Vienne* reflected and influenced medieval ideas about the nature of the different people in their society and the world.

In this chapter, I seek to join the dialogue about the development of racial thinking in the medieval period with a critical evaluation of the systematic division of characters into groups in *Girart de Vienne*. Seeing heroes and traitors through the lens of medieval racial thinking allows us to do as Henry Louis Gates, Jr. suggested, "to deconstruct…ideas of difference…in order to reveal the hidden relations of power and knowledge inherent in popular usage."[176] In this way, the concept of race can provide access to what medieval people understood to be the "self-evident, obvious, even ontologically *given* characteristics of humankind" that ordered the world of their epics and simultaneously reflected and influenced contemporary social attitudes and thinking.[177]

It is widely accepted by scholars that race is a categorical argument, rather than a real "thing." The widespread consensus in disciplines like biology and anthropology is that race "refers to nothing that science should recognize as real;"[178] that is, race is not a substantive content, but rather a construct, a structure of social relationships for the articulation and

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[176] Henry Louis Gates, Jr. "Writing 'Race' and the Difference it Makes," in *"Race," Writing, and Difference,* ed. Henry L. Gates. (University of Chicago Press, 1985), 6.

[177] Lucius Outlaw, "Toward a Critical Theory of 'Race'" in *Anatomy of Racism*, ed. David Theo Goldberg (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), 61.

[178] Appiah, "Race," 6.

management of perceived human differences.[179] Likewise, the different groups of characters in the *chansons de geste* are a construct, forming a discrete social structure, a hierarchy of traits and differential treatment for the characters of the poem. That this structure is fictional in no way decreases its usefulness. As Dominique Barthélemy argued:

> There is no reason for us to reject the direct testimony of epic literature…The
> Carolingian…subject matter is framed in twelfth- and thirteenth-century settings and
> dialogues…so why not accept as plausible the social relations upon which these fictional
> plots are constructed?[180]

Medieval writers and their audiences were "extremely conscious" of social hierarchies and structures, finding in literature "a space in which to contemplate" them.[181] To paraphrase Marc Bloch, the epic put a *magnifying glass* on social structures and perceptions.[182] Chivalric audiences in particular were faced with the very hierarchy of vassal-lord relationships that formed the foundation of their existence reflected in the songs. Even if "only literature," the *chansons de geste* carried representations of the largely ideological and narrative stakes of the society of their time.[183] As in Cord Whitaker's perspective that "race is a matter of language and literature at least as much as, if not more than, it is a matter of the visual," the literature of medieval epic furnishes information about social attitudes otherwise obscured by silence in the

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[179] Heng, *Invention of Race,* 27.

[180] *Il n'y a pas lieu de récuser le témoignage direct de la littérature épique…la matière carolingienne y est traitée… dans des décors et avec des dialogues qui sont des XIIᵉ et XIIIᵉ siècles…dès lors, pourquoi ne pas considérer comme vraisemblables les relations sociales sur lesquelles se construisent des scénarios imaginaires ?* Dominique Barthélemy, "Vassaux et fiefs dans la France de l'an mil," in *Feudalism: New Landscapes of Debate,* eds. Sverre Bagge, Michael Gelting, and Thomas Lindkvist (Turnout, Belgium: Brepols, 2011), 103-104.

[181] Gravdal, *Vilain,* 2.

[182] Marc Bloch, *La Société Féodale* (Paris: Éditions Albin Michel, 1949), 194.

[183] Bernard Ribémont, "Prison épique et corps en souffrance," in *Corps en peines*, ed. Martine Charagear et al. (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2019), 169.

historical record.[184] If Georges Duby was correct that, instead of orienting their behavior toward real events and circumstances, human beings orient their behavior toward their *image* of events and circumstances, then the types of discourses and representations of social structures in epics like *Girart de Vienne* reflect to an important degree how contemporary audiences imagined their world and the different people in it.[185]

The structure that divides the characters of medieval epic into groups, assigns essential characteristics to those groups, and then dispenses differential treatment accordingly, is a complex and esoteric system that is not at first readily apparent. The discourse that supports it is made up of various assertions scattered throughout the poem. Keeping in mind that the *chansons de geste* were based in oral tradition, Philip Bennett showed that "the strategies of oral delivery require us to find a totalizing discourse by re-assembling its paratactically juxtaposed elements."[186] Separated by centuries of change and linguistic barriers, the modern reader may be blind to the criteria that supports the structure, so these paratactically juxtaposed elements need to be connected in the same way that the contemporary audience would have intuited in order to reconstruct the medieval vision of epic society. To that end, the first section of this chapter looks to the opening of *Girart de Vienne,* where Bertrand de Bar-sur-Aube claims that "in all of splendid France there are only three *gestes*" [*n'ot que trois gestes en France la garnie,* v. 11]. The exact meaning of the polyvalent word *geste* can be difficult to ascertain, but Bertrand's suggestion of three *gestes* has typically been applied to the poems themselves to form a handy,

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[184] Whitaker, *Black Metaphors,* 4.

[185] Georges Duby, "Histoire sociale et idéologie des sociétés," in *Faire de l'histoire*, vol. 1, eds. J. Le Goff and P. Nora (Paris: Gallimard, 1974), 148.

[186] Philip Bennett, "Ganelon's False Message: A Critical False Perspective?" in *Reading Around the Epic: A Festschrift in Honor of Professor Wolfgang Van Emden,* eds. Marianne Ailes, Philip Bennett and Karen Pratt. (Kings College London Medieval Studies, 1998), 161.

tripartite classification for whole groups of poems thought to share commonalities of form or substance. However, despite its utility, this understanding of Bertrand's division into three cycles needs to be reevaluated, for, upon closer inspection, it does not actually fit the context of its appearance and use in *Girart de Vienne*. Arriving at a better understanding of Bertrand's use of three *gestes*, then, is the first step in reassembling the system of essentialization. I show that when its full narrative role is considered, the system of three *gestes* actually places *individuals* (rather than poems) into groups. The demarcation of these characters into three groups forms an important hierarchy that underpins their narrative roles.

But it is not the hierarchy that the three *gestes* create alone which reveals the underlying discourse. The second step in this analysis, then, is identifying the criteria that determine belonging to a *geste* within the hierarchy. Affiliation with one of these groups depends on factors that we will explore in the second section of this chapter: the concept of lineage and how the personality of a key individual comes to stereotype the entire group. The traits that accompany these factors are selectively essentialized as absolute and fundamental and assigned to characters both implicitly and, at times, as overt suggestions to the audience. These essential differences form the individual stars in a constellation of connections in the discourse overlaying the three *gestes*. In the final section, I show how affiliation with each *geste* governs the narrative outcomes for individual characters. Traitors of the second *geste* meet an ignominious death, while rebels of the third *geste* escape narrative consequences for their actions and are ultimately reconciled to the first *geste*. These are examples of the differential treatment that arises from segregation of individuals into a hierarchy of essentialized groups.

Overall, this chapter analyzes Bertrand's portrayals of various characters, his explanations for their traits, and their differential narrative outcomes as parts of an essentializing

discourse that underpins the construction of a hierarchy for differential treatment. In this way, the three *gestes* illuminate another aspect of the central object of this study, the difference between rebellion and treachery in the *chansons de geste*. I show that, even when their behavior might suggest otherwise, epic traitors and rebellious barons are fundamentally different in the world of Old French epic because they each embody the essential traits of the group to which they belong within the hierarchy of *gestes*.

The three gestes*: demarcating individuals into groups to construct a hierarchy of people*

As we have seen, the idea of race is based on a tendency to demarcate human beings through differences into groups in order to construct a hierarchy of peoples. The first criterion in this analysis of the essentializing discourse in *Girart de Vienne,* then, aims at showing that a hierarchy is created by a process of demarcating the characters into groups based on their differences. Revealing this hierarchical structure is possibly the most important aspect of the discourse under consideration here because it is the construct upon which the other criteria rely, an interpretive scheme that sorts and organizes the kings, traitors, and heroes into a hierarchy that governs the remaining criteria, i.e., the selectively essentialized traits and the power each group wields or lacks. It is in this way that traitors are punished for treason, while rebel heroes escape negative consequences and are ultimately reconciled back into society.

The hierarchical structure in question is found in the opening verses of *Girart de Vienne* where the poet, Bertrand de Bar-sur-Aube, introduces the concept of the three *gestes*:

> *A Saint Denis, en la mestre abaïe,*
> *trovon escrit, de ce ne doute mie,*

dedanz un livre de grant encesorie,

n'ot que trois gestes en France la garnie…

Des rois de France est la plus seignorie,

et l'autre aprés…fu de Doon a la barbe florie,

cil de Maience qui molt ot baronnie…

La tierce geste, qui molt fist a prisier,

fu de Garin de Monglenne au vis fier.

In the great abbey at Saint Denis,

in a very ancient book, of this doubt not a shred,

we find written that in all of splendid France

there are only three *gestes*.

That of the kings of France is the most noble,

and the other after…was of that grey-bearded

Doon of Mayence, who had much prowess…

The third *geste,* who did so much worthy of praise,

was of fierce-faced Garin of Monglane. (laisses I-III)

These three *gestes* have long been understood as a classification system for cycles of epic narratives, that is, a system for grouping poems thought to share commonalities of form and substance. In this way, the first *geste* contains poems about Charlemagne, his heir Louis, and the "twelve peers of France" such as Roland. The third *geste* comprises epics about the great hero Guillaume d'Orange (a descendent of Garin of Monglane). The second *geste,* that of Doon of Mayence, is the least uniform, but roughly it contains poems about barons in revolt against royal authority. This tripartite system offered a way (albeit an imperfect one) of organizing the large

corpus of *chansons de geste.* William Calin suggested that, despite its shortcomings, it is "the most ready means of categorizing the epic" that we have.[187] It is unclear exactly when, but at some point after the zenith of medieval French epic in the latter part of the twelfth century, the three *gestes* became the dominant organizing principle for categorizing Old French epic and is still in use in that way today.

However, if the three *gestes* are a recommendation for organizing the various *chansons de geste* into cycles, it is puzzling that each *geste* is not accompanied by clear classification guidelines or perhaps something like a list of songs belonging to each cycle. Instead, detailed descriptions of the *qualities* of the knights who descend from the namesake of each *geste* follow. The explanation of the third *geste,* for example, describes the loyal warriors of laudable skill who come from the lineage of Monglane:

> *La tierce geste, qui molt fist a prisier,*
>
> *fu de Garin de Monglenne au vis fier.*
>
> *De son lingnaje puis ge bien tesmongnier*
>
> *que il n'i ot .I. coart ne lannier,*
>
> *ne traïtor ne vilein losangier ;*
>
> *einz furent sage et hardi chevalier,*
>
> *et conbatant et nobile guerrier.*

> The third *geste,* who did so much to be praised,
>
> was of fierce-faced Garin of Monglane.
>
> From his lineage, I can well testify,

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[187] Calin, Epic of Revolt, 9.

There was never a single craven coward,

nor any traitor, nor any vile flatterer.

Rather they were wise and bold knights,

skilled and magnificent warriors. (vv. 46-52)

Likewise, the second *geste* is explained in terms of character traits. The knights of the lineage of Doon of Mayence are described as fierce but highly flawed knights who fail to reach their high potential:

et l'autre aprés…fu de Doon a la barbe florie,

cil de Maience qui molt ot baronnie.

El sien lingnaje ot gent fiere et hardie ;

de tote France eüsent seignorie…

s'an eus n'eüst orgueil et traïson…

De ce lingnaje, qui ne fist se mal non,

    fu la seconde geste.

And the other after…was of that grey-bearded

Doon of Mayence, who had much prowess.

In his lineage were fierce and bold people

Who would have been lords of all of France…

If there had not been such pride and treason in them…

Of this lineage, who did nothing except evil,

    was the second *geste*. (laisses I & II)

There is no mention of songs or poems about those knights as one might expect if this was intended to guide the categorization of epic material. Explaining the three *gestes* as a classification system, then, seems to depend mainly on the interpretation of the word *geste*.

As we saw in the Introduction, *geste* is a polyvalent word whose precise meaning in the twelfth century can be difficult to ascertain. The best meaning of *geste* in Bertrand's usage of the word is revealed through context, as it is in conjunction with descriptions of the knights of various lineages. In its earliest attestations, *geste* meant "family," "kin group," or "race" (in the sense of shared lineage). This is unexpected, as there is no clear and apparent link between this meaning and the Latin root *gesta* (deeds): "as illogical as it may appear, the sense of 'race, family' already existed in the first *chansons de geste*."[188] For example, in *La Chanson de Guillaume,* an early *chanson de geste,* the poet introduces a jongleur character who "knew how to sing the songs about the *geste* of Clovis, the first emperor" [*de la geste li set dire les chançuns, De Clodoveu, le premier empereur,* vv. 1261-1262]. It would be somewhat nonsensical for the jongleur to sing songs about the "cycle of songs" of Clovis. And since *geste* is singular here—coupled with the fact that "deeds" is a rarely attested meaning—"songs about the deeds" seems inappropriate, as well. But if the jongleur knows the songs about the *family* of Clovis, then the verses that follow make more sense:

> *E de la geste li set dire les chançuns,*
>
> *De Clodeveu, le premier empereur…*
>
> *E de sun fiz, Flovent, le poigneür…*
>
> *E de tuz les reis qui furent de valur*

---

[188] *Si illogique que cela puisse paraître, le sens de « race, famille » existe déjà dans les premières chansons de geste.* Van Emden, "Évolution*,*" 111.

Tresque a Pepin, le petit poigneür,

E de Charlemaigne e de Rollant, sun nevou

And he knew how to sing the songs

About the *family* [*geste*] of Clovis, the first emperor…

And of his son, Flovent, the fighter…

And of all the valiant kings

Up to Pepin, the little warrior,

And of Charlemagne and of Roland, his nephew. (vv.1261-1268)

La Chanson de Guillaume is dated to around the middle of the twelfth century, preceding *Girart de Vienne* (circa 1180) by only a few decades.[189] The meaning of *geste* in the anonymous *Guillaume* is likely the meaning still current in Bertrand's day. The three *gestes* thus understood as three epic families or kin groups provides a more straightforward relationship with the attendant descriptions of knights than the idea of three cycles of poetry does.

Another way to show that the concept of three *gestes* was originally intended to place individual characters*,* rather than poems, into groups is to point to the confusion that ensues when trying to deploy the three *gestes* as a classification system. Calin called the tripartite system "unwieldy, artificial, and incomplete."[190] There is a certain amount of disagreement between modern scholars as to how to define each cycle and the epics that should belong to each. The consensus has mostly settled on a cycle of poems about Charlemagne's exploits, a cycle about rebellious barons and traitors, and a cycle about Guillaume d'Orange—corresponding to

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[189] See *La Chanson de Guillaume,* ed. François Suart, 27, and *Girart de Vienne,* ed. Wolfgang Van Emden, xxxiv.
[190] Calin, *Epic of Revolt,* 9.

the *geste* of the kings of France, the *geste* of Doon of Mayence, and the *geste* of Garin of

Monglane, respectively. The first is the least problematic, as *chansons* like *La Chanson de

Roland, Le Pèlerinage de Charlemagne*, and *La Chanson d'Aspremont* conform in most respects,

especially when widened to include the exploits of Charlemagne's favorites, the twelve peers.

The heroes of these tales "behave," conforming to the epic ideals of feudal loyalty, self-sacrifice,

and just war against the Saracen enemy. The third is also quite monolithic thematically, with

poems that recount Guillaume d'Orange's many adventures (*La Chanson de Guillaume, Le

Charroi de Nîmes, La Prise d'Orange*) or of his close relatives (*Hernaut de Beaulande, Les

Enfances Garin de Monglane*). The unity is due in large part to the genealogical nature of the

heroes of these poems. They are all either about Guillaume or his direct relatives and they

typically extoll the virtues of loyal vassals.

It is the second group that poses the real problem. Most of the poems are about unrelated

knights. There is no apparent kinship between, say, *Raoul de Cambrai, Les Quatre Fils Aymon,*

and *Doon de Nanteuil*. Without much of a unifying familial line, the cycle depends largely on the

theme of rebellion for its coherence. At first brush, this seems to satisfy at least one aspect of

Bertrand's suggestion, i.e., that the *geste* should contain the traitors. But this is still problematic,

as *chansons de geste* about rebellion are not really about actual traitors, but rather barons who

have legitimate reasons to rebel and who are ultimately reconciled to the king. Compare this to

Bertrand's description of a lineage "full of treachery" "who did nothing but evil" and is

ultimately "cast down to the ground" [*plain de traïson; qui ne fist se mal non; est trebuchiez en

terre;* laisse II]. Then there is also the problem with epics like *La Chevalerie Ogier.* Ogier the

Dane is one of the twelve peers, featuring prominently in *La Chanson de Roland,* and, according

to the *Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle*, is one of the tragic heroes who falls at Roncesvalles. But in his

own epic, he begins his career as a rebel, a constant thorn in Charlemagne's side. So, does Ogier belong in the first or the second cycle? One modern scholar, leaning toward the first cycle, expressed surprise that later medieval organizers seemed to be placing Ogier in the *geste* of traitors; another claimed that Ogier is the veritable author of the *geste* of Doon of Mayence; while Van Emden found that the "clan of rebels" announced in the opening to *Girart de Vienne* was created "not without some confusion," making classification for Ogier problematic.[191] Indeed, even our text resists easy classification: Girart and his brothers are the sons of Monglane, veritable members of and grouped with the third *geste*, yet by theme, *Girart de Vienne* is an epic of revolt and is sometimes classified as an epic of the second *geste*.

The confusion is not restricted to modern readers. One manuscript version of the *Chronique dite Saintongeaise* (ca. 1220) containing an explanation of the three *gestes* erroneously puts both Doon and Garin as hailing from Mayence.[192] Extant codices often contain disparate *chansons de geste* collected together with large thematic inconsistencies.[193] Manuscript copies of *Girart de Vienne* suffer from a similar existential ambiguity—BnF fr. 1448 beads it on a consistent string of epics about the clan of Guillaume d'Orange, but in BnF fr. 1374, *Girart de Vienne* is surrounded by a kaleidoscope of material: the epic *Parise la Duchece* (considered part of the second *geste*), *La Venjance Nostre Seigneur*, a legend about the aftermath of the Crucifixion in the form of a *chanson de geste,* and romances like *Li Romans de la Violette* and Chrétien de Troyes's *Cligès*! It appears that later medieval copyists were attempting to group

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[191] Dessau, "L'idée de la trahison," 25; Paul Aebischer, *Des Annales Carolingiennes à Doon de Mayence* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1975), 205; Van Emden, "Évolution sémantique," 122.

[192] *Chronique dite Saintongeaise,* ed. André de Mandach. *Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für Romanische Philologie* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1970), 101.

[193] Marianne Ailes, "*Doon de Nanteuil* and the Epic of Revolt," *Medium Aevum* 52, no. 2, (1983), 247-257; 255.

poems cyclically according to Bertrand's three *gestes,* but the task was too tricky to realize effectively.

No true song of the second *geste,* based on Bertrand's criteria, at least, seems to have ever existed. *Raoul de Cambrai* is the most well-known representative of the second *geste*. But depending on how his character and motivations are interpreted, Raoul can be considered more of an anti-hero than a traitor, for his rebellion is in pursuit of a legitimate claim to land in the Vermandois granted to him by King Louis. He is perhaps a better example of *desmesure* than *traïsun.* An argument could be made to include *Jehan de Lanson* (early 13th century) in the second *geste*. The eponymous character is certainly a faithless oath-breaker who causes much trouble for the twelve peers sent to confirm his allegiance to Charlemagne and is ultimately defeated as a traitor. However, Jehan is just one of many antagonists in the song—the narrative is really about Basin de Gennes, one of Charlemagne's twelve peers, and the poem could just as easily carry his name as the title. *Gormont et Isembart* (early 12th century) has perhaps the best claim to this, but even here, Isembart does not die a traitor, repenting in his final breaths on the battlefield. True traitor characters that correspond with Bertrand's description of the second *geste* are only ever the antagonists of the *chansons de geste*, for what medieval poet wanted to extoll the exploits of an irredeemable traitor?

Rebel heroes offered a far more fertile field for sowing narrative seeds. Later generations of poets after Bertrand created new genealogies and rehabilitated old characters in an attempt to reconcile the confusion inherent with using the second *geste* as a cycle. Despite his consistent mention throughout the tradition as the progenitor of the *geste* of traitors, Doon of Mayence does not get his own song until the period of decline of the genre in the late fourteenth century. The poet of this song accuses *jongleurs*, the composers and performers of epic poetry, of having

neglected and forgotten Doon: "These new *jongleurs,* by their arrogance and for the sake of new things to sing, have completely discarded [Doon]" [*Chil nouvel jougleor, par leur outrecuidanche et pour leur nouviaus dis, l'ont mis en oublianche*, *Doon de Maience,* 1]. However, in this song, Doon is recast as the hero and the plot has nothing to do with rebellion— in fact, young Doon fights to overcome a traitor himself, the seneschal Herchembaut, and as an adult serves Charlemagne faithfully in the Saxon wars. But, because he is the namesake, the epic of *Doon de Maience* has been placed in the cycle of traitors and rebels anyway.

In order for Doon to go from a traitor to a hero, according to Marianne Ailes, a fusion of two epic families "so carefully differentiated by Bertrand" had to happen.[194] This plays out in *Gaufrey,* another late *chanson de geste,* where Doon becomes linked genealogically to most of the major rebel heroes and in the process, much of the distinction between the second and third *gestes* is erased. Doon's connection to the Ur-traitor, Ganelon, is also diminished when the poet claims that the seed of treachery came, not from Doon, but one of his many sons, Griffon, a traitor and the father of Ganelon.[195] The "change in attitude" that this merger represents also suggests that later medieval audiences and poets, like modern scholars, mistook Bertrand's schema as a suggestion for organizing the poems into cycles.[196] The cyclic model invites the composition of more texts, giving the tradition "a life of its own" that overflows the boundaries that "attempt to contain and canonize it."[197] It is clear that by the fourteenth century, *geste* had become fully synonymous with "cycle," and the three *gestes* had strayed far from their first inception as kin groups in *Girart de Vienne*.

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[194] Ailes, "Traitors," 43.
[195] *Gaufrey,* ed. M. Guessard (Liechtenstein: Kraus Repint Ltd., 1966), 4, 121, 322.
[196] Ailes, "Traitors," 43.
[197] Sunderland, *Narrative Cycles*, 25.

The idea of three *gestes* is commonly attributed to Bertrand de Bar-sur-Aube; however, the poet tells us that he had a source for the concept: an ancient book at the abbey of Saint-Denis [*a Saint Denis, en la mestre abaïe…dedanz un livre de grant encesorie,* vv. 8-10]. Since the Merovingian dynasty (mid-5th to mid-8th centuries), Saint-Denis held a position of close association with royal authority, acquiring the characteristics and functions of a highly prestigious spiritual center. By the mid-twelfth century, Saint-Denis had become one of the most privileged religious capitals in France, boasting the royal necropolis, depository of the royal insignia, and acting as home for the patron saint of the monarchy. Gabrielle Spiegel showed how an energetic movement to record the history of the French kingdom coupled with the abbey's intimate ties to the royal court turned Saint-Denis into the center of "official historiography" in medieval France.[198] In 1120 under Abbot Suger, the abbey initiated the first effort at a comprehensive history of France, the *Gesta Gentis Francorum*. As its "prestige radiated throughout France," Saint-Denis was looked to as an authority in matters of history.[199] It is tempting to point to the *Gesta Gentis Francorum* as the esoteric book mentioned by Bertrand as containing the recipe for three *gestes*. However, there is no such mention in the *Gesta. Girart de Vienne* is the earliest extant text to contain the idea and seems to be the source of all other mentions of it in medieval texts. It appears that Bertrand was either recording an established but obscure custom, the institution of the three *gestes*, or more likely, as this is the first mention of these three *gestes* anywhere*,* Bertrand was possibly creating an institution from whole cloth, relying on the authority of the abbey of Saint-Denis to legitimize it.

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[198] Gabrielle Spiegel, *The Chronicle Tradition of Saint-Denis* (Brookline, Mass.: Classical Folio Editions, 1978), 13.
[199] Spiegel, *Chronicle Tradition,* 36.

For medieval historian Marc Bloch, all human institutions are only realities of a mental or psychological nature.[200] They exist, but not outside of the *idea* we have of them. In this way, an institution for fictional people like the three *gestes* can be considered as participating in the same kind of purely psychological space as "real" institutions with a similar impact on the reality of attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. Whitaker finds that the structures that support racial thinking work the same way, as "mirages created and maintained through rhetoric" whose power is based in preconceived notions and frameworks that influence perceptions.[201] Kathryn Gravdal questioned whether medieval texts constitute a mimesis of social class structures, or simply create their own aesthetic constructs.[202] Could they be a combination of both? If so, the three *gestes* of Bertrand de Bar-sur-Aube are a fictional institution reflective of aspects of real social structures, as well as an aesthetic framework containing a powerful suggestion for perceiving and demarcating society.

One text (of many) that reprises Bertrand's concept of three *gestes* is the *Chronique dite Saintongeaise*, a franco-occitan prose fusion of history and epic material from the early thirteenth century. The chronicler prefaces the work with a brief list of the three *gestes*, followed by a religious dedication of the text.

> *Trois Gestes ot en France: l'une fu de Pepin e de l'angre; e l'outre de [Doon] de Maence; e l'outre de Guarin de M[onglane]. Ecist conquistrent crestianté Nostre Segnior Deu Jhesu Crist. En l'enor Nostre Segnior qui est Peres e Filz e Sainz Esperiz e si est uns Deus en trois persones…*

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[200] Marc Bloch, "Liberté et servitude personnelles au Moyen Âge, particulièrement en France," in *Mélanges historiques,* vol. 1 (Paris: SEVPEN, 1963), 355.

[201] Whitaker, *Black Metaphors,* 3.

[202] Gravdal, *Vilain et Cortois,* 5.

> There were three *gestes* in France: one was of Pepin and the angel; and the other was of
>
> Doon of Mayence; and the other was of Garin of Monglane. And they did conquer for the
>
> Christendom of Our Lord God Jesus Christ. For the honor of Our Lord who is the Father
>
> and the Son and the Holy Ghost and is therefore one God in three persons… (p. 255-256)

The chronicler seems to have noticed something typologically familiar about the number of *gestes* and so brings them together with a reference to the Holy Trinity. This is a fine example of what Emanuel Mickel calls "the medieval bent for reading typologically" and is telling of the symbolic importance of the *gestes* as invested with the specific number of three.[203]

The number three was, of course, an important number in the Middle Ages. As perceiving signs and paradigms and imposing models on experience were the "distinguishing marks of medieval thought," models constructed of three parts appeared everywhere in medieval life.[204] In religion, there was, of course, the three modes of self-disclosure of the one God, i.e., the Trinity. Or the biblical *origines gentium*, the idea that different post-diluvian peoples descended from Ham, Shem, and Japheth, the three sons of Noah. (In fact, the *origines gentium* is a great example of a kind of early racial discourse similar to that under study here. Beginning with Josephus in the first century and built on by Jerome and Isidore of Seville in the seventh, efforts have been made to link real ethnic groups to the sons of Noah, cumulating in the influential eighteenth-century Göttingen School of History's formalized phenotypical stereotypes of the "Hamitic," "Japhetic," and "Semitic" races.) The number three was part of the rhythm of agricultural, as the fairly recent advent of the three-field system of crop rotation was leading to

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[203] Emanuel Mickel, *Ganelon, Treason, and the* Chanson de Roland (The Pennsylvania State University press, 1989), 10.
[204] Gravdal, *Vilain,* 1.

new prosperities and unprecedented surpluses. In literature, Jehan Bodel, a contemporary of Bertrand, offered the three "matters": "the matter of France," which encompassed the *chansons de geste*; "the matter of Britain," which contained the Arthurian romances; and "the matter of Rome," which included the great works of antiquity. And in medieval society at large, there were the three orders.

Perhaps on a par with the Trinity in its overarching scope within medieval life, the three orders were an idealized division of labor, separating people into *oratores, pugnatores,* and *agricultores*. Gerard, a bishop of Cambrai writing in the early eleventh century, explained the three orders as a natural system of mutual social support inherent to humanity's earliest times.

> *Genus humanum ab initio trifariam divisum esse…in oratoribus, agricultoribus, pungatoribus…Oratorum a saeculi vacans negotiis dum ad Deum vadit intentio, pugnatoribus debet, quod sancto secura vacat otio; agricultoribus, quod eorum laboribus corporali pascitur cibo. Nihilominus agricultores ad Deum levantur oratorum precibus, et pungatorum defensantur armis. Pari modo pugnatores, dum reditibus agrorum annonantur et…vectigalium solatiantur…delicta piorum quos tuentur expiat precatio sancta, foventur et dictum est mutuo.*

> From the beginning the human race was divided into three sorts, those who pray (*oratores)*, those who work the fields (*agricultores*), and those who fight (*pugnatores*)…While free from the business of the world, the effort of those who pray advances toward God, owing their safety in holy tranquility to those who fight and owing the food that feeds their bodies to the labor of those who work the fields. Likewise, those who work the fields are lifted up to God by the prayers of those who pray and are protected by the arms of those who fight. In the same way, those who fight are fed from

the produce of the fields and paid from the taxes…and their sins are atoned for by the holy prayers of the pious ones. Thus, it is said, they are mutually supported.[205]

Just how rigidly this caste system of "mutual support" operated in the concrete functions of the society of the Middle Ages is unclear, but as a representation, an image of a social structure, it had a power that allured religious and political thinkers who consistently defended and attempted to base their power upon it for over a millennium, as Georges Duby exhaustively demonstrated in *The Three Orders*.[206]

The number three starts to seem almost overwhelmingly ubiquitous in the Middle Ages, for once noticed, more and more triangular paradigms continue to materialize. Joël Grisward based an entire study on the trifunctional structures he found in the minor "Narbonnais Cycle" of *chansons de geste*, theorizing that they descend directly from a tripartite social paradigm from Indo-European proto history.[207] Although the deep connections have been questioned, the observation that the characters of the cycle play three distinct courtly roles is sustainable and represents another testament to medieval schemas of three. The poet of a much later *chanson de geste* builds on Bertrand's three *gestes* by introducing a triplet of miraculous signs to accompany the establishment of each of the three. Accordingly, when Charlemagne, Doon, and Garin were born, three great strikes of lighting blasted three great pits in the ground out of which three

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[205] *Gesta episcoporum Cameracensium,* ed. L.C. Berthmann, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, S.S. 7* (Hannover, 1846), 485.

[206] Georges Duby, "Les Trois Ordres ou l'imaginaire du féodalisme" in *Bibliothèque de la Pléiade: Œuvres de Georges Duby.* (Paris: Gallimard, 2019).

[207] Joël Grisward, *Archéologie de l'Épopée Médiévale: Structures Trifonctionnelles et Mythes Indo-Européens dans le Cycle des Narbonnais* (Paris: Payot, 1981).

wonderous flowering trees immediately grew up near the birthplace of each.[208] These were to be signs of the future greatness of the three founders of the *gestes.*

Clearly not arbitrary, there is special significance accorded the number three in medieval thinking. In one manuscript version of *Girart de Vienne,* after copying "there are only three *gestes* in all of France," a cleric has added the quip "and anyone who asks for more is very unwise" [*n'est mie sages qui plus en i demande,* appendix A]. Limiting the number of *gestes* to three maintains the "triadic model" that was an essential way of "seeing and organizing social experience" in medieval social theory.[209] Otto Oexle found that trifunctional schemes were useful for discussing "current issues of the day," as well as for grasping social realities such as the formation of roles and identities, by attempting to perceive and interpret them.[210] A distinct personality and narrative role emerge for each of the three *gestes* as they are demarcated from the others. Let us turn now to analyzing the selective essential differences that inform the use of the three *gestes* within *Girart de Vienne.*

Lineages: common pools of selective essential differences

To classify a group as a "race" is to refer to generally shared characteristics derived from some type of common "pool" or source. Lucius Outlaw showed how in the 19th and especially 20th century genes came to be considered as this pool, but in other times and places, different criteria were imagined as the source for the pool.[211] This points to "how flexible and resourceful"

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[208] *Doon de Maience,* 162-163.
[209] Gravdal, *Vilain,* 1.
[210] Otto Oexle, "Perceiving Social Reality" in *Ordering Medieval Society,* ed. Berhard Jussen. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 95; 112.
[211] Outlaw, "Toward a Critical Theory," 61-68.

strategies of positing and assigning "strategic essentialisms" can be.[212] As we continue to

connect the paratactical pieces of essentializing discourse in *Girart de Vienne*, we will see that

the three *gestes* provided common pools of generally shared characteristics. This offered a way

to grasp the essential nature of the characters; it was a framework that guided audience

perceptions of the various knights in the stories. Their character traits and flaws could be

explained in broad strokes by bestowing each of the three *gestes* with general qualities, putting

the audience in the frame of mind to correctly experience the story as desired by the poet. The

poet "wants to make sure the audience is in the right mood to accept what is going to follow in

the story."[213] Thus, as a prologue to the narrative, the characteristics of each *geste* are laid out so

that the audience knows how to interpret the characters and their forthcoming actions. The

knights of the third *geste* are praiseworthy, bold, wise, and skilled [*molt a prisier, hardi, sage,*

conbatant]. Among them "there was never a single craven coward, nor any traitor, nor any vile

flatterer" [*il n'i ot .I. coart ne lannier, ne traïtor ne vilein losangier*]. In a poem whose plot

revolves around the rebellion of the sons of Garin of Monglane against Charlemagne, the poet,

paradoxically and preemptively, reassures us that this lineage "never sought to betray the king of

France" but "went to great lengths to help their rightful lord, and advance his power in all

places" [*Einz roi de France ne vodrent jor boisier; lor droit seignor se penerent d'aidier, et de*

s'annor en toz leus avancier]. As proof of their valiant nature, we are reminded that "they

protected Christendom and crushed and expelled the Saracens" [*Crestienté firent molt essaucier,*

et Sarrazins confondre et essillier, laisse III]. The acts of rebellion that follow can be justified

because the hiers of Monglane are intrinsically good—the essence of their *geste* is heroic.

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[212] Heng, *Invention of Race,* 59.
[213] John Stranges, "The Character and the Trial of Ganelon: A New Appraisal," *Romania* 96, no. 381 (1975), 331-367; 358.

In stark contrast stands the second *geste*. Bertrand has the most to say about this kin group. Whereas the qualities of the first *geste*, that of the kings of France, are summed up in just two verses, and those of the third *geste* require no more than half a laisse, the characteristics of the lineage of Doon of Mayence occupy nearly two full laisses (I & II). Bertrand begins his description of the second *geste* by stressing the importance of what he is about to relate: "it is very correct what I say" [*bien est droiz que jeu die*]. He wants the audience to trust the judgment he is about to pronounce on the individuals in question because recognizing the difference between the nature of the characters of the second and third *gestes—*the essential differences between rebels and traitors—is the keystone to the story arc of *Girart de Vienne*. The knights of the second *geste* are described with vital differences to those of the third. Where the third are "wise and bold knights" [*sage et hardi chevalier*], the second are "fierce and bold people" [*gent fiere et hardie*]. Although superficially similar, there are important nuances here. "Wise and bold" communicates prowess with restraint, while "fierce and bold" suggests wantonness. That the third are *chevaliers* is a reminder of their social position and responsibility as knights; as *gent,* the second are merely people, potentially unburdened of the societal restraint *chevaliers* might encounter. The selfless service to king and Christendom of the third *geste* stands in contrast to the ambitious nature of the second, who had "much great fame" [*de molt grant renon*], and "would have been lords over riches and armies, and even all of France" [*de tote France eüsent seignorie, et de richece et de chevalerie*]. But the lineage of Doon of Mayence is tragically flawed: they are full of pride, jealousy, and treachery [*plain d'orgueil et d'envie…plain de traïson*]. Those of this lineage, "who could do nothing but evil," make up the second *geste* [*De ce lingnaje, qui ne fist se mal non, fu la seconde geste*]. Among "essential heritable characteristics," moral qualities and intellectual dispositions account for more than visible

morphological characteristics in making up "the content of racialism."[214] Here, we can see that the structure of three *gestes* demarcates the characters into groups defined largely by qualities of a moral nature. This is discourse meant to essentialize the traits of each *geste,* as it is defined by the traits of its people.

As we have seen already, family or kin groups are at the heart of the formation of the three *gestes.* Old French *lingnaje* is obviously the close etymological ancestor of "lineage" in both orthography and meaning; its use in medieval texts referred to relations of kindred or family groups. In the Middle Ages, when a person was said to be related to some powerful personage *par lignaje* (by lineage or kinship), they enjoyed a more privileged position within the social hierarchy as a result.[215] For Kate Hammond, kin groups were "a mutually affective and supportive unit" whose members had shared aims, supported each other in their endeavors, and defended one another from external threats.[216] The "best-served hero" had other warriors bound to him either by the ties of kinship or vassalage because these superseded all other ties.[217] In the epics of revolt, kinship ultimately supersedes even vassalage. Appiah concluded that there were two types of essentialist discourse: intrinsic and extrinsic. We examine extrinsic essentialism in the next section; intrinsic essentialist discourse is "the metaphorical extension of the moral priority of one's family," that is, the moral obligation to defend family relations and make distinctions between two otherwise indistinguishable people on the basis of kinship.[218] In the *chansons de geste,* the kin group is the moral priority of its members. Extended families come

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[214] Appiah, "Racisms," 5.

[215] Dominique Barthélemy, Georges Duby, et al. *Histoire de la vie privée: Tome 2 De l'Europe féodale à la Renaissance* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1985), 98-99.

[216] Kate Hammond, "Kin in Conflict in 11th and early 12th century Normandy," in *Law and Disputing in the Middle Ages,* eds. Per Andersen, Kirsi Salonen, et al. (Copenhagen: DJØF Publishing, 2013), 93.

[217] Bloch, *Société féodale,* 192.

[218] Appiah, "Racisms," 13.

together to defend against slanderers and enemies, and, despite their own ties of fealty to the king, to support those in rebellion. Those outside of the lineage quickly become "others" whenever circumstances require distinctions to be made; the kin group is thus a distant mirror of Appiah's modern idea of intrinsic essentialism.

Appearing in key places throughout *Girart de Vienne,* lineage factors heavily into determining the traits of the individual characters of each *geste*. The common traits of the lineage were a feature of its hereditary nature, reflecting broader medieval thinking about heredity. Heredity was an unspoken rule of the Middle Ages—"rarely invoked, discussed, critiqued, or justified," yet applied with few exceptions to nearly everything from political power to professions to personal attributes.[219] Many human traits were considered hereditary, including treachery, as Marcabru, the mid-twelfth-century troubadour, demonstrated in the proverb "good fruits come from a good garden, and evil sons come from evil mothers" [*Bons fruitz eis de bon jardi, E avols fills d'avols maire*].[220] Bertrand based his *gestes* on lineages and the character traits of each *geste* stem from the lineage in question: "In his lineage (Doon of Mayence) were fierce and bold people…From this lineage there was so much deceit" [*El sien lingnaje ot gent fière et hardie….De ce lingnaje, ou tant ot de boidie*]; "From his lineage (Garin of Monglane) came wise and bold knights, skilled and magnificent warriors" [*De son lingnaje…furent sage et hardi chevalier, et conbatant et nobile guerrier*]. The firm hierarchy among the three *gestes* is derived in large part by the inherent traits of each lineage. The first *geste* ranks at the top by virtue of royal authority and moral quality: "[The *geste*] of the kings of France is the most noble" [*des rois de France est la plus seignorie,* v. 13]. To marry one who is of this lineage is the

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[219] Lugt and Miramon, "Penser l'hérédité," 6.
[220] Marcabru, *Poésies Complètes du Troubadour Marcabru*, ed. Jean-Marie-Lucien Dejeanne (Toulouse: Imprimerie Édouard Privat, 1909), XVII, 22-23.

highest possible aspiration for a woman of the *chansons de geste*, as Alda's uncle expresses when Charlemagne seeks to give her in marriage to Roland: "Sire, by your leave! My niece could not have a higher husband than one within your lineage" [*Sire, vostre merci ; plus haut ne puet ma niece avoir mari que en vostre lingnaje,* vv. 6819-6821]. By its attributes, the first *geste* is first among *gestes.*

As part of the identity of epic characters, lineage is a crucial element. In the worldview of the *chansons de geste,* the individual is defined primarily as member of a group, or even several concentric groups.[221] The characters are "other-oriented individuals" whose personality and being, i.e., identity, take definition from the group.[222] When first encountering Girart and Renier, both the abbot of Cluny and Charlemagne first look to the youths' lineage to establish their identity: "Then [the abbot] asks them: 'What lineage do you come from, young men?" [*Si lor demande: « Dont estes vos, enfant? De quel lingnaje? »* v. 365-366]; "'What lineage do you come from, young lords?' [Charlemagne] says." [« *Dont estes vos, » fet il, « seignor enfant? De quel lingnaje ? »* [v. 667-668]. When Charlemagne rejects Girart's terms for peace, offering instead to have him publicly humiliated and severely punished, Oliver insists that Girart's lineage-determined personality would never assent to such abuse:

> « *Ce n'iert ja, certes, sire,* » dit Olivier,
>
> « *Car trop est fier dant Girart le guerrier,*
>
> *et de puissant lingnaje.* »

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[221] Albert Gérard, "L'Axe Roland-Ganelon," *Le Moyen Âge* 4, no. 24 (1969), 445-465; 447.
[222] Jones, *Ethos of the Song of Roland,* 97-98.

"It will never happen thus, for certain," says Oliver,

"For Lord Girart the warrior is too proud,

and of a powerful lineage." (vv. 4033-4034)

In preparation for the duel with Roland meant to finally decide the outcome of the war that has lasted too long, Girart counsels Oliver to live up to his lineage: "and so he encourages him, as a true baron, that he should be like his lineage." [*si le conforte, a guise de baron, qu'il ert de son lingnaje*, vv.4940-4941]. Even in other poems, we can see that lineage plays an identical role in the identity of those of the second *geste.* In *Jehan de Lanson*, for example, Ganelon gathers his relatives to aid in his attempt to destroy Roland and Oliver. Because they are of his lineage, they share the same qualities: "For all are his cousins and his kin, and indeed they are of a lineage inclined to wickedness" [*Car tuit sont si couzin et si apartenant, et si sont d'un linnage qui si fu maupensans,* vv. 3660-3661].

The *lingnaje* is an integrated unit, functioning in a rather *Three Musketeers* "all for one and one for all" kind of way.[223] The acts of individuals have a shared effect on the whole kin group. This mechanism is established as early as the *Chanson de Roland*:

Roland does not feel that the decisions he makes affect himself alone. He will not be the only beneficiary of the glory, nor the only victim of the dishonor that he could bring upon himself. In his hands rest not only his own reputation, but also the renown of his entire lineage.[224]

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[223] *Tous pour un, un pour tous,* Alexandre Dumas, *Bibliothèque de la Pléiade: Les Trois Mousquetaires,* ed. Gilbert Sigaux (Paris: Gallimard, 1962), 112.

[224] *Roland ne se sent pas seul concerné par les décisions qu'il prend. Il ne sera pas seul bénéficiaire de la gloire, ni seule victime du déshonneur, qu'il pourrait s'attirer. Entre ses mains reposent, non seulement son propre* los*, mais aussi le renom de tout son lignage*. Gérard, "L'Axe Roland-Ganelon," 447.

The actions of one individual can advance the social esteem of the entire lineage. When the rebels return to Vienne with their willing captive Charlemagne in tow, Lady Guibourc excitedly proclaims that merely by hosting the emperor within their walls, their whole lineage will be enhanced.

> *Qui une nuit le porroit osteler,*
>
> *et en Vïenne servir et ennorer,*
>
> *toz ses lingnajes en seroit alevez.*

> Whoever might host him even for one night,
>
> And in Vienne serve and welcome him,
>
> Their entire lineage will be elevated. (vv. 6557-6559)

A messenger bringing news of the family to Girart and Renier, excited about the promise of heightened prestige for the family presented in young Aymeri, exclaims "if he lives long enough, he will do redoubtable deeds that will exalt and elevate his whole lineage!" [*se il vit longues, bien fera a douter, et son lingnaje essaucier et monter,* vv. 918-919, *D*]. Another example of this is when Roland returns from the riverside after meeting young Oliver for the first time. Charlemagne berates his nephew for failing to kill Oliver because the youth might now go on to boost the greatness of his entire lineage with his future deeds:

> *« Hé, gloz!...por coi ne l'as tué ?...*
>
> *ja ne queïsse que avant fust alez,*
>
> *ne ses lingnajes fust par lui amontez. »*

"Hey, stupid! Why didn't you kill him,

or at least maim him before he left,

so that his lineage won't be advanced by him?" (vv.2866-2869)

In persuading the duchesse to marry him, Charlemagne makes an appeal to the advancement of her social standing and, by association, that of her entire lineage. "Which is better, to decrease in status or to rise, exalting and elevating one's lineage?" [*Lequel vaut mieuz, abessier ou monter et son lingnaje essaucier et lever ?* vv.1308-1309]. As Charlemagne pointed out in a round-about way, if a lineage can be exalted, it can also be brought low and all of its members with it. The queen's foot-kissing insult to Girart is beyond personal, threatening to disgrace and diminish the status of his whole lineage if allowed to stand without retaliation: "the queen did so much harm to you, shaming and degrading your lineage" [*Molt vos a fet la roïne avillier, vostre lingnaje honir et abessier,* vv.1916-1917].

As a concept, kinship was as much a matter of the imaginary as of reality. The strength of the kinship group could be represented by the mighty castle. In medieval texts and art, the magnificent keep with its tower represents the power of a lineage.[225] Towers are an interesting *topos* of the *chanson de geste;* they function both as a secure location, and as a separation, a social and spatial boundary. When overwhelmed by enemies, heroes often retreat to the safety of a tower. In *La Prise d'Orange,* Guillaume takes refuge in *Gloriete*, a tower in the center of Saracen-controlled Orange (laisses XXVI-XXVIII). Later, Guillaume brings about the downfall of the city through *Gloriete*: his kin arrive as reinforcements via a secret tunnel underneath the tower, bypassing the defensive walls of Orange (laisse LX). In *Jehan de Lanson,* the twelve

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[225] Barthélémy, *Histoire de la vie privée,* 101; 116.

peers retreat to the safety of a tower more than once, where they enjoy banquets and wine while their enemies rage outside (laisses XVIII-XLIX; LVI-LVIII). In *La Chevalerie Ogier le Danois*, during his one-man war against all of the forces of Charlemagne, Ogier the Dane infiltrates a castle, defenestrates its occupants, and observes his enemies from the security of the high tower (vv. 6015-6238). *Topoi* of the tower appear throughout *Girart de Vienne* and are metaphorical representations of the strength of the lineage of Monglane. Upon his triumphant arrival as the new lord of Vienne, Girart takes to the keep to survey his new possession from its tower. The grandeur of the tower is shown through the description of its window: "[Girart is] seated at a window of very fine craftmanship" [*sus au fenestres de molt riche façon,* v.1547]. When the council to declare war on Charlemagne is convened, the family members meet in that same castle "of fine marble" [*de fin marbre*, v. 2050]. There is a balance within the lineage, where leadership alternates between the eldest, Hernaut, and the youngest, Girart.[226] These *relations lignagères*, as Barthélemy calls them, are shown symbolically through the figure of the tower. Late in the tale, Vienne is revealed as having *two* magnificent keeps of extraordinary splendor: "two great palaces were founded in Vienne…there is no man born of a mother who could describe the great wealth and riches of these two castles" [*ot en Vïenne .II. granz palés fondez…Il n'est nus hom qui de mere soit nez qui deviser seüst les granz bontez ne les richeces des .II. pales listez,* vv. 6223-6229]. Hernaut leads the family from one splendid tower and Girart from the other.

One way of fleshing out the character traits of a hero is to attach him to a loyal lineage. We have already seen how Doon of Mayence was rehabilitated through such a mechanism (see above). Placing Girart in the line of Garin of Monglane proves the essential loyalty needed to counter his rebellious acts. Correspondingly, attaching a character to the lineage of traitors has

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[226] Ibid., 117.

the same effect of revealing traits, not through actions, but through essence. Each of the three

gestes takes its overall disposition from the personality of a singular individual. Heng identifies

this type of generalizing practice, where the traits of an individual become transcoded into a

stereotype that applies to a collective totality of a group of people, as an important feature of

racial discourse.[227] In this way, the lineage of the first *geste* reflects Charlemagne; the third,

Garin of Monglane. The second *geste,* however, takes its essence, not so much from Doon of

Mayence, but from Ganelon. For Van Emden, "the germ of the idea of a pernicious lineage"

sprouted early in the epic tradition when thirty of Ganelon's kin shared in his grim punishment

for treachery in *La Chanson de Roland,* guilty only by association.[228] Bertrand de Bar-sur-Aube

seems to be cultivating this idea in his explanation of the second *geste.* He places Doon of

Mayence as the titular head of the lineage, but, saying no more about the enigmatic character, he

shifts instead to a discussion of Ganelon:

> *De ce lingnaje, ou tant ot de boidie,*
>
> *fu Ganelon, qui, par sa tricherie,*
>
> *en grant dolor mist France la garnie*

> From this lineage where there was so much deceit,
>
> came Ganelon, who, by his betrayal,
>
> put beautiful France in great pain. (vv. 21-23)

The poet then makes an appeal to tradition while deftly switching Ganelon for Doon as the

source of the *geste*:

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[227] Heng, *Invention of Race,* 116.
[228] Van Emden, "Évolution sémantique," 106.

Oï avez dire en meinte chançon

que de la geste qui vint de Ganelon

furent estret meint chevalier baron,

fier et hardi et de molt grant renon.

Tuit seignor fusent de France le roion,

s'an eus n'eüst orgueil et traïson

You have heard it in many songs,

that from the *geste* which came from Ganelon,

many brave knights were descended,

fierce and bold and of much great renown.

They all would be lords of the kingdom of France,

if there had not been such arrogance and treason in them. (vv. 27-32)

The renown of the knights of this lineage and their potential to rule France, thwarted only by their penchant for treason, is a repetition, echoing the brief description of the *geste* a few verses previous under Doon as the progenitor. Here, though, the poet continues his discussion of Ganelon and his family, supplying more details and reinforcing the idea that this lineage is ambitious, powerful, and craven, just like Ganelon.

Et ausin furent li parant Ganelon,

qui tant estoient riche et de grant renon,

se il ne fussent si plain de traïson.

De ce lingnaje, qui ne fist se mal non,

   fu la seconde geste.

So also were the kin of Ganelon,

who would be powerful and of great renown,

if they had not been so full of treason.

From this lineage, who did nothing except evil,

was the second *geste*. (vv. 41-45)

The idea of an entire lineage reflecting the attributes of its founder is alive in other epics. Not only does the poet label Ganelon's kin as traitors in *Jehan de Lanson* (v. 3690), Ganelon himself calls them such in a speech to enjoin them to his plot against Roland and Oliver:

"Merveilles voi", dist Guenes, "mout vous voi esmaiant,

S'i a tant traïtor devant moi en estant,

Si n'en i a .i. seul qui en sache noient"

"I cannot believe what I see!" says Ganelon. "I see how much you are worrying.

All of you traitors standing here before me,

yet not a single one of you knows anything about [my plan]?" (vv. 3683-3684)

According to Jacques Thomas, even a casual perusal of the *chansons de geste* quickly reveals the existence of a veritable lineage of traitors related to Ganelon, which is "also proof, undoubtedly, that the Middle Ages saw in him a type."[229]

From his earliest appearance in the *chansons de geste*, Ganelon is already established as the original traitor. *The Song of Roland* introduces him as "Ganelon, the one who committed treason" [*Guenes…ki la traïsun fist*, v. 178]. This holds true in other literature that arose early in

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[229] …*preuve aussi, sans doute, que le Moyen Âge voyait en lui un type*, Jacques Thomas, "La traîtrise de Ganelon," *Romanica Gandensia* 16 (1976), 91-117; 91.

the Roncesvalles tradition. The Latin poem *Carmen de Predicione Guenonis* ("Song of the

Treachery of Ganelon," circa 1120) is a retelling of the events in *La Chanson de Roland*, but

with special emphasis on Ganelon's perfidy, as summed up by the prologue: "Here revealed is

Ganelon's secret fraud…by which he deceived the Franks" [*Condita…fraus hic manifesta*

Guenonis, per quam decepit Gallos].[230] In the *Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle* (early twelfth century)*,*

Ganelon's name appears at the end of a long list of the important barons who accompanied

Charlemagne to war in Spain. The other names are listed in oblique fashion without

supplemental information, but Ganelon receives special commentary: "Ganelon, who later

revealed himself as a traitor" [*Ganalonus qui postea traditor extitit*].[231]

As a type, Ganelon was not bound solely to epic literature, appearing in romance and

poetry as the metaphorical embodiment of treachery. Patronizing and participating in the same

local literary culture as Bertrand de Bar-sur-Aube, Count Thibaut of Champagne wrote love

songs and pastorales about maidens pursued by amorous, and often unfaithful, knights. In one

such poem, Ganelon is placed on the lips of a young shepherdess as she rebuffs the advances of a

would-be knightly lover:

> *Mainte dame avront trichie*
>
> *cil chevalier soudoiant.*
>
> *Trop sont faus et mal pensant ;*
>
> *pis valent que Guenelon.*

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[230] *Carmen de Predicione Guenonis,* ed. Gaston Paris, *Romania* 11 (1882), 465-518; 468.

[231] *Pseudo-Turpin,* ed. Paul Gerhardt Schmidt, *Karolellus atque Pseudo-Turpini Historia Karoli-Magni et Rotholandi* (Stuttgart: B.G. Teubner, 1996), 50.

Deceiving knights

have betrayed many women.

They are false and too wicked minded,

worse than Ganelon.[232]

One popular vein of scholarly criticism in the twentieth century was the attempt to nuance the character of Ganelon to prove him a flawed, but essentially noble baron.[233] To illustrate how it is only through his betrayal that Ganelon becomes bad, Matthias Waltz quipped "Ganelon is evil only because he betrays" [*Ganelon ist böse, nur weil er verrät*].[234] But, according to Thomas, an attentive reading of the epic "prompts us to admit that Ganelon is essentially bad, that he is a traitor 'by nature,' and not 'by circumstance.'"[235] Others, including Roger Pensom, argued that those attempts to rehabilitate Ganelon were historicist and motivated by humanistic concerns that come "from outside the text."[236] Medieval poets introduce Ganelon as *the* traitor already. It is more appropriate, then, to flip Waltz' hypothesis: "Ganelon betrays only because he is evil."

As a character, Ganelon makes only limited appearances as one of the barons of Charlemagne's camp in *Girart de Vienne*, but the true nature of his personality manages to reveal itself in subtle ways. For example, Ganelon is present during the quintain episode (laisse XCII-

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[232] Thibaut de Champagne, *The Lyrics of Thibaut de Champagne,* ed. Kathleen Brahney (New York: Garland, 1989), 38, vv. 33-36.

[233] See Gérard, "L'Axe Roland-Ganelon" ; Ruggieri, *Il processo di Gano nella « Chanson de Roland » ;* Stranges, "The Character and the Trial of Ganelon: A New Appraisal"; and Waltz, *Rolandslied, Wilhelmslied, Alexiuslied.*

[234] Matthias Waltz, *Rolandslied, Wilhelmslied, Alexiuslied: zur Struktur und geschichtlichen Bedeutung* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1965), 32.

[235] *Nous pousse à admettre que Ganelon est essentiellement mauvais, qu'il est traître "de nature" et non "d'occasion,"* Thomas, "La traîtrise de Ganelon," 92.

[236] Roger Pensom, *Literary Technique in the Chanson de Roland* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1982), 100.

XCV).[237] When Oliver begins slaying the unaware Franks gathered to congratulate the mystery

knight, Roland tries to mount a counteroffensive, but in the mass turmoil he falls to the ground,

much to Ganelon's mirth: "Roland stumbles and Ganelon laughs at him" [*Rollant s'enbronche et*

Ganes s'en est ris, v. 3243]. Although little narrative continuation results from this moment of

derision (much to the chagrin of this reader), Ganelon's enmity for Roland is clear,

foreshadowing the future altercations and betrayal in *La Chanson de Roland.* Ganelon as a

character is much more important in other epics than he is in *Girart de Vienne*. It is as an idea,

the symbol of the traitor, that Ganelon truly matters to the plot of *Girart de Vienne*. Alongside

his prototypical role as founder of the *geste* of traitors, there are multiple narratorial reminders of

his forthcoming treachery in the events of Roncesvalles (vv. 24, 1185, 6925). The spectre of

Ganelon has a special effect, tainting with a dark shadow any other characters that can be

associated with his archetype. The audience was intimately familiar with Ganelon through the

Roland tradition; to evoke the begetter of all epic traitors was to convince audiences of the

disloyalty of any given character.

Renart de Peviers is one such character. Although he carries the same name, there is little

to suggest that this character has any resonance with medieval stories about the anthropomorphic

red fox recounted in *Le Roman de Renart* (c.1170). Renart the fox is a rebel trickster who has

much more in common with characters like Girart and Renier than the traitor Renart de Peviers.

Under the controlling influence of Bertrand's introductory description of Ganelon's *geste* of

traitors, the poet brings Renart de Peviers into the narrative by declaring him an "evil traitor who

should be damned by God!" [*un mau traître, qui Deu doint enconbrier,* v. 769]. The word

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[237] See Chapter Two: Rebel Barons and the Noble Robber Narrative.

"traitor" typically accompanies subsequent mentions of Renart. Yet, the character is never shown to commit acts of treachery, nor are there any references to extra-textual treasons. The poet relies on the audience to accept the essential disloyalty of Renart without ever displaying that disloyalty. As a matter of fact, Renart has occasion to shows his apparent loyalty. When they arrive at court, Renart warns Charlemagne that Girart and his brother Renier are bound to cause him trouble.

> *Or voi tel chose que vos conparroiz chier.*
>
> *Trop fêtes ja ces danziaus sorhaucier ;*
>
> *encore .I. jour vos feront il irier.*

> At present, I can see something that will cause you to pay dearly.
>
> Surely, you are giving these youths too much power,
>
> one of these days they will make you regret it. (vv.770-772)

As a means of authenticating his advice, Renart then reminds Charlemagne that "every day" for many years his own vassalage has been loyal and "without difficulty" [*Qui chascun jor te servons sanz dengier,* v.796]. And, of course, Renart's words do indeed prove to be prescient when Girart's clan inevitably rebels. Renart is thus a traitor who is never shown to betray and who gives astute advice. It bears mentioning that Ganelon knew how to give good counsel, too.[238] However, any credence toward these particular characters should be limited, as their words may be motivated: "Ganelon's advice is wise…but the reader should not be duped: one must invert the predicates, since the words of a traitor are a web of falsehoods."[239] In this light,

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[238] *La Chanson de Roland,* laisse 15; see also Stranges, "The Character and Trial of Ganelon," 337.
[239] *Le conseil de Ganelon est sagesse…Le lecteur ne saurait être dupe : il doit intervertir les prédicats, puisque les propos du traître sont un tissu de contrevérités.* Thomas, "La traîtrise de Ganelon," 96.

the poet's stark reaction to Renart's counsel— "God curse him! Will jealousy never die?" [*Deus le maudie…Ja ne morra envie!,* vv. 797-798] —seems warranted. One of the key traits of the *geste* of traitors is jealousy [*plain…d'envie*, v. 20], so even if the advice is sound, when it comes, not out of concern for Charlemagne, but out of enviousness, it is suspect. Afterall, *Girart de Vienne* is a story about the third *geste*, so any attempt to impede Girart's goals is a clear act of antagonism. Treachery is visible to the heroes, even if not to the king. Charlemagne holds Renart in high esteem, "the duke Renart de Peviers is so very praiseworthy and admirable" [*li dus Renarz qui molt est alosez, cil de Peviers qui tant est adurez,* vv. 962-963], but Renart's nature is obvious to Renier: "he is a traitor, his looks give that away" [*traïtres est, bien pert a son regart*, vv. 806-808]. The audience simultaneously experiences the same irony because the poet insists that Renart *le traïtor* is simply of bad stock: "Cursed be his lineage!" [*maudite soit s'orine*!, vv.823-826].

Three Gestes *and Differential Treatment*

Assigning characteristics to these characters through affiliation with a *geste* is exemplary of the Appiah's intrinsic racism discussed above. The tails-side of this coin is extrinsic racism, where the division of people into groups based on essentialized characteristics is the basis for differential treatment.[240] Renart de Peviers is an old member of Charlemagne's entourage and has influence with the king, yet he is universally hated by the other barons of the court. In

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[240] Appiah, "Racisms," 11.

defense of his father's honor against Renart's report of youthful improprieties,[241] Girart seizes Renart by the beard.

> *Forment rechine le traitor veillart,*
>
> *et François rient qui s'en pranent regart,*
>
> *car molt aoient le pautonnier Renart*

> Loudly the old traitor brays like an ass,
>
> And the Franks who look on laugh heartily,
>
> Because they hate that scoundrel Renart. (vv. 823-825)

No other reason than his belonging to the *geste* of traitors is offered as motivation for the collective hatred of Renart de Peviers. The character is not shown to truly betray anyone. Yet, his ultimate narrative fate is congruous with other traitors of the *chansons de geste*, a horrible death.

By delineating the characters of the *chansons de geste* into three discrete groups, a particular kind of narrative power has been brought forward that creates different outcomes for the motivations and actions of the agents in the various epics, e.g., the outcome for the rebels in *Girart de Vienne* is drastically different than that of traitor characters. Those differences result from the unique and universal claims attributable to each *geste* in the *chansons de geste*.

The first group, *la geste des rois de France*, is mostly limited to the emperor Charlemagne and his son Louis, but his nephew Roland and other characters in the king's entourage can also be considered as part of this *geste* because their fate is closely tied to the narrative arc of the king. Bertrand offers the fewest details about the nature of this *geste*, calling it simply *la plus seignorie* (v.13). *Seignorie* is a fairly dense concept, however, so the brevity in

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[241] See Chapter Two: Rebel Barons and the Noble Robber Narrative.

adjectives does not indicate a shallowness in meaning. "Seigniorial" is an obvious English derivative meaning, of course, "relating to, or having the characteristics of a seignior," but the Old French term meant more. As a medieval title of respect, *seignor* (lord) is coterminous with the Christian term of reverence for Jesus Christ. The analogy is obvious and labeling the first *geste* this way is a reminder of the medieval belief in the anointment of kings, i.e., that God unquestionably backs the actions of this first group and controls their overall outcome. This is an important feature, for the king often has to play the dual role of antagonist and center of order. In many songs and especially in the epic of revolt, Charlemagne is the source of conflict. His action and/or inaction spurs the events of the plot, but he is often also required to resolve those same conflicts, a task that seems impossible without divine intervention. The duel to decide the fate of the traitor Ganelon in *The Song of Roland* ends when half-dead Thierry, the stand-in for Charlemagne, strikes a miraculously fatal blow that cleaves in two the helmet, skull, and brain of Pinabel, Ganelon's hero. "God has shown his divine power here!" exclaim the onlookers [*Deus i ad fait vertut!,* v. 3931]. This miracle has turned the duel into a trial by ordeal, revealing God's judgment of Ganelon's guilt. In *Girart de Vienne,* the fight to the death between Roland and Olivier ends by miraculous means, as well, when an angel descends from the sky and orders them to cease. "Fear not, barons! From his heaven above, God commands you: end this fighting.*"* [*N'aiez poor baron! Deus le vos mende do son ciel la amont: lessiez ester iceste aatisson,* vv. 5909-10]. So begins the famous friendship that characterizes the pair's relationship in other epics and with the ending of their enmity, the larger reconciliation between Charlemagne's camp and Girart's clan can begin. The first *geste* benefits consistently from these *deus ex machina* resolutions that are denied to other epic characters who seek them, such as the unanswered prayers for Raoul's deliverance in *Raoul de Cambrai* (*laisse* LV and CLV).

Seignorie is also synonymous with "powerful," a meaning confirmed elsewhere with phrases like *Carles li reis, nostre emperere magnes,* [Charles the king, our powerful emperor; *Roland*, v.1]. This feature of the first *geste* is highly indicative of the role it plays in epic poetry. Not always just but always ultimate, the power that the *geste* of the king possesses wholly limits the actions of the other two groups. Part of the structure of race is the exercise of power. This power does not require machinery; often an idea coupled with practices suffices. There are two types of power at work in the *chansons de geste*: the ideological framework of the lord-vassal relationship and violent force. The *geste* of the king is adept at deploying both but prefers one technology over the other depending on which *geste* requires limiting.

The second *geste* primarily experiences violent force at the hand of the king. The Janus-faced *geste* of Doon de Mayence is full of would-be heroes whose own tendency to commit treason consistently puts them at odds with other barons and with the king. While acting as an official messenger for Charlemagne in a parley with the Saracen king Marsile, Ganelon chose to reveal key information that proved fatal for the Frankish rearguard. This act of vengeance was aimed at Roland, but the loss of Charlemagne's favorite nephew and the twelve peers of France marks Ganelon's act as treason. If read as a traitor, Raoul seems unable to restrain himself when he unnecessarily desecrates the relics and burns down the churches of his enemy, churches filled with the nuns he previously swore to spare, including the mother of his vassal Bernier (*Raoul de Cambrai,* laisses LXX-LXXII). The contumacy of these Gemini-like characters is met with violent punishment.

In the presentation of the *geste* of Doon de Mayence, Bertrand de Bar-sur-Aube includes a poignant comparison to fallen angels:

Mes par orgueil, por voir le vos dison,

est trebuchiez en terre mainz hauz hom,

ausin com furent, de verté le savon,

deu ciel li engres, qui, par lor mesproison,

trebuchié furent en l'infernal prison,

ou il n'avront jamés se dolor non.

Del ciel perdirent la seinte mansion

par lor orgueil et par lor foloison.

But because of arrogance, to tell you the truth,

many haughty men are thrown to the ground,

just like the angels, who, through their transgression

were thrown into the infernal prison,

where they will forever feel only pain.

They lost their holy mansion above the clouds

through their arrogance and their folly. (Vv. 33-40)

These verses contain a weighty theological reference with deep significance for the second *geste.* The proud and bold knights who would have held all of France in their hands were it not for their treachery will fall just like the angels cast from heaven into an infernal prison of eternal pain. The catalyst of their downfall is their very nature as *de facto* traitors, but the ultimate narrative consequence of their actions is beyond their control and usually plays out as physical violence to their bodies. In the final battle of his life, Raoul is struck by a blow that recalls Pinabel's fall before Thierry: his enemy's sword cuts helmet, mail, skull, and brain. Unlike Pinabel, though, Raoul survives to fight a little longer. In between clumsy counterattacks, Raoul's enemies stab

his body and head over and over until the mighty traitor painfully succumbs to death (laisses 154-156). After his betrayal in *The Song of Roland,* Ganelon is brought to Charlemagne's palace at Aix and, while awaiting his trial, is chained to a post and beaten with sticks and cudgels—"he deserved nothing better" (*n'ad deservit que alter ben i ait,* v.3740) says the narrator, in a literal moment of "guilty until proven innocent." Charlemagne calls a large council of barons to judge Ganelon, but when their verdict is to spare him, the irate emperor accuses them all of being "half traitors" themselves (*vos estes mi felun!* v.3814). Exercising divine privilege, Charlemagne ignores their council and has Ganelon executed anyway. Ganelon is drawn and quartered in a gory scene that illustrates the level of violent force one *geste* has over the body of a member of another:

> *Que Guenes moerget par merveillus ahan.*
>
> *Quatre destrers funt amener avant,*
>
> *Puis si li lient e les piez e les mains.*
>
> *Li cheval sunt orgoillus e curant ;*
>
> *Quatre serjanz les acoeillent devant,*
>
> *Devers un'ewe ki es ten mi un camp.*
>
> *Guenes est turnet a perdiciun grant ;*
>
> *Trestuit si nerf mult li sunt estendant*
>
> *E tuit li membre de sun cors derumpant :*
>
> *Sur l'erbe verte en espant li cler sanc.*
>
> *Guenes est mort cume fel recreant.*

Thus Ganelon should die by extraordinary suffering.

Four chargers are brought forward,

Then they attach him by the feet and the hands.

The horses are impetuous and lively;

Four servants push them forward,

Towards a waterway in the middle of a field.

Ganelon is pulled to an awful perdition;

All of his many nerves are distended

and all of the limbs of his body tear away:

his bright blood spills in profusion on the green grass.

Ganelon is dead like a treacherous coward. (vv. 3962 -73)

With the binding of his hands and feet, the tearing of his arms and legs, the chaos of treachery is resolved; order is renewed in a baptism of blood. But the traitor does not die alone in his treachery; thirty members of Ganelon's lineage are summarily killed by hanging. Traitors in *Girart de Vienne* experience similar consequences. In the resultant melee provoked by an episode of *outraje* at court, Renier seizes his opportunity for revenge on Renart de Peviers, dragging him across the floor by the beard and flinging his body into the fire where "he was indeed all burnt up and gone to his end" [*ja fust tot ars et a sa fin alé*, v. 1074]. The power brought to bear on the treacherous *geste* of Doon of Mayence is one of violent force. To be sure, epic poetry is generically violent, but as a narrative device for concluding the central conflict, the violent force wielded against those deemed traitors is staggering: treacherous barons of this group must forfeit their bodies and lives.

When rebels like Girart and Renier commit acts of treason, however, they consistently escape such consequences. As members of the third *geste*, they possess inherently good qualities that override all other considerations and characterize the actions that the characters take. Girart

cannot be a traitor, he can never be a traitor, because he does not belong to the *geste* of traitors, and thus he will not experience the fate of a traitor. His outcome will always be different than Renart's or Ganelon's because his *geste* receives different narrative treatment. Establishing the nature of the third *geste* as inherently good is a tidy way to establish clear expectations for the audience, reassuring them that, although rebellious, the actions of this *geste* are justifiable and will ultimately lead to reconciliation. This differential treatment is part of the process of racialization that yields a clear, fictional hierarchy of knights who populate the epic world of the *chansons de geste*.

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The term *geste* evolved to take on multiple meanings over time: deeds, family or kin group, poetic cycle. As we have seen, the different meanings of *geste* fed into each other and built upon one another. The wider context of its usage in one instance could come to redefine the word itself. In this way, the *geste* of Bertrand de Bar-sur-Aube's three epic kin groups came to mean cycles of poems about those groups. Bertrand also assigned shared characteristics to the three *gestes*. It is perhaps unsurprising that the word might come to embody this idea as well, for in the last third of the thirteenth century, *geste* took on an additional sense: species, kind, breed, race; "men or animals that share certain characteristics."[242] The essentialism that surrounded the *gestes* of *Girart de Vienne* seems to have ultimately influenced the development of the word.

I have shown that the idea of the three *gestes* in *Girart de Vienne* is also a part of the development of racial thinking in the Middle Ages. It is reflective of aspects of medieval thought that closely parallels the parameters of racial discourse laid out by scholars like Geraldine Heng

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[242] Van Emden, "Évolution sémantique," 113.

and Kwame Anthony Appiah: dividing people into a set of groups which share certain traits and tendencies selectively essentialized as absolute and fundamental for the purpose of differential treatment. The three *gestes* structure a set of groups that share traits from common pools of lineage, and, as such, they determine the narrative treatment of different characters.

As racial discourse, should the three *gestes* be considered representative of something like three "races" of epic poetry, then? Not exactly. But they should be considered an example of essentializing discourse reflective of medieval ideas about the nature of human differences. For Dominique Barthélemy, *trouvères* like Bertrand reproduced "the very process of the invention of the lineage at the heart of real societies."[243] Medieval people created interpretive schemes like the three *gestes* when "an existing reality was in need of interpretation," condensing elements of perception into understandable forms.[244] Bertrand's interpretive scheme of three *gestes* was a textual explanation for understanding certain perceived social realities current in his time. If a text "represented a locus in which shared values were publicly—orally and ritualistically— communicated and affirmed" for audiences of the Middle Ages, then it is critical to recognize that the designation of the moral qualities of epic characters as essential is related to the discourse that fed into racial thinking at this early juncture in its history.[245] For the phenomenon of racial discourse is "a matter of assertions, ironies, antitheses, conclusions, and, on a grander scale, of metaphors and even entire genres."[246]

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[243] *Le processus même d'invention du lignage au sein de sociétés réeles*, Barthélémy, *Histoire de la vie privée,* 119.
[244] Oexle, "Perceiving Social Reality," 117.
[245] Howard Bloch, *Medieval French Literature and Law* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1977), 2.
[246] Whitaker, *Black Metaphors,* 4.

In my reevaluation of the three *gestes,* I am not suggesting that the long-standing tradition of using them as an organizational system for the epic catalogue should be abandoned. Instead, we need to understand its original purpose insofar as the plot and characters of *Girart de Vienne* and other epics of revolt are concerned. Even if those who later encountered Bertrand's three *gestes* misunderstood them as a classification device, their basis in essentialist thinking was still present in many of the ways in which poems came to be attributed to the different cycles. Racial or essentialist discourse is ultimately a helpful lens for illuminating the central conundrum of this study: the difference between rebellion and treachery in the *chansons de geste*. Characters of the *geste* of traitors are present as counters, as adversarial obstacles, to the essentially loyal and heroic *geste* of rebels. Rebels are justified when contrasted with traitors. In this way, explaining them as merely archetypes or character tropes is deficient. William Calin suggested that the new wave of rebellious epics in the late twelfth and early thirteenth century required new and expanded ways to treat characters: the king as both tyrant and symbol of order; the main character as both persecuted hero and dangerous rebel.[247] I would add that traitors became dual as well—a threat to the hero hidden as a loyal vassal to the king. These dual roles were accomplished by anchoring one aspect of the characters in the essential qualities germane to their *geste*, freeing the poet to focus on developing the narrative around the newer, and thus more interesting, side of the characters. They may have been tropes, but they were new tropes created through a broader discourse of essentialization that affected whole groups of characters.

Thus far I have shown that the three *gestes* of *Girart de Vienne* was a way to establish groups of characters who shared essential moral qualities and characteristics. As such, it became a fictional social structure, an institution that resonated with other aspects of medieval thinking

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[247] Calin, *Epic of Revolt,* 227.

about difference, such as the division of society into three distinct orders (those who pray, those who fight, and those who work). I analyzed the characteristics of the three groups that populate the structure and how those characteristics were in essence hereditary, deriving from the common pool of the lineage. Thus, by their very essence, rebel heroes and traitors are different entities. In this way, the epic of revolt portrays the nature of behavior as more dependent upon *who* commits the act than the act itself.

Chapter Four: Young Knights and the Imperative to Rebel Symbolically

Thus far, I have shown how *chansons de geste* about rebellion offered rival ideas to the prevailing legal custom about the nature of treasonous acts. When couched within a justifying structure like the noble robber narrative, treachery becomes an acceptable form of rebellion. Revolt is further justified when the characters committing rebellious acts are also inherently good. The entire sub-genre of the epic of revolt benefitted from Bertrand of Bar-sur-Aube's innovation of the three *gestes*, a hierarchical division of epic characters into race-like groups whose essential characteristics serve to determine whether their acts should be considered treason, and therefore punishable by extreme measures, or merely *outrajes* that can lead to reconciliation. In this chapter, we engage more specifically with the identity of those rebellious-but-essentially-good barons of the second *geste*, revealing that they possess a clear affinity with a specific set of individuals within the makeup of the audience for the *chansons de geste*: young knights.

In this way, I show that the rebellion depicted in *Girart de Vienne* was a clarifying solution to at least two important societal problems. The first concerned the conflict produced by changing patterns of land distribution that were happening throughout medieval France in the twelfth century. The second was the existential crisis brought on by the crusading movement that became more and more rhythmic throughout the twelfth century, ultimately claiming the lives of large parts of successive generations of young knights and indelibly scarring the psyche of the survivors. In this chapter, I show how *Girart de Vienne* and other *chansons de geste* engage with these conflicts through a specific symbolic process. Written by and for an audience of young nobles, these works were also *about* that audience. The major themes and narrative twists were inspired by the rhythm of life, happiness, and losses experienced by the aristocracy, especially

that of the county of Champagne of the late twelfth century in the case of *Girart de Vienne*. The poet used cultural vocabulary appropriate to his audience of young, likely errant, knights of Champagne in order to depict relevant struggles. These conflicts are resolved symbolically by depictions of rebellious youth in the *chansons de geste*, suggesting that a literary imperative to rebel could provoke a meaningful catharsis in the audience.

The twelfth century was a period of drastic social and political change for the aristocracy. These changes were particularly acute in regions like Normandy, Flanders, and the county of Champagne, the geographic origin of the written version of *Girart de Vienne* and thus naturally the geographic background of its initial audience. Ever since the effective tying of vassalage to fief tenure during the Carolingian era, as historian Jean Dunbabin showed, the granting of land by the more powerful to secure the allegiance of lesser nobles had increasingly become the primary mode of social stability and mobility for the aristocracy of the tenth and eleventh centuries.[248] A "craving for fiefs" transformed lord-vassal relationships, where the granting of a fief as an occasional side benefit had become the primary motivation for vassalage.[249]

This pattern was referred to broadly by modern historians under the umbrella of *feudalism* until the term was problematized in the late twentieth century. In *Fiefs and Vassals,* Susan Reynolds poked holes in the concept of a tight medieval triangle of lords, vassals, and fiefs, suggesting that it was not the uniform political mechanism that previous scholars had posited.[250] Feudalism was instead a modern construct imposed upon freer and more varied medieval relationships. Other scholars showed different problems with feudalism as a useful

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[248] Jean Dunbabin, *France in the Making 843-1180* (Oxford University Press, 1985), 111.
[249] *fringale de fiefs,* Ganshof, *Féodalité,* 13.
[250] Susan Reynolds, *Fiefs and Vassals: The Medieval Evidence Reinterpreted* (Oxford University Press, 1994).

term for understanding the Middle Ages, such as Dominique Barthélémy who deemphasized the ubiquity of fief-giving in feudal relationships in order to consider other social factors, such as the primacy of oath-making and the giving of gifts other than land to secure fidelity.[251] One important criticism of the model of feudalism as described by François-Louis Ganshof in the influential 1957 treatise *Qu'est-ce que la Féodalité,* is the lack of a medieval vocabulary supporting the concept—*feudalism* is a modern term with no cognate from the period in question. These criticisms led to an overall disuse of the term by medievalists (although it still has currency in the popular imagination) and a much more restricted discussion of the concept that it described.

More recently, scholars have begun to revive aspects of Ganshof's model, suggesting that rather than abolish the idea of feudalism, it should be rethought in order to accommodate a wider body of evidence. One important recognition is in geographic differences: the importance of the role of the fief in lord-vassal relationships varied across Europe. Ganshof's findings were largely based on the tenth- and eleventh-century kingdom of France, so it is important to restrain assumptions about the granting of fiefs in regions where the practice was not as pervasive. However, there were many areas where gifts of land for loyalty were an inextricable part of lord-vassal relationships. Theodore Evergates defended the role of the fief in his study of the aristocracy of the county of Champagne: "Despite the attempts of some modern historians to diminish the importance of fiefs in medieval society, the evidence from Champagne, and from most of France, is unambiguous: fiefs and the customs attendant on fief tenure figured prominently…"[252] Striking a balance between painting with too broad a stroke and

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[251] Barthélémy, "Vassaux et fiefs dans la France de l'an mil."
[252] Evergates, *Aristocracy in the County of Champagne,* 191-192.

problematizing the interpretation of phenomena to the point of erasing the phenomenon is therefore crucial to fully appreciating the role that fiefs played in aristocratic life of the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth centuries.

Many literary texts also emphasized the importance of the role of the fief in securing the allegiance of lesser nobles. As one example, the *Conventum*, dated to around 1030 from Aquitaine, is a Latin text in verse recounting the numerous attempts at resolving a dispute between a lord and his vassal through the granting and revoking of various fiefs.[253] As the primary resolution to conflict, the significance of fidelity in exchange for land is encapsulated in the final lines of the poem: "and [the vassal] swore fidelity to [the count and his son], and they gave him the fief of his uncle Joscelin just as he had held it himself" [*Et juravit illis fidelitatem, et dederunt illi honorem Joszcelini avunculo suo sicut ipse tenebat illam,* vv. 339-340]. Using the *Conventum* as his primary example, Stephen White pushed back against Reynolds, showing that, similar to other eleventh-century texts, the *Conventum* treats fiefs (*honores*), under the various "guises of lands, fortresses, and towers," as gifts "that have implications for the future status of the lands given and for the relationship between the giver and the recipient."[254] This is also the model that the *chansons de geste* exemplify. Especially in the epic of revolt, the seeking, granting, and confiscation of fiefs are significant plot motivators. Thus, despite the scholarly problematization of *feudalism* as a concept, it remains clear that there was a definite pattern of land granted in exchange for feudal service in many French-speaking regions that gained in prevalence from around 900 into the twelfth century.

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[253] *Conventum,* ed. George Beech, Vyes Chauvin, and Georges Pon (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1995).
[254] Stephen White, "The Politics of Exchange: Gifts, Fiefs, and Feudalism," in *Medieval Transformations: Texts, Power, and Gifts in Context.* Ed. Esther Cohen and Mayke de Jong. (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 169-188; 175.

This pattern went hand-in-hand with the decline in centralized royal authority characteristic of the period, which saw the French crown at its weakest, the king as ruler virtually in name only over anything beyond the royal demesne of the Île-de-France. The power of counts and dukes was tenuous as well, highly dependent on the cooperation of their underlings. In his seminal study on knighthood, Maurice Keen explained that the "real driving force" that drew knights and great lords together in eleventh-century France was "their mutual need for one another."[255] Small lords came to enjoy broad autonomy, exercising great dominion over the lands in their tenure, and wielding much influence in the political sphere. This situation was especially beneficial for certain groups: "The insecurity of the lesser knighthood greatly sharpened their appreciation of the rewards that the great could offer."[256] Young knights from humbler backgrounds could aspire to a greater position by entering into the service of a more powerful lord and eventually receiving a fief in compensation. In the same way, the path of the church or the monastery was no longer the only option for non-inheriting noble sons who, through the pursuit of a fief of their own, could now anticipate opportunities for power and wealth in the lay realm. For many young knights, grants of land were key to social mobility and stability in the "great period of reorganization" between the Carolingian era and the twelfth century.[257] But, as we will see in detail further on in this chapter, this pattern was disrupted to the extent that by the end of the twelfth century, the obtaining of a fief had become a rare commodity for most non-inheriting sons of the aristocracy.

Another disrupting factor in the lives of young knights was crusading. As we saw in the Introduction, after the First Crusade in 1095, crusading became cyclical in the twelfth century,

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[255] Keen, *Chivalry,* 28-29.
[256] Ibid., 29.
[257] Galley, "Dieu, le droit," 161.

with a Second Crusade called in 1145, a Third in 1187, and, capping off the century, a Fourth in 1198. The extreme levels of carnage and the sheer volume in loss of life that these wars entailed had no domestic analogue. Generation after generation of young knights who embarked on these crusades was decimated. Survivors returned to western Europe forever changed by their experiences, emotionally scarred, and questioning their own humanity. Crusades were thus another important factor in the relationship between the epic of revolt and the audience who received it.

Crusading and the problem of obtaining a fief were pressures characteristic of Champagne of the later 1100's facing the aristocracy, and in particular young knights. The analysis of these in relation to the epic of revolt, and *Girart de Vienne* in particular will be through the interpretive lens of the economy of symbolic process. This is part of linguist and theorist George Zipf's social theory of art.[258] Most well-known for "Zipf's Law"—the uncanny distribution of word frequencies where, given any body of spoken or written language, the most frequent word will appear twice as often as the second-ranked word, three times as often as the third-ranked word, and so forth—Zipf posited the economy of symbolic process in his exploration of many different human endeavors as part of his influential work *Human Behavior and the Principle of Least Effort*.

Among the largely unconscious choices that creators and receivers of language must negotiate, the overriding factors are: "what is the most economical information to have, what is the most economical means of procuring it, and what is the most economical means of utilizing

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[258] George Zipf, *Human Behavior and the Principle of Least Effort* (Addison-Wesley Press, 1949; reprinted Martino Publishing, 2012).

it?"[259] These concerns create the economy of symbolic process, a functional relationship between artist and audience based on economical behaviors and substitutions. In this process, a symbol may stand in for other objects or ideas, provided that the audience recognizes that the symbol has the same functional feature as that for which it substitutes.[260] This recognition must be automatic, without effort, in order to evoke the appropriate response in the mind of the spectator. When done successfully, the symbols become cultural signals, part of the "language" of the social group to which an individual belongs. Engaging in appropriate cultural signals is especially crucial for portraying the necessary conflict required in a successful work of art (play, painting, story, etc.):

> In the first place, unless the plot of the dream play represents a solution to a conflict in his spectator's life, the dream artist will have no audience at all, and hence cannot receive a social sanction for his play. On the other hand, if the plot of his play treats problems of great moment for his spectators, and treats them to their satisfaction in the sense that the spectators become clearer about the nature of their problems and of their solutions, then the theater may well become filled.[261]

Thus, appropriate cultural signals must have meaning in terms of an individual's personal conflicts between themself as an individual, and themself as a member of social groups. The audience does not need to recognize these elements consciously. When engaged in correctly, the audience will react to the cultural signals with catharsis. I apply these ideas to my study of rebellion in the *chansons de geste* for the unique way that they enable poetic abstractions and correlations to be revealed for the various modes of activity, social attitudes, and cultural modes

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[259] Zipf, *Human Behavior,* 156.
[260] Ibid., 270.
[261] Ibid., 328.

assumed by poet and audience. They offer a special way to reassemble the often paratactically scattered poetic clues tying poet, audience, and narrative together, clues that would have been salient to contemporary audiences but obscure to modern ones. An analysis using the economy of symbolic process thereby provides a closer look into the world that produced the *chansons de geste* and a better understanding of the catharsis that this epic poetry would have effected in its audience.

Conflict of Land Shortage

The next step in understanding why rebellious narratives came to characterize the new wave of *chansons de geste* of the late twelfth century is to examine the particular way that they present conflicts and solutions. George Zipf demonstrated how individual audience members respond positively to works of art that portray resolutions to meaningful conflicts through appropriate cultural signals. If a story treats conflicts "of great moment" such that "the spectators become clearer about the nature of their problems and of their solutions," then the audience will be amused, edified, enlightened, and profoundly moved; the work of art will have cultural relevance.[262] As a theme, rebellion in the *chansons de geste* is typically a narrative response to some breakdown in lord/vassal relations. For example, in *La Chevalerie Ogier,* Ogier the Dane revolts against Charlemagne when the murder of his son by the prince goes unpunished. Or, in *Raoul de Cambrai,* it is King Louis' inept management of fief distribution to his loyal vassals that drives Raoul's marauding of the Vermandois. Conflicts like these were fictional representations, meaningful to audiences not necessarily for direct correspondence to real-world

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[262] Ibid., 328.

experiences but resonating instead on a deeper level as cultural signals, recognizable to audiences as stand-ins for current societal problems.

Many *chansons de geste* convey an image of the aspirations for fiefs. *Girart de Vienne* in particular is a tale of young knights seeking social stability through obtaining land. The young men of *Girart de Vienne* must set forth into the world in order to obtain that necessary component of economic and social stability: land. Achieving the status of landholder is a major concern for the characters of the song. Early in the poem, the Monglane clan is nearly reduced to starvation by an occupying army of Saracens, but thanks to a successful raid on a mule train from Spain[263], the four brothers renew their father's ability to resist the occupation inside his walled city. However, Girart and his three brothers determine that it is now the time to leave home and seek a future of their own.

> *Lors ont ensemble lor reson devisee,*
>
> *qu'il s'en istront de la cité loee*
>
> *conquerre ennor en estrange contree.*

> Now together they decided
>
> that they would leave the beloved castle [of their father]
>
> to acquire domains in other lands. (vv. 287-289)

The expression *conquerre ennor en estrange contree* appears again when the eldest brother, Hernaut, informs his father of the brothers' intentions: "Now, father, with your consent, we are going to leave to acquire domains in other lands" [*Ore en irons, père, s'il vos agree, conquerre ennor en estrange contree*, vv. 293-303]. The father, Garin de Monglane, has little to offer his

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[263] See Chapter Two: Rebel Barons and the Noble Robber Narrative.

sons for their future, so they must travel to other regions in order to acquire land of their own. Despite its obvious modern English cognate, *to conquer*, I have translated *conquerre* as *to acquire* because it better captures the nuance of the Old French usage, obtaining something, possibly but not necessarily by force. The four brothers each follow different paths to acquiring lands: on a pilgrimage to Rome, Miles prays to Saint Peter to grant him control of a fief, then obtains Apulia through armed conquest; Hernaut gains control of his lands through the more peaceful avenue of inheritance following the death of his uncle, a powerful count (vv.305-321).

The paths of the eldest two brothers occupy but a few verses in the song; the poet focuses most of the narrative energy on the path to stability taken by the younger two.

> *Entre Renier et Girardin l'anfant*
>
> *ne demenderent escuier ne sergent ;*
>
> *chascun monta sur .I. mulet enblant,*
>
> *si acoillirent lor grant chemin errant.*

> Between Renier and young Girart
>
> neither asks for a squire or servant;
>
> each mounts an ambling mule,
>
> and thus riding, they greet the great wandering road. (vv. 330-334)

The "great wandering road" [*grant chemin errant,* vv. 334; see also 356, 413] would have been a familiar *topos* to audiences of the poem. Wandering was the definitive way of life for young knights. Georges Duby pointed to wandering as being the "fundamental trait" of the period of

youth in the lifecycle of medieval nobles.[264] Renier and Girart wander, venturing into the wider

world to seek a more powerful lord in whose service they might enter and who will, ultimately,

reward them with land. "We will go to France, to Charles the powerful… we will serve him for a

year or two, or even three at the most" [*En France alons, a Charle le poisant…un an ou .II.,*

voire trois en avant, *li ferons son servise*, vv. 377-380], with the full expectation of a reward on

the other end: reception of a fief. The brothers' plan would have been familiar to most of the

young knights who made up the audience for the poem. In Keen's estimation,

> [L]iterature accurately mirrors the aspirations of real-life knightly society, in which the
>
> young bachelors, unmarried cadets with nothing to offer but their swords, their good birth
>
> and an upbringing which had taught them a taste for adventure, were the most numerous
>
> element crowding the courts of the greater nobility. For such men whose real social
>
> position was insecure, the service of the great had powerful psychological attractions as
>
> well as economic ones...[265]

The image of young Girart and Renier taking the open road to seek out a more powerful lord

functioned as one of Zipf's "appropriate cultural signals" crucial to achieving positive audience

reactions. Other depictions insightful to understanding the hopes and expectations of young

knights who set out to join the service of a more powerful lord are embedded in *Girart de*

Vienne. In a lovely description of the process of knighting, Renier is led to a church where it is

"customary for new knights" [*coutume a nouvel chevalier,* v.739] to hear mass and pray to God

"so that He will grant him honor, favor, and the right to hold and rule over land" [*que il li doint*

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[264] Georges Duby, "Les 'Jeunes' dans la société aristocratique," in *Bibliothèque de la Pléiade: Œuvres de Georges Duby* (Paris: Gallimard, 2019), 1604.
[265] Keen, *Chivalry,* 29-30.

ennor et souhaucier, le droit de terre tenir et jostisier, vv. 742-743]. Beyond mere reward, the control of land is a divinely blessed right that young knights set out into the world to obtain.

However, by the late twelfth century, these depictions were steadily becoming less indicative of current circumstances and more reflective of the expectations of a by-gone era. The era of this kind of social mobility and opportunity for the children of lesser nobles was "relived" through epic poetry, but it seemed more destined to "flatter the illusions" of an entire caste than to portray actual and current possibilities.[266] Throughout the twelfth century, kings, great lords, and regional magnates were "busily extending their reach" to the detriment of smaller nobles.[267] The "great wandering road" that led to a future of prosperity secured by the right to a fief was becoming a vanishing opportunity for many audience members, particularly in Champagne.

Among the last regions of medieval France to cohere as a distinct territory, Champagne was still a highly fragmented frontier zone between the royal domain and the German Empire until after the First Crusade (1095-1099). At the start of the twelfth century, even as regions such as Normandy and Flanders already enjoyed fairly independent and cohesive statuses, Champagne did not seem likely to coalesce into an important territorial state within France. But a succession of energetic counts who enacted farsighted economic policies stimulated new rural settlements, encouraged urban expansion, and promoted a series of trade fairs, making Champagne a center of international trade and finance; they also created a durable administrative apparatus to manage the new principality.[268]

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[266] Galley, "Dieu, le droit," 161.

[267] Richard Kaueper, *Medieval Chivalry* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 239.

[268] Evergates, *Aristocracy in the County of Champagne*, 5-9.

Of these counts, Henry I the Liberal was perhaps the most important and influential in bringing about these changes, which drastically affected the life cycle and expectations of lesser nobles of the twelfth century. Indeed, one cannot discuss the formation of a *champenois* principality without mentioning the count. Henry I figured highly in the broader politics of the time: in 1147, he led a contingent of nobles on the Second Crusade; in the 1150s, he supported Louis VII against Henry Plantagenet and was involved in the royal attempt to impose peace throughout the realm; he witnessed the treaty between the kings of France and England in 1160; and he mediated between Louis and Emperor Frederick I during the papal schism of 1162.[269] Groomed from his youth to rule his father's disparate eastern counties and lordships, Henry I took a creative approach to government. By mid-twelfth century, the city of Troyes had become the leading city among the expanding towns of Champagne, serving as the political, administrative, and cultural center of Champagne. Troyes owed its development to Henry I, as he based his countship from there. Troyes was the most important urban center, the only episcopal seat in southern Champagne and the only urban center in the count's holdings that was not held from the king or a prelate, affording the count the autonomy critical to his new administrative policies. He built a new, two-story comital palace just beyond the thriving commercial district of Troyes from which to administer the county. Next to it, he had the chapel of Saint-Etienne built so that he could have an unobstructed view of the altar from his balcony.[270] It was larger than the bishop's cathedral in the old city—this new building complex was unambiguously the "heart of a new principality."[271] The comital residence no longer exists in modern Troyes, but the *canal du Trévois* that flowed under that balcony still runs through the same part of town. The street that

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[269] Theodore Evergates, *Henry the Liberal* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).

[270] Anne François Arnaud, *Voyages archéologique et pittoresque dans le département de l'Aube* (Troyes: L.C. Cardon, 1837), 10.

[271] Evergates, *Aristocracy in the County of Champagne,* 16.

flanks the east bank is now named *Quai du Comte Henri* in memory of the impressive palace that was the site of new and disruptive administrative innovations.

Young, wandering knights aspiring to land tenure were directly and negatively impacted by count Henry the Liberal's drastic changes. In constructing a new territorial state from his disparate lands in Champagne, Henry I assembled a core of administrators and did away with the old, small counties as administrative districts, basing his new administration on *castellaria*: new, basic units of account for military, administrative, and financial matters, consisting of a fortified location (a castle or walled city) and the surrounding area.[272] The *castellaria* resembled and functioned very much like fiefs, with the important exception that they were directly controlled by agents of the count. The lands held autonomously by smaller nobles in feudal relationship with the count were subsumed administratively into the *castellaria*. This change in administrative unit was significant in that it brought knights and barons under closer oversight from Troyes. Land held in fief could revert to the count's holdings upon the death of the vassal. Even allods, land held generationally by families independent of an overlord, were vulnerable to comital escheat whenever a clear heir was unavailable. These changes to lord-vassal relationships placed new pressures on the fief-for-service model: "the incorporation of castle lordships into the comital domain methodically reduced the number of substantive lordships— the very symbols of baronial identity—available for redistribution within the aristocracy."[273] Whereas formerly, young knights could obtain a fief through service to a more powerful lord like count Henry I, by the end of the twelfth century the policy of reclaiming fiefdoms back into comital holdings severely restricted the availability of land in exchange for service.

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[272] Ibid., 17.
[273] Ibid., 191.

In addition to the introduction of the *castellaria*, other practices reduced the availability of lands rewarded in fief to young knights. While other regions had already adopted the practice of primogeniture (allowing only the eldest son to inherit), partible inheritance continued to be practiced in Champagne throughout the twelfth century. The division of assets amongst all heirs ultimately diminished and fragmented many formerly productive fiefs in Champagne. This and other factors led to a liquidation market for fiefs. Lands held in fief became "fungible assets," allowing fiefholders facing "unrelenting financial pressures" to sell their fragmented holdings.[274] The buyer for these was very often the count, who then converted those fiefs into *castellaria* rather than regifting them to faithful vassals as the great lords of yore used to do. By the early thirteenth century, the "implicit linkage between knighthood and fief tenure" was effectively severed in Champagne.[275] Similar processes were underway in many other parts of medieval France, including and perhaps especially during the royal expansion of power under Philip Augustus, as historian John Baldwin has shown.[276] The implication of these changes is that, even as centralized authority was gaining stability, new generations of young knights were facing greater insecurity.

The new pressure of fief scarcity and its impact on the life cycle of young knights revealed itself as a central conflict in much literature of the late twelfth century. "This world of feudalism in decline," R. Howard Bloch explained in the introduction to Nathaniel Dubin's 2013 edition of medieval *fabliaux*, "yields a panoramic image of dispossessed knights" in the poetry and storytelling of the period.[277] In *La Bible,* an acerbic critique of late twelfth-century

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[274] Ibid., 191.
[275] Ibid., 192.
[276] Baldwin, *The Government of Philip Augustus*, 191-219.
[277] *The Fabliaux,* ed. and trans. Nathaniel Dubin (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2013), xxii.

aristocratic society, Guiot of Provins openly blamed the great princes for the anxieties faced by

smaller knights. "But the princes are so severe, and hard, and stingy, and cruel…because none of

them grant lands or possessions" [*mais li prince sont si destroit, et dur, et vilain, et fellon…que

nus feïst honor ne bien,* vv. 233-239].[278] Guiot calls for a return to "the courts of the ancestors"

[*les cors tindrent li ancessor,* v. 251] where young knights could expect feasts, lavish gifts of all

kinds, and participation in a higher lifestyle (vv. 248-254). A *champenois* writer and

contemporary of Bertrand of Bar-sur-Aube, Guiot was also a lesser knight and thus his hopes and

fears were representative of those of the audience of *Girart de Vienne* as well.

The frustrations and anxieties revealed in Guiot's *La Bible* parallel central conflicts in

Girart de Vienne. After some time, the brothers' ambitious plan of serving Charlemagne for a

few years in order to receive a fief of their own has yet to produce the intended results, as they

find themselves still landless. Despite audacious feats in the service of the king, such as ridding

the Vermandois of "notorious robbers and thieves" [*de robeors et de larrons revois*, v. 840], the

only reward Girart and Renier have received are somewhat servile positions at court: "one brings

the feast plates to him [Charlemagne], and the other carries the big cup of bright gold" [*L'un fet

les mes devant lui aporter et l'autre tint la grant cope d'or cler,* vv. 890-891]. During one feast

where the brothers are so employed, a messenger arrives with news about the fortunes of the

elder members of the Monglane clan. Landholders in their own right, Miles has obtained Apulia

and Hernaut "has all of the land to control himself" at Nice[279] [*par lui a toute la terre a*

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[278] Guoit de Provins, *La Bible,* in *Les Œuvres de Guiot de Provins,* ed. John Orr (Manchester University Press, 1915).

[279] Hernaut's domain of *Biaulande sor mer* is not readily identifiable with any modern placename, but based on contextual evidence, Nice seems to be the likely candidate. "Beaulande *semble être Nice ; au moins les désignations qu'on en donne concordent parfaitement avec cette hypothèse (voy. surtout Ramon Feraud), et on montre à Nice la tour de Bellande, construite, dit-on, par Charlemagne.*" Gaston Paris, *Histoire poétique de Charlemagne,* (Paris, E. Bouillon, 1905), 80, n. 6. More recent scholars uphold this

governor, v. 915]. "And you, what can I boast about you upon return?" the messenger eagerly wants to know [*Et vos, de coi vos repoez venter ?*]. "Do you have lordship, lands or marches, towers or ancient castles? Do you have fiefs or lands to look after that I might return to tell your brothers about?" [*avez vos seignorie, terre ne marche, tor ne cité antie ?... Avez enneurs ne terres a garder, que j'en repuisse a voz frères conter ?,* vv.943-944; 920-922]. As the only news worth sending back would be that of the brothers' successful attainment of fiefs, Renier bitterly replies "you ask nonsense" [*tu demendes sotie*, v. 945].

This sends Renier into a loud and public tirade where he vents his frustration about his unmet expectations in Charlemagne's service. Renier asserts no less than three times that he will abandon his service to Charlemagne and seek out a better lord unless he should receive a fief that very day (vv. 925-955; 986-989; 1097-1100). Hearing this, the king becomes offended by the rebellious presumption, comparing the brothers to a proverb about an ungrateful thief saved from the gallows by a benevolent lord (vv. 966-971).[280] Renier quickly questions the validity of the comparison:

> *Sire, quele l'avez trovee ?*
>
> *Quele cité nos avez or donee ?*
>
> *Ne quele terre, quel fié ne quel contree ?*
>
> *Vos m'adoubates, c'est vérité provee,*
>
> *mes je nen ai eü autre sodee*
>
> *de vostre terre que vos ai aquitee.*

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conclusion; see Van Emden's remarks in "*Table des Noms Propres*," in the appendices to his edition of *Girart de Vienne.*

[280] See also Chapter One: Treason and Medieval Customary Law.

Lord, how is it that [you have saved us]?

When did you give us a castle?

Or land, or a fief, or a territory?

You have dubbed me [a knight], that is true,

but I have had no other reward

from your land that I set free for you. (vv. 975-980)

From Renier's perspective, and ostensibly from that of the contemporary audience, service to a lord is not a reward in and of itself, even if it contains the occasional side benefit. Reception of knighthood, participation in feasts, even monetary gifts are unacceptable substitutes for land.

This sentiment is evident in other *chansons de geste*, such as the mid-twelfth-century *Charroi de Nîmes*. Incensed at being left out of emperor Louis' divvying up of fiefs to his faithful warriors, Guillaume d'Orange demands appropriate recompense for his important role in recent conquests. Having no lands left to give, the hapless Louis attempts to assuage Guillaume by offering one quarter of the revenues of the kingdom of France. For Guillaume, the offer is an insult:

> *Or m'a de France otroié l'un quartier*
>
> *Tot ensement com fust en reprovier.*
>
> *Por mon servise me velt rendre loier.*

> He has now offered me a quarter (of the income) from France
>
> Just as if it was a reproach.
>
> For my service he wants to pay me wages. (vv. 431-433)

The *feodum de bursa*, or "money fief," was one arrangement where a lord paid a vassal money in the form of an annuity or single lump sum instead of granting a landed fief. The first known instance in France was in 1155 under Louis VII. It is possible that the parallels (a king named Louis, the offering of a money fief in lieu of land) in the contemporaneous *Charroi de Nîmes* are more than coincidental. The practice of granting money fiefs took hold as Louis' successors "methodically followed the same policy" to the extent that their financial resources permitted, especially from the reign of Philip Augustus.[281] *Girart de Vienne* was thus composed during the early proliferation of money fiefs. It is perhaps not surprising that the protagonists reject the concept with even more disdain than Guillaume d'Orange. For Renier, it would be better "to be cut into pieces and killed" [*mieuz vodroie estre detranchiez et ocis*, v.1093] than to accept a substitute reward, for such would be akin to becoming "a purchased serf" [*sers achatez*, v. 1094]. In the worldview of the *chansons de geste,* the granting of land is the only true way for a lord to reward a vassal.

As Renier's exchange with Charlemagne becomes increasingly heated, the assembled barons join the argument. Some offer negative opinions about the personal character of Girart and Renier, prompting verbal abuse and physical violence in retaliation as the court devolves into an episode of *outraje,* the rebellious behavior typical of the poem (laisse XXIX). Other barons appeal to precedent, urging Charlemagne to fulfill the upstart brothers' wishes in the same way he has rewarded effective service with grants of land in the past. After some persuasion, the emperor ultimately concedes. Renier is to become a fiefholder: "He will be a lord over land" [*sire ert de la terre,* v.1125]. The psychological atmosphere encapsulated in this *vers*

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[281] Ganshof, *Féodalité,* 149-150.

orphelin is revelatory of the hopes and expectations of Girart and Renier, and, by extension, the young wandering knights among the audience for the poem.

However, even as he bends to gratefully bestow a kiss upon Charlemagne's foot in recompense for the grant of land, Renier speaks a warning:

> *mes gardez bien, itant vos veil proier,*
>
> *ne me faciez de mon don foloier ;*
>
> *que, par ce Deu qui tout a a jugier,*
>
> > *tost en avrïez honte !*

> But this much I want to beseech you,
>
> take care not to mess around with my gift,
>
> because if you do, by that God who judges all,
>
> > you will soon be brought low! (vv. 1148-1151)

Renier makes it clear that if Charlemagne fails to respect his right to the land he has just been awarded, he is willing to rebel. This is, of course, a clever foreshadowing of events in the plot to come, but it is also a broader message to the audience. In Zipf's symbolic process, an object or experience may be substituted with a symbol, provided that the audience recognizes the symbol as having the same functional feature. In the poem, the symbol of a king able but hesitant to reward vassals with land stands in for the increasing scarcity of fiefs in Champagne and elsewhere. Renier's agitation symbolizes the dissatisfaction of an audience living with the conflict brought about by a changing social landscape. Renier's warning is a clear symbolic message: young knights have an imperative to rebel when their ability to receive and control land is threatened.

The Crusades: Loss of Young Life and Psychological Damage

The poet treats another salient conflict facing his audience: the substantial loss of life represented by a crusading movement that by the end of the twelfth century had become cyclical and an inevitable part of aristocratic life. The high mortality of crusading marked the county of Champagne, further consolidating comital power and limiting the availability of fiefs. It also had an emotionally scarring effect on the psyche of the nobility. By portraying this conflict through meaningful signals, however, Bertrand de Bar-sur-Aube clarified both the nature of the problem and its solution for his audience, bringing about a certain catharsis to the anxieties of crusade through a spirit of youthful rebellion.

At its most basic, *Girart de Vienne* is about the adventures a young knight must undertake to overcome painful adversity in order to attain social stability. In the final verses of the opening laisses that serve as a prologue to the song, the poet explains the story as "the adventures and the great woes that duke Girart suffered before he could obtain Vienne" [l*es avantures…et les granz poines que dant Girart sofri einz qu'il eüst Vienne*, vv.107-109]. This is a glimpse into what the audience expected from the tale: a reflection of their own struggles and potential solutions.

Holy war permeated the fabric of life in the late twelfth century and the mortal toll that it took on the aristocracy of the county of Champagne was deep. Many veterans of the Second Crusade of 1147-49 would have been alive when *Girart de Vienne* was composed in the 1180s, keeping the memory of those events present even as a Third Crusade was called in 1189. The crusading climate is foregrounded in the *chanson,* as the story opens at the castle of the Monglane family, under siege after several years of war with an invading Saracen army. Their fighting force has been utterly decimated, their weapons all but destroyed, and the survivors

teeter dangerously on the precipice of annihilation. As the besieged family partakes in a meager

Easter feast that will consume the last of their provisions, Garin, the patriarch, is overcome

emotionally by the severity of their losses.

> *Voit le li peres, li cuers l'en atendrie ;*
>
> *plore des euz, durement se gramie,*
>
> *les lermes corent sor la barbe florie.*

> The father sees [their situation], his heart weakens,
>
> he weeps and is bitterly afflicted,
>
> the tears pour down his white beard. (vv. 128-130)

Garin's reaction to the devastation is reflective of real-world suffering by survivors of conflict in

the Levant. According to crusades historian Jay Rubenstein, the degree of carnage experienced

by soldiers of the crusades was unprecedented:

> Even historians at the time recognized that to live through such battles would have been
>
> for the soldiers a transformative experience, and probably not a positive one. The levels
>
> of bloodshed and brutality were so far beyond ordinary warfare that the experience of it
>
> would have changed the warriors' sense of their own humanity. [282]

The emotional break-down of Garin of Monglane, the old but powerful warrior who is otherwise

referred to in the poem as "the fierce-faced" [*au vis fier*], is reflective of such transformative

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[282] Jay Rubenstein, *Armies of Heaven: the First Crusade and the Quest for Apocalypse* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 203.

experiences, revealing the agony of the extreme loss of life inherent in Christian-Muslim
conflict.

As we saw in the Introduction, by the rise of the epic of revolt, crusading had become
cyclical, even rhythmic in the lives of the aristocracy of the twelfth century. The unprecedented
violence introduced by the First Crusade was experienced again and again by new generations of
knights with each crusade. Each one left intense emotional scars on the survivors, for despite the
popular image of a brutal medieval world where individual deaths did not matter, a very high
value was placed on human life in the Middle Ages. The institution of *wergeld* is a concrete
example of this. From the earliest Frankish kingdoms, this legal system placed monetary values
on the lives of different types of people. Anyone who killed another was subject to pay *wergeld*,
a fine commensurate to the social value of the murdered individual. Military historian Kelly
DeVries showed that "the warrior in these legal systems was placed at the top, his value
recognized and, consequently, protected by the virtue of the impoverishment that would be
suffered by the one who killed him. This was quite different from the Roman tradition and
certainly lead to an elitism developed by early medieval warriors."[283] As further evidence of the
importance of human life in the Middle Ages, DeVries cites the overall lack of major, open
battles throughout the entire period. Pitched battles were a risky endeavor and always entailed
the largest loss of lives, and so were avoided as much as possible. The development of effective
armor such as the mail hauberk and stone fortifications are further evidence of the very
defensive, human life-valuing nature of medieval warfare. These elements are all clearly
reflected in the descriptions of armor, castles, small-scale skirmishes, and sieges of *Girart de*

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[283] Kelly DeVries, "Medieval Warfare and the Value of a Human Life" in *Noble Ideals and Bloody
Realities: Warfare in the Middle Ages*, eds. Niall Christie and Maya Yazigi (Boston: Brill, 2006), 34.

Vienne and other contemporary *chansons de geste*. The celebration of human life and the complex relationship with violent death were familiar themes allowing for a cathartic treatment of the audience's own struggles.

Elsewhere in the poem, the poet reveals how attitudes toward death may have been changed by crusades carnage in other ways. Bertrand cites a proverb-like truism to explain how the death of an individual can go unnoticed.

> *Seignor barons, assez l'avez oï :*
>
> *Puis c'ome est morz et alez a sa fin,*
>
> *c'est une chose molt tost mise en obli.*

> Lord barons, you have already heard it enough:
>
> When a man is dead and gone to his ending,
>
> it is something too quickly forgotten about. (vv. 553-555)

The attitude toward death in this adage is almost flippant. The poet seems, however, to be calling for a return to a greater sensitivity for the humanity of others when he reminds his listeners that they "have already heard it enough." Guiot of Provins was equally concerned about the collective forgetfulness of those who die. A significant section, over 107 verses, of his *La Bible* are dedicated to preserving the names of warriors from the county of Champagne who became casualties following their count on the Third Crusade in 1189 (vv. 368-475). Lamenting the loss of a generation, Guiot wrote these sorrowful verses: "Oh, Champagne, how many barons you have lost in so little time! Empty! What happened to those good feelings and the abundance I used to see?" [*Oï, Champaigne, queus barons avez perdu en po de tens ! Avoi ! qu'est devenus cil sens et la richesce que je vi ?,* vv. 476-9]. In a similar way that Guiot calls upon his audience

not to forget the fallen ones, Daisy Delogu showed the role of communal grief in forming social solidarity. The recognition and mourning of a communal loss through literary texts "becomes a foundation upon which to build or fortify social and political community, the shared acknowledgment of the significance of the dead for forging a powerful bond among the living."[284] Writers like Guiot and Bertrand pushed against the desensitization toward death that affected their post-crusades society, calling on their audiences to come together in remembering those lost to violence.

No social group was more impacted by crusading than young knights. Among the crusaders, youths constituted the majority of the rank and file. With lives essentially devoted to violence, the youth were the organ of aggression and tumult in medieval society and were therefore most exposed to its inherent dangers. In the early thirteenth-century moral treatise on knightly behavior known as *Des .IIII. Tenz d'Aage d'Ome* (On the Four Ages of Man), Philip de Novara divides human lives into four distinct periods.[285] Of these, the second period, "youth," is considered the most dangerous: "This account says that youth is the most perilous of all four ages in the life of men and women" [*Cist contes dit que jovens est li plus perilleux de touz les .IIII. tenz d'aage d'ome et de fame*]. "Violent death," wrote Georges Duby, "often harvested entire groups of the offspring of noble lineages; it always gouged out large holes."[286] And it is through the perspective of this group that the conflicts depicted in *Girart de Vienne* and other rebellious *chansons de geste* become most meaningful.

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[284] Daisy Delogu, "'A la grant temps de douleur languissant': Grief and Mourning in Girart d'Amiens *Istoire le roy Charlemaine*," *Speculum* 93, no. 1 (January, 2018) 1-26; 21.

[285] Philip de Novara. *Des .IIII. Tenz d'Aage d'Ome,* ed. Marcel de Fréville. (Paris: Société des Anciens Textes Français, 1888).

[286] [*La] mort violente…fauche parfois par groupes entiers les rejetons des lignages ; elle y creuse toujours de larges trous,* Duby, "Les Jeunes," 1607.

In a study on the appearance of the Latin terms *juvenis/juventus* in medieval sources, Georges Duby concluded that they are precise qualifiers used to designate membership in a particular social group, that of warrior men at a well-defined stage of their life. [287] They refer to men who are young, past the educative activities of school and/or military training, but not yet married or established in a land holding. They typically received arms (were knighted) between 16 and 22 years of age. "Young" or "youth" therefore meant belonging to an age-group and a certain situation in military society and family structures. It was a time of impatience, turbulence and instability, and it could last quite a while in the life of a knight: William Marshall was famously a "young knight" for 45 years.[288] The image of twelfth-century, knighted young men going through a period of errancy where they travelled in packs through the countryside, frequenting tournaments and looking for eligible heiresses, provoking violence and instability until the time came to inherit, be rewarded with a fief, or marry a wealthy widow, is a depiction of a life-stage for medieval noble men that has enjoyed wide currency.[289]

Girart de Vienne has a specific vocabulary of Old French terms to describe this group of which the majority of principal characters belong. One of the common terms is *anfant*. It describes a young man, not quite knighted, but in the errancy phase, such as Girart and Renier in their early adventures, or Aymeri before he receives arms from his uncle, a life stage where he is capable of holding his own in a fight. It can correspond to the modern French definition meaning a child, but in the *chanson de geste* that usage is rare. Other terms which correspond closely to Duby's *juvenis/juventus* are *damoisel, bacheler,* and *jovenciaus*. These are the descriptors for the

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[287] Ibid., 1385.

[288] See A.J. Holden, Stanley Gregory, and David Crouch, *History of William Marshal* (London: Anglo-Norman Text Society from Birkbeck College, 2002).

[289] See Evergates, *Aristocracy;* Duby, "Les jeunes;" and Shulamith Shahar, *Growing Old in the Middle Ages* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

wandering knight and much of the plot of *Girart de Vienne* pivots on episodes that would have been familiar to contemporary young men, reflecting the importance of this group in the makeup of the audience for the poem and in the daily life of the county of Champagne.

Youths have the greatest ability to effect change through their words and actions in the *chansons de geste*. Young knights are characterized as having *la cheire hardie* (a courageous body); this is often used in opposition with *la barbe florie* (white beard) or *la barbe meslee* (grey beard), a shorthand used with older characters to evoke a set of expectations about age, experience, and a limited range of actions available to those characters. There is a paradox in old age: wisdom. Bernard of Clairvaux cited the *Book of Wisdom* in his argument against the church appointing young men to high church office: "therefore the understanding of man is grey hair, and an unstained life is old age" [*Denique cani sunt sensus hominis, et aetas senectutis vita immaculata*].[290] Here also, grey hair is a circumlocution for the wisdom of old age. Chrétien de Troyes, another contemporary of Bertrand de Bar-sur-Aube, employed a similar metaphor to describe the Fisher King in *Perceval*, who is described as being "with grizzled hair" [*de chienes mellez,*].[291] The Fisher King is old and completely powerless in his predicament, having been injured in the groin and unable to take care of his domain or do much of anything besides fish as he waits for someone like Perceval to come along and ask the right questions in order to be restored.

In her study on aging in the Middle Ages, Shulamith Shahar described the general characteristics assigned to old men in the High Middle Ages:

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[290] Bernard of Clairvaux, *De moribus et officio episcorum tractatus seu epistola XLII, P.L.*, Vol. 182, C. 7; Sap. IV, 8, 9.

[291] Chrétien de Troyes, *Perceval ou Le Conte du Graal,* ed. Jean Dufournet (Paris: GF Flammarion, 1997), 228.

The image of the old person was not unequivocal. The old man was believed to possess

wisdom, an accumulated experience of life, cooler passions (as already noted by Plato

and Aristotle), serenity and, though not as often as a child, the ability to see the unseen.

At the same time, the old person was held to have feebler mental faculties and to tend to

irascibility, melancholy, miserliness (this was mentioned very often), a complaining and

grumbling disposition, cowardice, suspiciousness, despondency, shamelessness and a

rejection of all things new (which nowadays is explained as the old person's lessened

flexibility).[292]

In a kind of verisimilitude, the older characters in *Girart de Vienne* are typically powerless

before Fortune and her wheel. Garin de Monglane is unable to defeat the invading Saracens nor

even knight his own sons. At the clan council leading to rebellion against Charlemagne, he

details his great battles of yore and yearns to engage with *les Françeis* in combat. All the while,

his grandson Aymeri mocks his boasting and age behind his back, revealing the general attitude

that with old age comes inability of effective action (laisses LVII-LVIII). Charlemagne, another

notably aged character in the poem, is limited in the actions he can take as well. In one example,

he has a premonitory dream of two birds of prey locked in deadly combat that he is given to

understand represent Roland and Olivier in their upcoming duel (laisse CXXXI). Despite his

foreknowledge, he remains powerless to alter the course of events. This is another literary

example of an older character lacking the power and virility of youth to effect change in their

circumstances. Shahar would see this as evidence of the marginalization of such characters, but I

read it more as a simple acknowledgement of their relative position in the society of the time.

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[292] Shahar, *Growing Old,* 70.

Even the wealthy elderly occupying important societal positions were limited in their range of action when compared to youths.

Youthful characters of *la cheire hardie* are not so limited in their agency. The major plot points erupt from the decisions, mostly rash, made by young knights and the overall story reflects the real-life expectations and experience of this group. This is illustrated in the poem when Girart and Renier are frustrated after 8 days spent waiting to be allowed into Charlemagne's service. As we have already seen, their entire aim is analogous to that of any errant youth: obtain land and wealth. Renier complains that since they haven't seen the great king once nor eaten at his table, "devils incarnate" must have plotted to bring them there "because this land is full of great misery" [*li vif deable nos i ont amené, car cist païs est plains de grant lasté*, vv 441-442]. Girart jokes that it was better where they came from, Muslim besiegers and poverty notwithstanding. Renier refuses to entertain the idea of returning home in a telling response that evinces the expectations placed on the errant knight class:

> *Demenderont ou nos avons esté*
>
> *Et je dirai : 'A Paris la cité,*
>
> *et puis a Reins ou le roi ai trové,*
>
> *et si ne l'ai veü ne esgardé,*
>
> *ne a sa cort ne beü ne disné,*
>
> *ne pris avoine ne denier recovré.*
>
> *Lors me tandront a recreant prové,*
>
> *si en serons escharni et gabé.*

> They will ask where we have been
>
> and I will say: "In Paris the ancient city,

and then in Reims where I finally found the king,

but neither did I see nor meet him,

nor did I drink or dine at his court,

nor did I take oats, nor receive a cent."

Then they will call me a proven quitter,

and we will be teased and mocked for it. (vv. 451-8)

Once the period of errancy began, young nobles were not expected to return or stop wandering until fortune was found. Duby showed that the presence of a group like this within aristocratic society held up certain mental attitudes, represented certain aspects of a collective psychology, certain myths in which one finds both the reflection of and the models for the literary works of the twelfth century. "It is worth noting that above all else, the youth formed the actual public for all of the literature that we call chivalric and that was without a doubt composed first and foremost for their use."[293] In this way, main characters sustain, perpetuate, and stylize the intellectually spontaneous and affective reactions of the contemporary audience. *Girart de Vienne* relates a tale of young knights struggling to find a place in their world that would have resonated with this audience through the cultural signals of errancy and violence.

<div align="center">***</div>

In Joseph Duggan's view, "the world of epic is not, any more than any other world presented in literature, randomly constructed…it constitutes a paradigmatic society that singers

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[293] *Il convient de remarquer tout d'abord que la « jeunesse » formait le public par excellence de toute la littérature que l'on appelle chevaleresque et qui fut sans doute composée avant tout à son usage,* Duby, "Les Jeunes," 1395.

hold up for admiration."[294] This idea largely corresponds with the cultural signals embedded in *Girart de Vienne* and other *chansons de geste* that I have tried to reveal here. The poet, consciously or not, engaged in what Zipf called a symbolic process, where appropriate symbols were presented to the audience in order to portray meaningful conflicts and solutions. The historical reality at the time of composition was a world where young knights faced insecurity and instability. Land was no longer as easily obtained through dedicated service as a vassal to a lord. The already violent life cycle of those young men was rendered more fatal by crusades that were becoming dependably rhythmic by the end of the twelfth century. But young knights could find catharsis for these anxieties in the epic poetry of their day. Rebellious barons who agitated successfully against stingy overlords must have been an exciting idea, even if restricted only to literature. A rejection of callous attitudes toward the widespread death of young men and a call for honoring those who have fallen must have bolstered morale among rising generations of knights. "After all," according to Zipf, "every artistic creation, being a social phenomenon, is nothing more to a given individual or group than his or her reactions to it."[295] These stories presented solutions to societal problems facing contemporary audiences, and thus represent a symbolic imperative to rebel. Even if those solutions were not necessarily possible for individual audience members to replicate themselves in the real world, the catharsis that they must have brought about is very much suggested by the overall popularity of such stories, both at the time of their composition and throughout the Middle Ages and even into modern times.

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[294] Joseph Duggan, "Social Functions of the Medieval Epic in the Romance Literatures," *Oral Tradition* 1, 3 (1986), 728-766; 746.
[295] Zipf, *Human Behavior,* 330.

Conclusion

The early twelfth century witnessed a proliferation of vernacular literature in Western Europe. After a slow start in the eleventh century with limited numbers of texts written in Old French, poets fully embraced the possibilities that composing in the vernacular offered. Not only did the number of texts increase, but the range of genres and styles grew as well. The twelfth century moved beyond the "monological propensities" of works like *The Song of Roland* to embracing "the potential for acute conflicts or even outright contradictions between the collective solidarity presupposed by feudal institutions and the private, subjective desires and aspirations that might clash with them."[296] As the twelfth century turned into the thirteenth, the epic of revolt continued to gain in popularity, but soon began to be outcompeted by other literary genres, the romance tales in particular. The *chansons de geste* persisted until the fourteenth century, at which point new songs had become nearly indistinguishable from romance, incorporating elements of courtly love, magic and faeries, etc. Social changes, dissolution of old systems, and the consequential destabilization of many noble families were all part of the historical developments of the twelfth century that unleashed profound changes in the structure and themes of epic poetry. Albert Dessau found that these changes introduced in the epic of revolt were the very *cause* of the decline of the *chansons de geste,* blurring the generic line until the point where the epic morphed into romance.[297] Some later poems, like *Gaufrey* (late 13th)*,* retained their epic flavor, but seem to have accepted the inevitability of the life-altering social

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[296] Donald Maddox, *Fictions of Identity in Medieval France* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 212.
[297] Dessau, "L'ide de la trahison," 26.

changes that the epic of revolt had raged against. The late twelfth-century spark of rebellion that ignited the *chansons de geste* had burned itself out by the fourteenth century.

In this study, I have attempted to explain the rise of the epic of revolt by closely analyzing the new features that it brought to the *chansons de geste*. I frequently used *Girart de Vienne* as a case study for its unique role as first of many epics about rebellious barons, as well as the understudied features that it boasts, comparing it to similar epics and contrasting it with the older, more traditional poems of the corpus. When compared with contemporary legal custom, acts portrayed in epics of revolt would have been highly treasonous if committed in the real world. Rather than shocking the audience, these episodes were depicted as justified and desirable acts of rebellion. This was achieved through strategic narrative structures. In the case of *Girart de Vienne*, that structure was the noble robber narrative. By presenting rebellion as part of a Robin Hood-like story, treasonous acts become reckless adventures in the service of restoring order. In this way, *the chansons de geste* represent an alternative textual community to that of medieval legal thinking, providing a different perspective on literary acts of treason.

The fictional barons who participate in the outlaw adventures matter as much as the narrative structure for the justification of rebellion in these songs. I showed how the three *gestes* introduced in *Girart de Vienne,* rather than organizing poems into cycles, form a hierarchy of epic characters. Based largely on shared lineage, the characters are placed into groups of shared characteristics deemed essential and immutable. In order to become a traitor, a character must belong to the *geste* of traitors; conversely, rebel barons remain heroes by their affiliation with a different *geste*. By presenting the characters in this way, the poet controls the expectations of the audience. Shameful acts lose their shock when the audience understands the nature of the character committing the act. The system of three *gestes* is also evidence of medieval racial

thinking, not only by dividing individual characters into groups based on criteria of shared characteristics, but also by distributing narrative treatment differentially to those characters based on group identity. Thus, traitors are severely punished, while rebel heroes escape consequences, often for similar acts.

Narrative structures and differential character schemes serve to justify rebellion, which, in turn, serves as a literary resolution to conflict. I showed that, through the economy of symbolic process, the poet engaged with the important struggles of the audience. Characters and events are symbolic stand-ins for the young knights and the social pressures and changes in the late twelfth-century world of the contemporary audience. In this way, the epic of revolt provided a hopeful catharsis for the contemporary anxieties of its audience.

The analysis in this study represents a starting point for additional research. The Robin Hood-like narrative structure of *Girart de Vienne* has not been previously analyzed in scholarship. Other epic poems might be found to have similar correspondences or may hold other surprising narrative strategies that have been overlooked. Revealing these would serve to further enrich our understanding of the preferences and expectations of medieval audiences. There is also opportunity for further research into the role of the three *gestes* in medieval literature. As the schema has largely been adopted as an organizing principle for cataloging the many poems of Old French epic literature, the original role of the three *gestes* in *Girart de Vienne* as a hierarchy of character groups has gone largely unstudied. The implications that I have shown in this study are merely a start to the potential for understanding medieval thinking about difference that they represent. The epic of revolt has typically been explained as reactionary to broad, contemporary political events, but my analysis based on the smaller social changes directly affecting members

of the audience also represents new possibilities for interpreting the rebellious aspect of the *chansons de geste*.

Real-life rebellion in the Middle Ages was an extremely risky endeavor that rarely ended well for the rebel. As recounted in the *Roman de Rou* (c.1170) the brave, young men who rebelled in the peasant revolt in Normandy of 996 were quite confident in their youthful prowess, much like the young knights of the epic of revolt.[298] Unlike the fictional knights, however, the Norman youths were cruelly exterminated. It seems that the rebellion depicted in the *chansons de geste* was not a call for actual revolt; at any rate, there is no recorded evidence of any medieval rebellion having been inspired by epic literature. Far from revolutionary, the epic of revolt was not a call to overturn the social order or even a model for real-world behavior, but a hopeful image of the way the world ought to be.

That actual rebellion was not the goal of the epic of revolt in no way diminishes how meaningful and impactful it was on the lives of its audience, particularly the young, unlanded knights. In *Disorderly Discourse,* Charles Briggs showed that conflict is a crucial part of the social construction of reality, and that resolution of such is not even necessarily a relevant goal.[299] Rebellious discourse can still be taken seriously even when it has no effect on the immediate outcome of events. Chivalric literature like the *chansons de geste* performed crucial social work, "for it was largely through a chivalric lens that the medieval lay, male elite viewed and made sense of formative elements in their lives."[300] Thus, in the case of the *chansons de*

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[298] Wace, *Le Roman de Rou,* ed. A.J. Holden, (Paris: A. & J. Picard, 1970), Tome I, 191-196.
[299] Charles Briggs, *Disorderly Discourse: Narrative, Conflict, and Inequality* (Oxford University Press, 1996), 4-5.
[300] Kaeuper, *Medieval Chivalry,* 22.

geste, rebellious narratives were a literary reaction to a changing world aimed at bringing about a catharsis for the hopes and fears of their audience.

This is the role of entertainment, then and now. As Joseph Duggan observed: "The awe with which modern scholarship treats medieval epic sometimes makes us forget that their primary ostensible purpose *was* entertainment."[301] One of my aims in the close reading of *outrajes* and the analysis of the various characters of the epic of revolt has been to reveal the entertaining side of the *chansons de geste*. The temporal distance and unfamiliar *topoi* can make this corpus seem esoteric and staid. Through revealing the swashbuckling nature of rebellion in Old French epic, I have hoped to enjoin the modern reader to an experience of the *chansons de geste* more akin to the original medieval reception. However seriously they may have taken the subject, medieval poets viewed rebellious heroes as "a source of joy" in their narratives.[302] In this way, I have tried to respond to Kathryn Gravdal's call for an examination of the lighter side of the Middle Ages:

> Scholars have examined the distant Middle Ages, the autumnal Middle Ages, the Middle Ages of sorrow and persecution. It is to be hoped that we can now become better acquainted with the laughter and play of medieval culture.[303]

Much has been made in this study of anxieties, pressures, and violence in the lives of the young knights who formed the audience for the *chansons de geste*. But it should be remembered that the rebellious narratives offered by poems such as *Girart de Vienne* offered a refuge to those conflicts, enabling an emotional purge through catharsis.

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[301] Duggan, "Social Functions of the Medieval Epic," 732.
[302] Van Emden, "What Constitutes a *bon larron*?" 213.
[303] Gravdal, *Vilain et Cortois*, 146.

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Vita

Klayton Tietjen grew up in southeast Idaho and spent a few years after high school living in France. He earned his BA at Idaho State University where he majored in French and History. After about a decade working in the commercial real estate industry, he decided to return to his passion for medieval European culture and history, enrolling in graduate studies at the University of Tennessee (Knoxville). Klayton earned a Master's degree in pre-modern European History in May of 2017, after which he continued his studies at the University of Tennessee, earning a PhD in French (Modern Foreign Languages and Literatures department). His research was based in Old French texts, with an emphasis on the *chansons de geste*.